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Port St. Lucie Vice Mayor Linda Bartz hugs Nina Baranski, author of "Port St. Lucie at 50: A City for All People," at the beginning of a Port St. Lucie City Council meeting Monday night at City Hall. Baranski autographed copies of the book during a brief celebration in honor of the city's 50th anniversary.

City Council celebrates Port St. Lucie's 50th birthday

By Alexi Howk

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PORT ST. LUCIE — The city Monday night kicked off a weeklong celebration of the city turning 50 with cupcakes, a history book-signing and a visit from former child star Lauren Chapin, who played Kathy "Kitten" Anderson on the 1950s hit television show "Father Knows Best."

Before the City Council's 7 p.m. meeting, members from the Rio Linda Garden Club served cupcakes and Nina Baranski, author of the city's history book, "Port St. Lucie at 50: A City for All People," signed copies in the lobby of City Hall.

Residents also got their first preview of the "City of Dreams," a promotional video reel to be used to market development and tourism.

"I see a couple of us kind of tearing up as we're listening and seeing how beautiful our city is. Sometimes we get into a box and forget all we have to offer and all we are," said Vice Mayor Linda Bartz, drawing applause from the audience.

After City Clerk Karen Phillips read a city proclamation in recognition of the city's 50th anniversary, Mayor JoAnn Faiella introduced Chapin, who lives in Vero Beach, as a special guest.

"I'm here to congratulate all of you on 50 years of a wonderful, beautiful, thriving community," Chapin said. "I appreciate Port St. Lucie. I have many friends who live here so it is my pleasure to just be a part of what you're celebrating. I know in time when I come back I'm going to see this community even bigger and better and more glorious than it is today."

Also in attendance were former Mayor Patricia Christensen, who worked on the anniversary project for the past three years, and former state Senate president and St. Lucie County Property Appraiser Ken Pruitt, who was featured in the promotional reel.

"I'd like to take the opportunity to say thank you to former Mayor Christensen for the amount of work that she specifically has put in and for leading this," City Councilwoman Michelle Berger said. "I know that this is a labor of love for you."

Christal Perkins, who works in the city's Public Works Department and said she was the first female to play baseball at Sportsman's Park, shared her memories as a longtime city resident.

"The city has been home since 1976, but we bought our property in 1990," she said. "We owned half the block because my dad paid \$1,000 a lot. On that block we had rattlesnakes, silver foxes, red foxes, a cow or two. So this city has grown in leaps and bounds since I've been here. I've watched roads being built. I've watched roads go away. I've watched the name of my road change three times. And just recently they got it right. On one end it was Dolores, the other end as you came in, was Delores. So now it is all Dolores."

The city was incorporated on April 27, 1961. Upon incorporation the city covered 62.5 square miles and had less than a dozen permanent residents. The city's land mass is now 115 square miles and is home to more than 155,000 residents. Between 2003 and 2004 the U.S. Census Bureau named Port St. Lucie the fast growing city.



