

**SPORTS:**

Final Four teams battle for spot in final.

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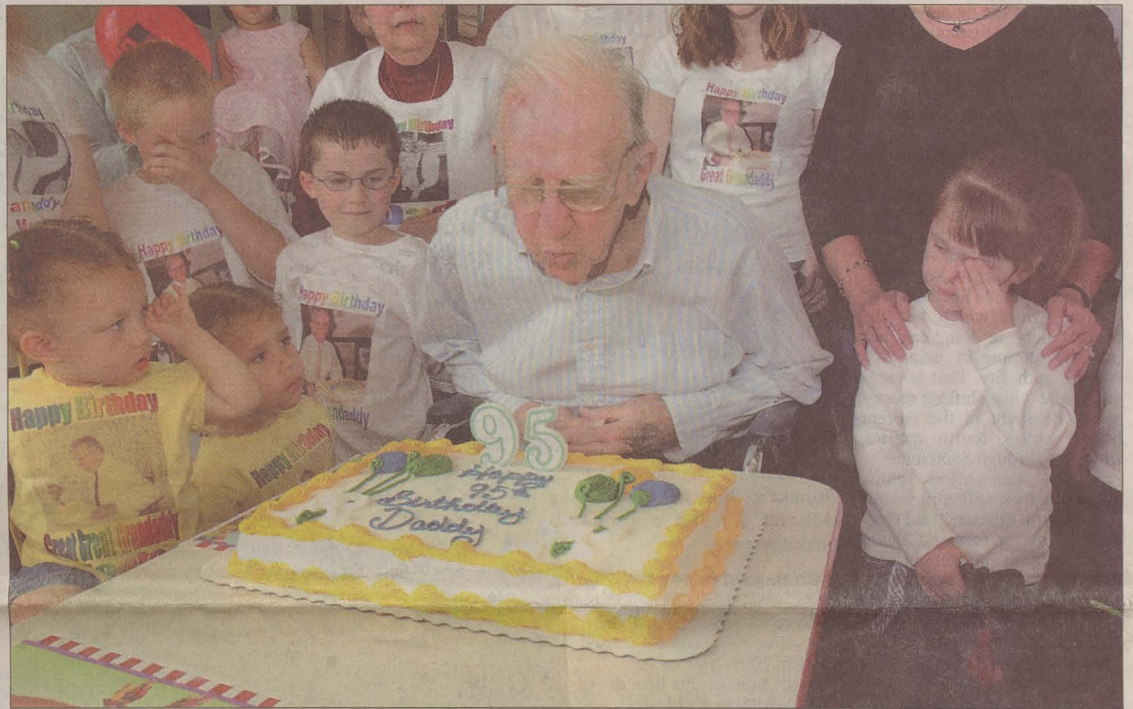
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Not all callers want new cell phones.

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Jonathan David Phillips/The Mount Airy News

Howard Monto blows out candles at his 95th birthday party at McDonald's Play Place on U.S. 52 Saturday. More than 40 family members and friends celebrated Monto's surprise party.

# SURPRISE!

## Extended family treats 95-year-old to birthday celebration at McDonald's

By **JONATHAN DAVID PHILLIPS**  
Staff Writer

MOUNT AIRY — Nancy Davis and her younger sister, Pat Spencer, arrived at their father's house to take him out for his birthday Saturday afternoon. They knew the place he wanted to go. It's the same place he always wants to go to.

Howard Monto, 95, loves McDonald's. It's his treat, Davis said, adding that she takes her father there every time he has to go to the doctor for a checkup.

Saturday was different for the birthday boy, however. Instead of going through the drive-thru, Davis told her father they should sit down inside, "enjoy the meal" with her sister, who came in from out of town.

Monto, a laid-back fellow, didn't object and gladly let his daughter push him in his wheelchair into the restaurant located on U.S. 52.

Inside, a child's birthday party had finished up, and customers were walking back and forth from their tables. Rather than go to the counter to place an order, Davis took a left and made a beeline for the Play Place area.

The door opened, and more than 40 family members and friends shouted, "Surprise."

Monto was speechless. Everywhere he looked he saw someone with a T-shirt with his face printed on it and the words "Happy birthday" written across the chest. Two daughters, six grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren — all with different pictures of Monto



Jonathan David Phillips/The Mount Airy News

Howard Monto sits beside Ronald McDonald during his surprise 95th birthday celebration inside McDonald's Play Place on U.S. 52. Saturday.

on their shirts — were there to celebrate his birthday.

"I can't believe my family did this," Monto said, his eyes bouncing from one familiar face to the next. "It's just remarkable seeing them. Some, I haven't seen in a good while."

In all, his guests arrived from three states: Maryland,

Virginia and North Carolina. Davis, who had tears in her eyes, said she had cried all day.

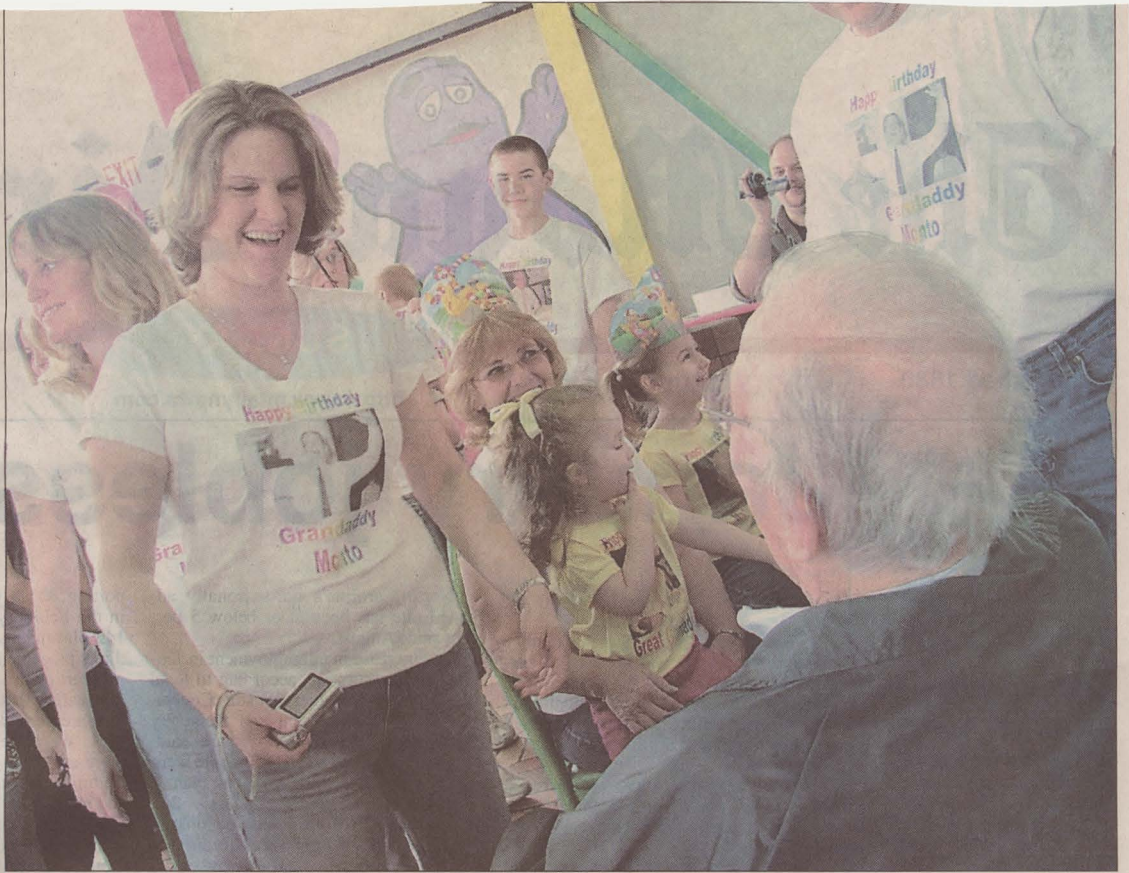
"But we made it," she said. Six-year-old Matthew Howard Davis, who shares his name with his great-grandfather, said the idea of the party was "cool."

"I'm amazed," he said. "I

don't know, cause a grownup is having a birthday party at McDonald's."

Monto originally came to Mount Airy in the early 1930s as a jeweler. In fact, he was the first certified watchmaker in the Granite City.

He and his wife of 67 years, **See SURPRISE, page 2A**



Jonathan David Phillips/The Mount Airy News

Jeanette Baber, left, shows her special T-shirt to her grandfather Howard Monto during his 95th birthday party at McDonald's Play Place on U.S. 52.

## SURPRISE: Play land isn't just for children's parties



Jonathan David Phillips/The Mount Airy News

**95-year-old Howard Monto smiles as he enters the McDonald's Play Place on U.S. 52 for his surprise birthday party.**

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Audrey Ayers, split their time between Mount Airy and Charlottesville, Va. Audrey passed away in 2001.

Still, Monto says he's doing fine for a 95-year-old.

"I'm in pretty good shape," Monto said. "I'm in good condition to go for a good while yet. You never know."

To talk about her father, Spencer can't help but smile.

"Growing up, he was the best dad," she said. "He always complimented me. I couldn't ask for a better dad."

"He was the most loving, friendliest person. He even took me to one of the Supremes' concerts. What dad would do that for you?"

Spencer said her father couldn't be at a better place to celebrate his 95th birthday.

"It really is his treat," she said.



Jonathan David Phillips/The Mount Airy News

Howard Monto's great-granddaughter Emma Davis, 3, runs down a slide during Monto's surprise birthday party at McDonald's Play Place on U.S. 52.

Yes, the treat — Monto's McDonald's.

"I like to come here," Monto said. "I like a hamburger, some fries, a Coke and a couple of fried pies."

But what McDonald's birthday party would be complete without a cameo from the red-haired man himself?

Just as the action was set-

ting down, Ronald McDonald popped into the Play Place to see to the birthday boy, tell jokes, pose for pictures and shake hands.

McDonald said meeting Monto and his family was something special.

"If it takes 95 years to get that great of a group of people together to honor you, then it's

worth the wait," McDonald said.

The face of "over a billion people served" said he's never celebrated a 95-year-old's birthday at a Play Place before.

Then again, there's only one Howard Monto.

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