

# Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



Left: Oak Haven residents lived in style in this parlor in 1925. Right: Residents at The Mather in Evanston enjoy the luxurious Fairfield Room.

## Area senior communities have deep roots

Today's retirement communities often exceed buyers' wildest expectations. Amazing fitness center? Check. Multiple dining venues? Check. Transportation, university courses, lively locations? Check, check, and check.

You may be interested to know that many of these ultra-modern communities actually have histories stretching back to the Civil War era. Some local senior living organizations have seen their 70th, 90th, even 150th birthdays, becoming leaders in their field—and extraordinary places to live.

For example, The Admiral at the Lake, a new high rise continuing care retirement community under construction at Foster Avenue and Marine Drive, is both Chicago's newest and oldest senior community.

It began in 1862 as The Home for Aged and Indigent Females in what is now Printers Row. Women had to be over 50 and "of good character." They paid a \$50 admission fee, transferred any financial assets to the home, and brought their own furniture. This guaranteed them room and board for life, plus medical care.

The Chicago Fire changed everything in the city, including the home. In the aftermath, aid flooded in from across the country. The home's trustees negotiated for a piece of this, in exchange for admitting non-Protestants and men. In 1874, the renamed Old People's Home of the City Of Chicago opened a state-of-the-art building for 60 residents at 39th Street and Indiana Avenue. The home mimicked a large summer hotel with indoor plumbing, large bedrooms, a chapel, parlor, workroom, servants' quarters, and verandas. By 1910 it had built an even bigger home at 4724 S. Vincennes Ave., which remained for the next 50 years.



The home was a model for the rest of Chicago. During the remainder of the 19th century, ethnic and religious groups built residences for their seniors: Irish Catholics, Swedes, Jews, Danes, Norwegians, Bohemians, Episcopalians, African-Americans, Scots, and more.

### Chicago's elite contribute

It was about the time of the first World War that the organization we now know as Smith Senior Living was conceived. [Englewood](#) resident Susie Woodman and physician William Gregg gathered a group of Chicago luminaries to finance a senior home. They included reformer [Jane Addams](#), William Wrigley, Jr., attorney [Clarence Darrow](#), Chicago Tribune publisher and senator Medill McCormick, John G. Shedd, and many others.

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### Growing senior population

The Great Depression brought out the philanthropic spirit toward seniors. In 1941, entrepreneur and humanitarian Alonzo Mather established the Mather Foundation. His goal was to create a home for "ladies of refinement" (many the widows of his former business colleagues) who lost their incomes when their husbands passed away. Due to [World War II](#), the Mather Home for Aged Ladies did not open in Evanston until 1952.

By this time, the Old People's Home of The City of Chicago was looking for new quarters once again. It settled on The Admiral, a residential lakefront hotel on the North Side at Marine Drive and Foster Avenue. It adopted the Admiral name, and residents moved there from the home on Vincennes in 1960. Seniors were now living longer and there were more of them. The Admiral and Oakhaven (and many others) underwent continuous expansions and updates over the following decades.

In the late 1980s, the Mather Home expanded to admit men, and opened more Mather locations on the North Shore.

### Senior lifestyles emerge

By the 1990s senior living began to look like what we know today. New concepts appeared. Active adult communities debuted in the Chicago area, including the massive Del Webb Sun City Huntley in 1998.

In 1999, Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging was established, providing leadership in senior living best practices and research. The following year, the first of three Mather's—More Than a Cafés opened its doors.

The key trends for the 21st century are wellness, choice, and space, not to mention luxury.

In 2004, Smith Senior Living debuted Smith Crossing, a \$60 million retirement community on a 32-acre site in Orland Park. The historic Beverly site, re-named Smith Village, saw a \$68 million rehab in 2007.

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lucrative careers, and are more active," McGee says. "They want more high-end services, and programs inside and outside the building."

In 2009, The Mather set a new standard for continuing care retirement communities, creating a home in the heart of Evanston akin to a five-star hotel. Staff does everything possible to ensure residents age well. "When we talk about wellness, it's more than just the physical—it's emotional, social, vocational, spiritual, and intellectual," says Linda [Hollinger](#)-Smith, vice president of Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging.

Other walkable communities in prime downtown locations have recently debuted, from The Clare off Michigan Avenue to LaGrange Pointe in the western suburbs.

"What older adults are looking for is less a resort than a home base launching pad where they can engage in an active lifestyle beyond the senior community," says Glen Brichacek, president of The Admiral. He notes that the incoming Admiral residents average age is 77.

The Admiral was demolished in 2007. It will reopen in 2012 as The Admiral at the Lake, an affiliate of Kendal, a senior living nonprofit corporation. While the old building had small studio apartments with minimal kitchens, the new building—like the Mather—will offer one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, full kitchens, laundries, and multiple dining options. Building amenities will include a fitness center, wellness center, lap pool, and landscaped roof terraces overlooking Lake Michigan. Care includes independent living, assisted living, dementia care, and skilled private nursing, with physical and occupational therapy on site.

"In order for this organization to survive for over 150 years, it has had to remake itself," Brichacek says. "We are essentially repeating history to stay current with the needs and preferences of older adults."

FYI More photos are contained in the PrimeTime section's article of the Wednesday, Sept. 6<sup>th</sup> *Chicago Tribune*.