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### ***Profile of an Exemplary Mother – A Mother’s Day Story***

Windsor, VT: Mother’s Day was first celebrated in 1910 as a day to pay tribute to mothers, both living and deceased. The holiday was spearheaded by Anna Marie Jarvis, whose mother was a model of strength, independence, and benevolence. The holiday continues today to provide an opportunity for children to cherish their mothers. It is also an opportunity to recognize mothers who nurture communities that stretch far beyond the family circle—mothers like Windsor’s own Mary Louise Sayles.

A Windsor resident of nearly 30 years and a recently recognized Super Senior by WCAX, Mary Louise began her journey into motherhood in 1959 with the birth of her first daughter, Maria. Since then, she gave birth to two more daughters and transformed a derelict one-building nursing home into a continuing care community that enables seniors to age comfortably in place and offers a range of work and career opportunities to Windsor community members.

To her staff at the Cedar Hill Continuing Care Community, Mary Louise is known as a powerhouse. “To me, she is a pioneer. A visionary,” says Sue Spadaro, who has worked at Cedar Hill since 1998 and currently holds the position of executive director at The Village at Cedar Hill. “This is not a business about making money,” Sue says. “Mary Louise really cares about the residents and she wants to make sure the elderly are taken care of properly.”

Born in 1935, Mary Louise Sayles grew up in an Italian immigrant family with a mother who was protective of her children. Her mother rattled off biblical proverbs in Italian when the children misbehaved, and instilled within them a sense that anything they decided to do should be important enough to finish. According to Mary Louise, “I always believed that discipline was part of providing a loving home that set the example for bringing up children to be loving and responsible adults.”

Mary Louise married in 1957 and mothered three daughters; Maria, Patricia, and Cynthia. “We had first generation immigrant Italian grandparents from Boston on my mother’s side and Irish immigrants from a farm in Laconia on my father’s side,” says Patricia. “But the two families were one. My mother worked hard to ensure that by bringing everyone together at our house every year. There were a lot of different personalities and we learned that it was okay for people to have different beliefs or lifestyles. We were all different but we were still part of one family.”

According to Cindy, though her mother’s marriage ended in 1989, Mary Louise continued to host family gatherings with both sides of the family. “That is how important it was for her to keep the family together. She did it for us and for the future generations of our family.”

In 1988, Mary Louise Sayles, now a single, middle-aged mother with three adult girls, was following her career path as a nursing home administrator at Sullivan County Nursing Home in Unity, New Hampshire. At the suggestion of a friend, Mary Louise and her colleague, Judith Brogren, crossed the Connecticut River into Windsor, VT, to look at an old 31-bed nursing home called Cedar Manor. The building was run down but the property was ideal, with 8 acres of land and a 4-acre buffer along the east side of the river.

The idea of the continuing care community, where seniors could age in place, was just beginning to take hold and Mary Louise learned a lot about the concept from her eldest daughter, Maria Horn, a social worker and also a licensed nursing home administrator who was working with one of the early pioneers in assisted living, William Gilmore, in Exeter, NH.

Mary Louise and Judith had no money to speak of so they scraped together every cent they had and requested a small business administration loan, which they were granted. They moved onto the property to live in a comfortable mobile home as they set to work fixing up the original building and planning the building projects that would complete their dream.

Winston Churchill once said that “the empires of the future are empires of the mind.” For Mary Louise Sayles and Judith, the empire they held in their mind – of a continuing care community that provided encouragement and support to seniors, enabling them to live with dignity and maximize their personal potential – was the guiding light that pushed them forward.

Within an eleven-year period, Mary Louise and Judith realized their dreams – they renovated the original home (Victorian House) upgrading it to a level-3 residential home, where they care for frail and chronically ill elderly residents who need support services and assistance with activities of daily living; They constructed Cedar Hill Health Care, a skilled nursing facility that included Teddy’s Place, a dedicated wing for memory care; and in 1999, they built the Village at Cedar Hill with 20 apartments for independent and assisted living.

“My mother is a builder of beautiful places where people can live,” says, Cindy. “Quality of life is extremely important to her. She made sure every place we lived in was a beautiful place, with lovely outdoor spaces, a view, gardens, and great food.”

Mary Louise kept her daughters in the loop about Cedar Hill. Though they had all grown up to be independent women with their own ideas and careers, she hoped that one of them would choose to carry on her dream some day. “My sisters and I are very comfortable around a broad range of people and that’s important,” says Patricia. “Because my mother kept us involved in her work over the years, we learned the whole nursing philosophy of taking care of others, about reaching out and making sure that people are taken care of with skill and compassion. This stretches out into the community. For my mother, she sees having a business as being a good contributor to the community. Our mission is high quality care for seniors but a sub-mission is the role of Cedar Hill in community.”

After Judith Brogren retired in 2005, Patricia left a career in journalism to join her mother as a licensed nursing home administrator. Together, Mary Louise and her daughter expanded the vision further, building a \$10.4 million addition to their independent and assisted living

neighborhood with a secure state-of-the-art memory care center, which opened in early 2015. They dedicated the project to Mary Louise's daughter Maria, who lost her life to cancer in 2004. The Judith Brogren Memory Care Center was dedicated to Judith, who passed away in 2013.

Mary Louise is now 80 years old. A mother to her three daughters and matron within her continuing care community and the larger Windsor community, Mary Louise embodies the strength, independence, and benevolence that Mother's Day was founded upon. Though she is enjoying partial retirement, Mary Louise continues to cherish her involvement in the Cedar Hill community and looks for ways to improve life for those who count on her. "She is always proactive," says Sue. "She is always looking for ways to improve the community."

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