

Carol Rosenberg showed off her actor's panache at many JSL community events.

For Love Of Seniors

Robin Schwartz | Contributing Writer

Carol Rosenberg of Jewish Senior Life to retire after 36 years of flair, compassion and success.

She has been known to enter a room belting out show tunes. "Hello seniors/Well, hello seniors/It's so nice to have you here where you belong" [to the tune of "Hello Dolly"] is one of her signature songs. Carol Rosenberg, 74, the longtime director of the Jewish Senior Life Foundation, is equal parts nurturing and theatrical, a tireless and selfless advocate for the Jewish community's thousands of older adults, and a vibrant, energetic force of nature, bringing joy and encouraging active participation wherever she goes.

"I made [the community] more aware that old people matter," Rosenberg says. "It's not the old folk's home anymore; it's doctors and lawyers and social workers and homemakers who come to live here now. It's the challenge of taking care of them and fulfilling their needs."

Rosenberg has met that challenge head on with her own special flair. Over the last 36 years, she has incorporated art and theater, humor, fitness, a resident dog, bird aviaries, flower arranging, educational workshops, an exhibit honoring Michigan Holocaust survivors, financial assistance programs, support services and so much more. She has trained

and mentored hundreds of staff members and community volunteers who help run JSL's five senior apartment residences. And she's done it all with love, compassion and pride.

"She is a great teacher; Carol leads by example," says Beth Tryon, Rosenberg's executive assistant for nearly 19 years. "The vision she possesses and shares with staff, family and community members is a culmination of her own passion, experiences through her long career and her dedication to our community."

Early on, Carol made a noticeable impact. A 1982 *Detroit Jewish News* article speaks glowingly about her accomplishments, just two years after she began working as program director at what was then the Jewish Home for Aged.

"Last summer, we took some residents to see a baseball game at Tiger Stadium," the then 40-year-old Carol is quoted as saying. "To see these elderly men waving canes over their shoulders yelling, 'Go!' — well, it was wonderful. One man told me, 'I never thought I'd live to smell the air of this stadium again.' I would have carried him Downtown on my shoulders so he could have had that experience."

MAKE A HOOPLA

It all started in 1980. Rosenberg, who was born and raised in Detroit, was working as a high school English, theater and speech teacher when budget cuts were made. Her husband wasn't working at the time and they had three small children. She needed a job. Carol was invited to visit Borman Hall on 7 Mile Road in Detroit to see if the program

director position might be a good fit.

"You'll come in, and you'll just make a hoopla," she recalls being told. "Well, this was right up my alley. My first challenge was to bring in a show, so I brought *Barnum* from the Fisher Theatre to the people because they were distance limited and couldn't go anywhere. The whole cast came in and did that. We brought *The Sound of Music*, too."

Through it all, Rosenberg played many roles of her own. At a volunteer recognition party one year, she came dressed from head to toe in a Mother Goose costume. Other photos show her in a police officer's uniform, a glittery wizard's cape, wearing retro glasses and a mink stole. At 5 feet 11 inches with striking red hair and a husky voice, she can captivate an audience just by walking in the room.

"It was my theater background that allowed me to begin events with my own personality," she says. "This is my life. This is my stage. And I directed it like the director."

"And I'll miss it," she adds, fighting back tears.



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"Carol Rosenberg is an icon," says Matt Lester, immediate past president of Jewish Senior Life of Metropolitan Detroit. "She epitomizes everything good in a Jewish communal professional and, yet, she is so unique. There is no one like her — not even close. What an honor it has been for me to work with her and to learn from her."

Son Paul Rosenberg, a music manager for rap superstar Eminem and other artists, says it was his early days with his mom that provided his first brush with fame.

"Since I was a child, going out in public in Detroit and its surrounding suburbs was like having a celebrity mother," he says. "She is known by all, and everyone always has a kind word to say about how much she means to our Jewish community in Detroit and beyond."

CHANGING ROLES

Through the years, Carol Rosenberg has grown with Jewish Senior Life and held a number of increasingly prominent roles. In 1983, she added administrator of the Fleischman Residence to her program director duties. The following year, she was appointed associate director of Jewish Home for Aged.

In 2005, Carol was named executive director of Jewish Home & Aging Services. Four years later, she led a merger between Jewish Home & Aging Services and Jewish Apartments & Services and became co-executive director of Jewish Senior Life. Over the last six years, Rosenberg has served as director of the JSL Foundation, while continuing to oversee and manage aging services programs, support services, marketing and communications, community outreach and special events. She has received numerous local and national awards.

"Carol is a jewel and she has set the bar very high for all of us," Lester says. "There is tremendous pressure on many



Matt Lester

of us as she retires to maintain the standard she has set. She may be retiring soon, but she will continue to be a force for good in our Jewish community. I personally intend to call on her regularly and collaborate wherever possible to continue to benefit from her wisdom and love for Jewish seniors."

Fran Victor, who has spent the last three years as chief development officer at JVS, will assume Rosenberg's role in the coming months. For many years, Victor's video production company Evolution Media, formerly known as

Victor/Harder Productions, produced videos for a wide variety of Jewish nonprofits including JARC, Jewish Family Service, JVS, Federation and Jewish Senior Life.



Fran Victor

"I am deeply honored to be following in the footsteps of the larger-than-life Carol Rosenberg," Victor says. "I have long admired her professionalism, kindness and brilliant spirit. There is only one Carol Rosenberg, and I am humbled to succeed her in helping to evolve Jewish Senior Life and the services it provides to seniors in our community."

Rosenberg will work with Victor for the next few months during the transition. After that, she'll be spending more time with her husband, David Elliston, and their blended family of four children, Amy, Matthew, Paul and Douglas, their spouses, and seven grandchildren. A fifth child, David's son Charlie, passed away several years ago.

"It's really hard to believe she's actually finally retiring," says Rosenberg's daughter, Amy Rosenberg, an administrative law judge for the Social Security Administration in East Lansing. "When my son was born 13 years ago, she told me she was going to retire soon to help me take care of the baby."

"I think [this role] has been very important to her because her nature is to be a caregiver, and she loves the people there so much, and I know that she knows they love her — they reciprocate that love."

During a recent walk through the Fleischman Residence in West Bloomfield, Carol stopped to hug, talk to and greet everyone she passed, including a 100-year-old woman who was walking down the hall.

"Isn't she gorgeous?" Rosenberg says. "Oh, goodness. I've known her for such a long time."

Carol's son Matthew Rosenberg says, "Our mother has the amazing ability to focus right in when talking to someone and making them feel like he or she is the most special person in the world."

"She has such a tremendous heart and her caring for other people is a genuine trait. She has passed this down to my sister, brother and me and we have begun passing it down to our children."

STAR-STUDED SEND-OFF

A star-studded send-off to celebrate Carol's nearly four decades of service will take place Oct. 13 at Royal Oak Music Theater starring actress, come-

dian, writer, singer and producer Lily Tomlin. Rosenberg will once again be in the spotlight. She has a few surprises planned when she joins Tomlin on stage.

"I've got to put on a show. And when it's over, it will be over," she says.

"You asked why I'm leaving. It's not the age really, but I'm 74. I've worked all my life — I never could leave here because it was always changing. Nothing was really as stable as it is now. I feel comfortable with the leadership, JSL President Lowell Salesin, the officers, the board of directors and CEO Nancy Siegel Heinrich. It makes good sense for me to retire now."

As a result of Rosenberg's tireless efforts and generous donors, renovations and more new amenities are coming. A gift from Audrey and William Farber will provide two wellness centers, equipped with appropriate exercise equipment and professional instruction for all residents on the Eugene & Marcia Applebaum Jewish Community Campus in West Bloomfield. Sharon and Marvin Fleischman and family will fund the complete renovation of the Bistro and Boutique located in the Fleischman Residence/Blumberg Plaza.

Right now, crews are working to complete renovations of the dining room, common areas and hallways at Meer. Renovations were also recently completed in the common, kitchen and dining areas of the Coville Assisted Living Apartments and the Prentis and Teitel Apartments in Oak Park. All of it is part of Rosenberg's legacy.

"I wanted to leave with a noise," she says. "I spent a lifetime here. But it went so fast. It wasn't work — it was my joy." *

details

A celebration honoring Carol Rosenberg, starring Lily Tomlin, will take place Thursday, Oct. 13, at the Royal Oak Music Theater. Tickets are \$75-\$200 per person; VIP tickets are \$250. Visit romtlive.com or call (248) 399-2980, ext. 3, for more information. Proceeds benefit the Carol Rosenberg Promises Kept Fund, fulfilling residents' needs to enrich the quality of their lives. For more information about Jewish Senior Life, visit jslmi.org or call (248) 661-1836.