

# Cedar Hill grows to fulfill owner's dream

By **PATRICK O'GRADY**  
Staff Writer

When Mary Louise Sayles walks through the Cedar Hill Continuing Care Community and Health Center she greets everyone she meets by their first name and shares a word or two along with a smile.

"Hello, Harriet," Sayles says cheerfully to a nursing home resident. "How about sitting down here for a while."

**Windsor** "Hi Kay. You look lovely in that red dress," Sayles tells a resident in her room at the assisted living complex.

No one escapes Sayles' recognition and friendly greeting, and despite her no longer being Cedar Hill's full-time administrator, Sayles remains an important part of the longterm care facility she dreamed of creating 16 years ago.

During a recent tour of Cedar Hill, Sayles talked about how she and her business partner, Judith Brogen, were able to buy the Cedar Hill Nursing Home on Route 5 and expand it to include different levels of care.

"Two women in their 50s without a lot of money," Sayles says with a laugh as she describes herself and Brogen back when they decided to



**Sayles**

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purchase Cedar Hill.

Both had long careers in nursing and Sayles, who had worked in long-term care since 1972, was the administrator of the Sullivan County Nursing Home at the time.

In 1988 the Cedar Hill Nursing Home, a 40-bed facility operating since 1960s in a former Victorian home built in 1875, was for sale. Despite not having much money, Sayles and Brogen decided to pursue their dream.

"I really have an entrepreneurial spirit," said Sayles about what made her decide to become a small business owner. "I wanted to have a community that could serve the needs of a growing elderly population."

When they bought Cedar Hill in May of 1988, Sayles said she knew the facility was small to be "economically practical," so they and new owners began planning for an expansion.

"I envisioned what we could do to build a continuous care facility," Sayles recalled.

"People are living a lot longer now with their family members often dying before they do," Sayles said. "It is important for them to live in a community where they can be taken care of and have a reasonable quality of life. That is what we strive to do here."

Sayles said the purchase of Cedar Hill was made possible with a Small Business Administration loan, a partnership with Valley Regional Ventures, a part of Valley Regional Hospital, and a mortgage insured by the federal Housing and Urban Development.

"We had a hard time finding capital so I felt fortunate HUD insured the mortgage. That is how this place was bought," Sayles said. "It was a significant struggle, but we believed we could build the community we wanted."

Sayles immediately put her vision on paper and developed a business plan to build a new nursing home and an independent and assisted living facility.

With help from Windsor builder Paul Bel and architect Paul Carroll, Sayles led a team that was put together to turn the plan into reality.

**"You don't go into this to make a lot of money. You do it because you love caring for this population and you love working with people. There is tremendous satisfaction in knowing you are making a positive difference by providing the care they need."**

### Mary Louise Sayles

Purchased Cedar Hill Continuing Care Community and Health Center in 1988

Today, Cedar Hill has a 40 bed nursing home, which includes a secure area for Alzheimer's sufferers, a residential care level III facility with 13 beds and an separate assisted- and independent-living facility with 20 one- and two-bedroom apartments and two studio apartments. Cedar Hill accepts both private and Medicare and Medicaid residents.

The 13,000-square foot addition to the former nursing home became the new nursing home in 1994 and the separate 17,000-square foot independent- and assisted-living facility opened in 1999. Today, the former nursing home area serves as the residential care facility where people who may suffer from multiple sclerosis, had a stroke or were in an accident live. The third floor is used for staff training and continuing education.

The independent and assisted care facility is for residents who can still care for themselves on many levels but not 100 percent.

"This is an opportunity to live in a more home-like setting with support services such as meals, housekeeping and personal care but also socialization. The human contact is so important."

Sayles said it was important that Cedar Hill not be just a place where residents receive only basic care. Physical, occupational and speech therapy is also available. There is an activity room and a beauty salon. In the level three residential care facility there is a dining room where residents can enjoy a meal with family members in a home-like atmosphere.

Sayles said they work as hard at getting to know family members as they do caring

for the residents.

"We develop long-term relationships with residents and their families," Sayles said. "You are also nurturing the family and giving them relief."

To do that, requires finding staff that "have a caring and nurturing personality and the skills to take care of the residents."

Sayles said one of their goals for both the residents and families is to have a place that provides complete services so family members know their loved ones will have a secure place to live the final years of their life.

"One of my thoughts was to establish a community where folks who come here know this is where they will be staying, their health care needs will be met and this can be their home," Sayles said.

With complete care, Sayles said residents who need hospital care can be assured of being able to return to Cedar Hill and receive additional services if needed.

Today Sayles has turned over the day-to-day administration of Cedar Hill to Lynn Meyers and Brogen, who still helps out, recently retired.

Reflecting on her decision 16 years ago, Sayles said she did it for all the right reasons.

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