

# Everybody's 'Pal' celebrates birthday

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Ralph "Pal" Hunting is one of the few men left on the planet who can get away with addressing women as "Darling," "Dear" and "Sweetie."

It isn't a privilege of age — he turned 77 yesterday — it's because he truly means it. Hunting, a longtime Watsonville resident, loves and respects everyone with whom he has contact.

Much of that contact is through the mail. Hunting almost daily receives postcards and greeting cards from local people traveling on vacation and from people who are at home in Watsonville, but know how he treasures the special attention.

Hunting, who has brain damage from a gunshot wound incurred when he was a child, had a fistful of cards at his birthday

See 'PAL' / back of section ►



Kurt Ellison

**'Pal' Hunting celebrates his 77th birthday yesterday with a cake from Ingrid Rutherford, a waitress at the Nook restaurant in Watsonville.**

# 'PAL'

► From Page 1

party held yesterday at The Nook Cafe on East Lake Avenue. Everyone in the restaurant, including an infant in a high chair, had a look at his birthday wishes.

Someone brought Hunting a balloon bouquet. Someone else baked him a cake with clown decorations and an inscribed greeting. His brother John, 72, gave him red suspenders and a new shirt, even though Hunting says John is jealous "because I'm older."

Ken Miller, owner of Johnson Drugs on Brennan Street, gave him a box of chocolates and a crisp \$20 bill to add to the \$5 he received in a card. Hunting was in heaven.

"Yep, I'm happy," Hunting said. "I'm a happy man on my birthday."

Although many people call him Pal, some of his friends, including Miller, call him by his given name, Ralph.

"That kind of lowers him, calling him Pal," Miller said. "But a lot of people call him Pal, because that's how he refers to people, as Pal, Boss or Friend."

Hunting said Pal and Ralph are both OK with him.

"I have a lot of friends," he said. "They call me one or the other. (It's the) same thing."

Hunting may have just turned 77, but his clear blue eyes and uplifting attitude are that of a man 25 years his junior. He still works for a living, helping out at

the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce, recycling and doing dishes at The Nook for a free lunch.

He refuses to consider retirement, saying, "Never. I'll never retire. I like my jobs."

Hunting, who wears a trademark baseball cap, rides his bicycle to work and to visit his friends on what Miller calls "Ralph's daily rounds." Miller said Hunting hasn't missed a day calling at his business in almost 31 years. He visits every work day, usually mid-morning.

Unless Hunting is at a San Francisco Giants baseball game.

Hunting has been an avid fan since he was a kid and predicts this year they'll win the pennant for sure. He has been to two games this season, and Miller said they're one of his favorite conversation topics.

"But they got beat last night. They got their pants beat off," he said of Tuesday night's 10-3 loss to Pittsburgh. "Too bad my boyfriend (shortstop Royce Clayton) got hurt."

Hunting also likes the Oakland A's but says the team is "a little light. There are too many new players. I like the Giants (for the pennant)."

When Hunting isn't listening to baseball or working, he visits friends. He's known for passing out Doublemint chewing gum to women, and says they're part of his formula for staying so young.

"I have a lot of girlfriends," he said. "But I won't get married. I have no time to be married."