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## IN PROFILE

# Helping older adults age well

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Contributor

Mary Leary grew up with a keen admiration for her father just as many children do, though under circumstances uncommon to most families.

An injury during military service in World War II had rendered Leary's dad 100-percent disabled, forcing him to relearn how to walk and talk.

Those late-in-life impairments, however, did not prevent him from living life to the fullest. Leary's father pursued two master's degrees on the G.I. Bill and worked in rehabilitation services to help others like him obtain gainful employment.

"He was just this amazing man," Leary said. "He was the perfect role model of resilience and tenacity."

Despite his physical limitations, he played golf and bowled with friends.

"He was the worst in his league and had the best time," Leary said. "He didn't take himself too seriously."

Inspired by her dad's strong will to live a bountiful life, Leary has spent the past two decades helping adults age well by leading senior living, health care, and long-term-care organizations.

On July 8 Leary celebrates her 10th anniversary as the CEO and president of Mather LifeWays, an Evanston-based nonprofit that serves older adults through senior living residencies and wellness programs.

Hailing from upstate New York, Leary moved to the Midwest in 1996 to take a job with Classic Residence, the senior living affiliate of Hyatt Corporation, before joining Mather LifeWays in 2002.

She resides in one of Evanston's hundred-year-old Queen Anne Victorians with husband Dr. Richard Lin, a dentist often found visiting and providing dental services at senior living communities.

The values of his Chinese heritage parallel that of Leary's in regard to respecting and caring for parents and older adults.

"He loves what I do almost as much as I do," Leary said of her husband. "He constantly gives me inspiration and ideas to help support our residents."

The couple recently vacationed in Bhutan to learn about happiness. The small land-locked country on the eastern edge of the Himalayas is home to the concept of "gross national happiness," that is, a holistic qualitative measurement of social progress and citizens' quality of life.

Leary gained a new perspective on concepts like contentment, she said, that stand to benefit Mather LifeWays' constituents.



Mary Leary (right) celebrates her 10th anniversary as CEO and president of Mather LifeWays on July 8. She is pictured with Evanston Mayor Elizabeth Tisdahl at a February 2012 event celebrating the completion of The Mather in Evanston. | SUBMITTED PHOTO

She said the organization has looked closely at the behavior traits that cause seniors to be resilient and happy and have the drive to pursue ways to age well.

Besides finances, the most pressing concerns of older adults today, Leary said, are staying healthy and maintaining a positive lifestyle.

Mather LifeWays operates to support people in their later years of life by offering services and care that cater to different interests and capabilities.

For example, the organization pioneered a model of Internet cafés specially designed for adults aged 50 and up. The Café Plus concept takes the typical coffeehouse experience and adds restaurant dining, fitness classes and educational workshops.

Mather LifeWays retirement communities, too, provide opportunities for socializing and staying active.

Under Leary's leadership, the organization constructed a new senior living residence, The Mather, at 425 Davis St. in Evanston.

In addition to featuring 240 apartment homes, The Mather has a 10,000-square-foot fitness center, a pool and day spa, a 22-seat movie theater, and a computerized wine bar, the very first of its kind in Chicago, according to Leary.

"It's not an old-folks home," she said. "It's a vi-

## UP CLOSE



WHO: Mary Leary

RESIDENT OF: Evanston. She lives in a 100-year-old Queen Anne Victorian with her husband, Dr. Richard Lin, a dentist often found visiting and providing dental services at senior living communities.

MILESTONE: On July 8 Leary celebrates her 10th anniversary at the CEO and president of Mather LifeWays, an Evanston-based nonprofit that serves older adults through senior living residencies and wellness programs.

brant community of actively engaged people who want to live, work, contribute and play in Evanston."

Leary's commitment to raising the bar of expectations has not gone unnoticed, as Mather LifeWays is the recipient of numerous national and local awards and honors.

For Leary, whether it's in the work place or at home, "our philosophy is to seek to eliminate impossibility," she said.