

Public Affairs Office  
Armed Forces Retirement Home  
1800 Beach Dr.  
Gulfport, MS 39507  
Contact: Mary Kay Gominger  
228-604-2747

***Army veterans find love in retirement***

***Armed Forces Retirement Home, Washington, D.C.*** – Claire Dimler joined the Army in 1976 and spent the majority of the next 13 years as a missile technician, repairing mostly small rockets. A medical condition forced her to retire and in 2003 she found herself standing in front of the Armed Forces Retirement Home, ready to check into the 11-story high rise on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Somewhat overwhelmed by both the challenges of her medical condition and starting a new life in a new place of which she knew no one, the next stage of Claire's life began.

During her first few days at the AFRH, Claire met a man named Carl Smith. Carl was an Army veteran, too, but he was retired from the Air Force. The two instantly became friends.

"Claire wasn't so physically strong back then and I knew she needed someone to help her get to appointments and just get around," Carl recalled. "I was happy to help her out and we soon grew to be good friends."

That friendship grew over the next few years and soon the two were inseparable.

Last fall, Hurricane Katrina struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast forcing Claire and Carl and the other veterans of the Gulfport Home to evacuate. Claire and Carl went to the DC Home.

"We knew we were in love before the storm last August," Carl said. "Here in DC, we both lived in different buildings and this is such a bigger campus. We had gotten used to being together all the time. So we decided to get married."

Claire and Carl were married at the AFRH on August 4. The small, intimate ceremony that they planned turned out to be much more than either of them expected.

"When we got to the Chapel that morning, I could not believe all the people that were there!" Claire said. "A lot of the Gulfport residents now living at DC showed up and the friends we've made since moving to DC came too. It was such a nice surprise. The Chapel was overflowing with people standing in the foyer."

Carl and Claire Smith moved into a new double room at the AFRH and bought a small travel trailer. Since Claire has moved to the AFRH, her health has improved and she is feeling good. They plan to go to Georgia to visit Carl's family and travel to other places around the country. Mostly, though, they look forward to being together.

"When you get to our age and you go through such a traumatic experience like Hurricane Katrina, you just don't want to waste any more time," Carl said.

"Carl has brought so much happiness into my life," Claire said. "I spent years focusing on my career in the Army, then my health, and now I can be with Carl and we can enjoy being together. I've never been happier."