



The Duchess of York visits with residents at Aegis Senior Living of Shoreline.



Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, visits with Aegis Senior Living of Shoreline's oldest resident, Rita Bradley.

## The duchess came to tea

By Katherine Luck

The Duchess of York arrived at Aegis Senior Living of Shoreline just in time for tea on Jan. 26. She exited her black Rolls Royce amid a blaze of camera flashes — though not from hostile paparazzi as in the days following her 1996 divorce from Prince Andrew, when the British tabloids dubbed the “Duchess of Pork.”

She came to town to speak at Aegis’ annual meeting, and she wanted to see for herself what the senior living facility was all about.

She breezed in, a 50-year-old ball of energy capped by the iconic spill of red hair.

“Who is she?” demanded one elderly woman.

“Fergie,” her white-haired companion replied.

“Fergie?”

“The duchess.”

“I’m the mad duchess ... I run everywhere,” Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, laughed as she personally introduced herself to each of the dozens of residents who had gathered to meet her. “I’m Sarah. I married a handsome prince — well, the handsomest of the lot.”

One by one, she shook each wrinkled hand. She sat down for a moment with the facility’s oldest resident, nearly 101-year-old Rita Bradley.

Did Rita enjoy meeting the Duchess of York?

“I’m sure I did,” she said.

The last hand shaken, the duchess addressed the crowd.

“For those of you who don’t know, I married the Queen’s best-looking son ... funnily enough, we live in the same home. He’s an incredible man,” she said.

A hint that their decade-long marriage

might one day resume? Maybe.

“I call myself a ‘closet American’ because the American people gave me my life back,” she said. “You’ve fed my heart and soul. ... I’ll take your kindness all the way back to England.”

Then off she sped on a whirlwind tour of the 102 apartment community.

“This is fabulous — I don’t even have my own apartment!” she enthused, inspecting a one-bedroom unit. “I’d love to be here. I think it suits me down to the ground.”

She checked out the movie theater and decided to arrange a private screening of the new Martin Scorsese film *Young Victoria*, which she produced and which features her daughter, Princess Beatrice, in a cameo role.

The author of 26 books next examined the library and determined that she simply had to donate some copies her children’s books for residents to read to their grandchildren when they visit.

As she hurried down the hall with her entourage, a resident paused to smile shyly at her.

“Jeanette, is it?” the duchess inquired.

“How did you remember that?” exclaimed Jeanette McCurdy, who had met the duchess only for a moment when she arrived.

“Because it’s important,” Fergie replied.

“She’s such a nice young lady. So many times I’m frightened of going up to say ‘hi’ to someone of a higher level. But with her, I wasn’t at all,” said McCurdy.

As the duchess was dashing by — she does indeed run everywhere — an apartment door opened and Wally Anklam, a resident of Aegis for the past four and a half years, poked his head out.

“Do you believe in valentines?” he inquired. “Because I have a valentine for you.”

He offered her a hand-painted heart and

explained that he’d learned how to paint at Aegis. He’d wanted to make a valentine for someone special, and then he, like the other 108 residents, heard about her unplanned visit. The duchess did indeed believe in valentines; she accepted it graciously.

As she came to the end of her high-speed tour, the residents were in turn finishing a traditional British high tea prepared by Aegis’ chef and Mary Greengo of Queen Mary Tea Room.

Still holding Wally Anklam’s valentine, the duchess took a cup of Earl Grey tea and offered a plate of food to a pair of residents.

“You have to have a cucumber sandwich. It’s so British,” she said.

Her car was waiting; her plane would soon arrive at SeaTac.

“Aegis Living has restored my faith. Not only by looking after [elderly] people, but by how they treat their staff. It’s goodness; it’s goodness,” she said.

Time was up; the duchess had to leave. She swiftly downed the last of her tea, waved, posed for a few last photos, jumped into her waiting Rolls Royce and sped off.

“She has a heart as big as the world,” marveled Marc Nowak, executive director of Aegis’ Shoreline facility. “How would you like to be able to call home and say, ‘By the way, I had the duchess over to visit?’” ■