

Multi-million dollar expansion at Mather Place of Wilmette continues

Independent living community showcases renovations

HILARY ANDERSON, Staff Writer

Robert Heinzen, a lifelong Wilmette resident, was at Mather Place of Wilmette when it recently held a Holiday Showcase of Homes, but he was hard to find. That's because he was with a group of friends busily playing bridge and having a good time. He had just won his third game.

"I know all about living at Mather Place of Wilmette," he said. "This has been my home for the past seven years."

The event, held on Dec. 3, gave the community a peek into the apartment residences there, an independent living facility. There also was an update about the multimillion dollar expansion now in progress, which will include 51 new one and two bedroom rental apartment homes, more amenity areas and some renovations on the first floor's existing ones.

It is easy to understand why Heinzen chose to live there. Heinzen, 93, was born in Wilmette and lived there all his life except for the eight years his company sent him to Detroit to work. Relatives on both sides of the family are among founding members of the community dating back to 1843.

"My grandfather, Joseph Heinzen, was a Wilmette Village trustee and constructed many of the buildings in the area," he said. "I love this wonderful community and moved right back here from Detroit when I could. Wilmette is my home."

Heinzen with his wife of 60 years raised nine children in Wilmette. The two of them lived in their house on Hawthorn Lane until her death eight years ago.



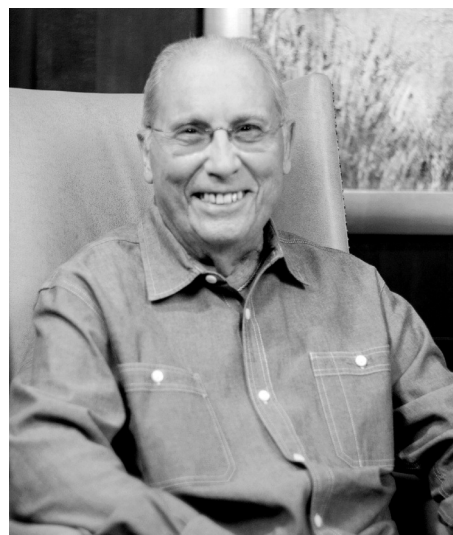
One of the living units at Mather Place of Wilmette is shown. Photo submitted



The library is one the most popular places at Mather Place of Wilmette.



An artist rendering of the soon to be opened indoor pool is shown.



Resident Mel Frankel is a former Chicago Board of Education administrator. Photo submitted

“We had talked about moving to Mather Place of Wilmette,” he said. “Following her death, I lived for about nine months in the kitchen, den and bedroom. I didn’t need the leaves on the ground, the snow, or picking up the newspaper on the driveway by myself in the morning. That’s when I decided to finally make the move to Mather Place, which was only about five blocks from my house. I liked what I originally saw in the construction. We also knew about it because my wife often went here to play bridge.”

He chose a one-bedroom apartment.

Heinzen admits to not being much of a morning person. “Sometimes I might not get dressed until 10 a.m.,” he laughed. “I usually make my own breakfast in my apartment and eat lunch and dinner in the dining room. I made breakfast for my wife and me for about 20 years.”

Heinzen is a thespian at heart. He is part of a Mather Place of Wilmette troupe, “Still Acting Up.” The group is performing their originally written and produced musical, “High Tech,” for their building and other senior centers. It’s about senior citizens learning how to use new technology.

Wini Drell lived in nearby Skokie with her husband in the house they bought in 1956. She came to Mather Place of Wilmette for similar reasons.

“When my husband died four years ago, I didn’t want to live in my house alone, especially through another winter,” Drell said. “I also didn’t want to move out of the area either because I have two children, a son and daughter.

One lives in Rogers Park and the other in Glenview.”

She went with her daughter to see Mather Place of Wilmette and immediately liked what they saw. It was a solution to a problem she never thought about having until her husband passed away.

“I know it sounds like a broken record, but the people were so friendly and welcoming,” she said. “My favorite activities are the lectures and the movies.”

Mather Place of Wilmette has its own movie theater, the Reel Room, which seats about 20 people at each showing and has a theater quality sound system. A resident movie committee decides which movies play each day. The theater also is available for residents to show home movies.

“I like to cook, but that involves shopping,” Drell added. “If I don’t want to cook, then I can eat lunch and dinner in the Alonzo restaurant in the dining room. I make reservations, dress like a lady and have dinner “out” each evening, if I choose. There is a menu of eight entrees. It’s worry-free.”

Coming next year will be a bistro-style restaurant with the expansion of the building. This will give Mather Place of Wilmette residents even more choices about where to eat their meals.

Mel Frankel, who previously served as a Chicago Board of Education trouble-shooting administrator, took his job seriously as an ambassador for the Mather Place of Wilmette’s Showcase of Homes. He was not at a loss for words to show what he thought was special about his

home of nearly two-and-a-half years. He moved there shortly after his wife, Lillian, passed away.

The couple celebrated 60 years of marriage. They lived in the same Evanston house for 57 years. Things changed, though, when she was diagnosed with Alzheimers, which took her life 10 years later. Mel was her primary caregiver during that time.



Resident Anita Michalchik has lived at Mather Place of Wilmette since May.

Michalchik came from Warminster, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia this past May. It was a long time in coming. She lived alone in the house she and her husband shared after he died seven years earlier. One daughter lived a half-hour away, two sons' had jobs that took them to different parts of the country and yet another daughter lived in New York but passed away last year.

"Her disease caused her to go from in-home care to assisted living to a nursing home," Frankel said. "When she passed away, I realized I had problems climbing the stairs down to the basement."

He began looking for alternative places for senior citizens to live, preferably one with an elevator. "I didn't want to be a burden to my kids," Frankel said. "I have two children, six grandchildren and one great grandchild."

Frankel went to the North Shore Senior Center looking for a list of places where he could rent. That eliminated many possibilities.

He chose the Mather Place of Wilmette. "I wanted to control my money [rent] and was swayed by the services they offered," Frankel stated. "Remember I had lived in one house for 57 years and had a lot of stuff to get rid of. The people were fantastic, really terrific."

Frankel said a crew of people from Mather came to help at no charge. "There was a coordinator who oversaw everything, a realtor to help with the selling of my house, an interior designer to help me decide what I wanted to take with me and what would fit into my apartment and another person who estimated the cost of moving," Frankel said. "I didn't have to do anything other than decide what I wanted to keep and take with me, what should be donated and what was garbage."

Anita Michalchik was so happy with her experience at Mather Place of Wilmette that she volunteered and opened her home to the public during tours that occurred the day of the showcase. All of the apartments were leased at the time.

"The husband of the daughter who lived somewhat close to me had also died," Michalchik said. "She was unhappy living where she was. I told her to move back to Sarasota, Florida where she had friends and enjoyed living there. She did. It seemed as though she needed my permission to move even further away from me."

Michalchik decided to move closer to another daughter and her family who live in Glencoe.

"She has three children who have given me seven great-grandchildren," she added. "My daughter wanted to help me but I said no."

I rented my two-bedroom apartment sight unseen. The ladies in marketing at Mather were fabulous. I couldn't be happier. That's why I chose to be an ambassador for the place. I want to share all the good things about it with others. I'm not the only person out there who now is or will be in a similar situation that I was."

In addition to 51 new apartments coming the summer of 2016, there currently is an expanded library, the Reel Room, a larger fitness center, an enhanced salon and day spa, art studio, billiards room and private spaces for personal entertainment, family gatherings and celebrations.

The summer of 2016 also will see a covered, indoor pool at Mather. One more thing, Mather Place of Wilmette allows pets—dogs and cats—unlike many rental apartments.

For more information on Mather Place of Wilmette, visit www.matherplaceofwilmette.com or call (847) 999-4596.