



## Spencer takes helm at RHS



Newly appointed President of the Ridge Historical Society Elaine Spencer holds a wedding photo of herself in front of the current exhibit at the Graver-Driscoll House featuring wedding dresses through the century. Tuesday May 22, 2018, at the Graver-Driscoll House in Chicago. (Gary Middendorf-Sheila King Public Relations)

"I read somewhere that if you walk faster, you live longer," said Elaine Spencer, striding down the walkway leading to Ridge Historical Society (RHS), 10621 S. Seeley Ave.

There's no question, Spencer, RHS's new president, is energetic. Active in the Beverly/Morgan Park community, she also travels the world and regularly kayaks on the lake surrounding her family's island retreat in Wisconsin.

Spencer invested a bit of her own personal history in the wedding gown exhibition at RHS's historic Graver-Driscoll mansion through Friday, Aug. 31: a photo of her wedding day in 1954.

Her vintage gown isn't on display, but there are plenty of others worn by local brides beginning in the 1800s, including one representing a jilted bride, another with a massive train that occupies an entire staircase, and a bride's traveling suit made of brown and black cloth.

Spencer served on the board of RHS for eight years. Last February, she took the helm as president. It's a role she relishes, having grown up in the Beverly/Morgan Park area.

"I stayed close to my roots, and that's okay with me," she said.



Spencer's paternal grandparents owned Elizabeth Polacek Florist, which once operated at 112th Street and Fairfield Avenue. They also sold bedding plants, vegetable starts and cut flowers at a summer stand at 99th Street and Western Avenue.

When her parents rented their first home at 101st and Vincennes streets, Spencer attended Barnard Elementary School. She later transferred to Clissold Elementary School when the family bought a home at 114th Street and Fairfield Avenue. She attended Morgan Park High School, as did her parents and her four sons—Greg, Phillip, Steve and Bryan—who she raised in a home on the 9600 block of Longwood Drive.

**In 2007, Spencer moved to Smith Village, a life-plan community at 2320 W. 113th Pl.,** where she has served as resident council president and now serves as resident council vice president.

As president of RHS, Spencer said she appreciates the Beverly/Morgan Park area's significance as a landmark district with many homes representing the work of famous architects including Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Burley Griffin.

She plans to make RHS more accessible to the public for research. She also wants to take on maintenance and drainage issues related to the property, to expand the number of volunteers willing to become docents and conduct tours, and to publish a member directory. According to Spencer, RHS will enlist archivists from the Chicago Historical Society and the Art Institute of Chicago to train RHS volunteers on preservation practices for the society's permanent collection of artifacts, publications and photos.

These goals seem doable in light of the fact that for decades, she partnered in business with her husband, Carl Spencer, now deceased. The couple bought American Perforator, a manufacturer of perforators whose clients include banks, hotels, the U.S. Department of State and the New York City Police Department. Their son, Bryan, now owns that business.

Spencer still shares production experience when her son occasionally asks her to assist with machining new perforation dyes.

"My eyes are still good, so I can do that work," she said. "I like to keep going. If you just retire and don't do anything, life is dull."

RHS is open Monday, Wednesday, Friday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For more information, call (773) 881-1675 or visit [ridgehistoricalsociety.org](http://ridgehistoricalsociety.org).

For more information about **Smith Village**, call (773) 474-7300 or visit [smithvillage.org](http://smithvillage.org).