finding

center

"When I graduated from college, I wanted to change the world," says Suzette Lindemuth, the founder of the Center for Ageless Living. Today, she sits at a round pink table in her office above the Garden Gate Day Spa and Salon. It's one of the many structures on the Center's six-acre property located off the highway between Los Lunas and Belen. Tall cottonwoods with their gnarled branches, border the land to the north and south. Plum, quince, cherry, peach and other fruit trees stand near the pond, their first tiny spring buds greeting the new season. Though the office's windows are closed against the morning's chill, Sandhill Crancs can be heard trilling in the distance.

When Lindemuth began building the Center in 1990, she knew she wanted to create an entire environment with all the components possible to encourage healthy, joyous aging. "I wanted a sustainable community where we'd recycle water, we'd grow our own food, where there would be enough diversity on campus so that people here would be able to build friendships—and so that people from the outside would want to come and support our efforts," Lindemuth says.

To do so meant looking at the relationships between the various systems in which—and with which—we humans interact daily.

Lindemuth soon realized her approach to these goals couldn't be summed up easily in a sound bite. So she resorted to art. The Center's logo is a loam-colored tree with five green leaves. Each represents one of the Center's divisions: the day spa and salon, restaurant, community programs, residential living and elder personal services.

What makes this effort so interesting is the way Lindemuth integrates her goals and services into a vibrant interdependent whole.

"We focus here on the art of aging gracefully. We define grace as the ability to have inner flexibility, resilience and acceptance," Lindemuth says, pausing to consider her next words. "Good, healthy food is essential to the process, as is exercise. We also want to cultivate inner and outer beauty. There's strength, too—

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both mental and physical. And we want to celebrate wisdom—the sage part of us. We want and need to share the journey that elders have gone through."

children often feel guilty or overwhelmed by the aging process. They also worry about finances—their own and those of their parents," she understanding that no one exists in a vacuum. worlds? The Garden Gate Day Spa and Salon grew out of Lindemuth's massage or salon appointment. But what about the other people in their to yoga classes, these elderly occupants automatically receive either a purpose to support the entire endeavor. There are three assisted-livi homes, each of which houses 15 residents. Every week, in addition employees, to be able to relax and benefit from affordable spa experiences Every building on the Center's grounds has a well-conceived Lindemuth wanted these important people, as well as her own "Caregivers and adult assisted-living

who might need an assistant to enjoy a spa experience too. rooms are big enough to accommodate people in wheelchairs or those bodied visitors might not be aware of this, but Lindemuth made sure the the outdoor year-round heated pool and one of the two hot tubs. Ablecan spend the entire day at the spa enjoying its services, taking a dip in needs. The facility has all the amenities you'd expect to find-full body mindful of its financial health. "Forty percent of the elderly here are low-income," she says. So Lindemuth created the public spa to meet several At the same time, as director of the Center, Lindemuth needed to be facials, wraps, salt glows, foot rituals and more. A customer

sound and sustainable that it was selected by Day Spa Magazine as the So many aspects of the Garden Gate Day Spa are environmentally

2010 Top Green Spa for its commitment to "green.

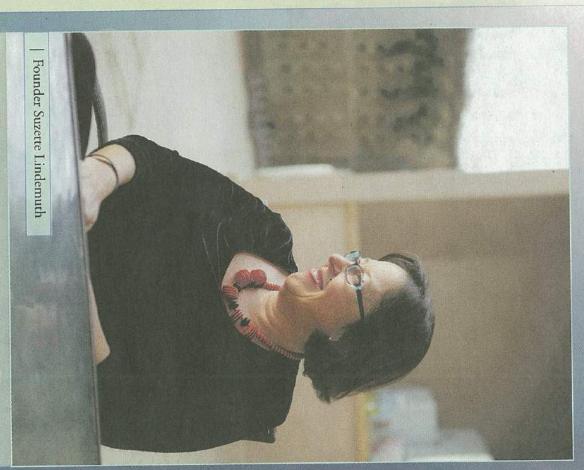
several gardens to the Center's grounds, including some with beds raised childhood in rural Pennsylvania how much better fresh herbs and rich brown soil. high enough for people with limited mobility to get their hands in the produce taste than their cellophane-wrapped counterparts. She added And then there's the food. Lindemuth knew from her own

salads and the restaurant's signature rotisserie chicken. "So people visiting our Center can come for a full-day spa experience and then pick comestibles? That's how the Green House Rotisserie came into being and people in the surrounding areas have access to the same quality up dinner before they go home," resource for fresh baked breads, pastries, gourmet main meals, soups, Since its opening as a take-out bistro in 2004, it has become a popular residents. But what about other people? Shouldn't caregivers, families, From the beginning, Lindemuth served good healthy food to her says Lindemuth, with a grin.

a point of buying from local growers whenever possible because she firmly believes that building communities involves supporting other gardens provided more bounty than the Center could use. Each growing communities. She also started the Field to Food initiative when her now working to involve other local farmers so that even more people can to get her fresh produce to more than 150 homebound recipients. She is The Center's food programs don't end there. Lindemuth makes Lindemuth partners with the Belen Meals on Wheels program

as intergenerational gardening days with her residents and local school externally, Lindemuth has also developed educational programs such Food annual gala fundraiser in June. children. Each year, gatherings and celebrations are a mainstay in the Center's large open park. One of the most popular events is its Field to To build and increase a sense of community internally and

But how does all of this feed into "aging gracefully?"
Though she has always found jobs to help people live better lives,



Lindemuth found her passion in the mid 1980s. At that time, she worked at two rehabilitation hospitals as a recreational therapist. She about aging and about isolation. being incredibly moved by the book," she says. "It opened my eyes alone any longer, but who didn't need intensive medical care. Then saw that there weren't many options for older people who couldn't live Lindemuth read Betty Friedan's The Fountain of Age. "I remember

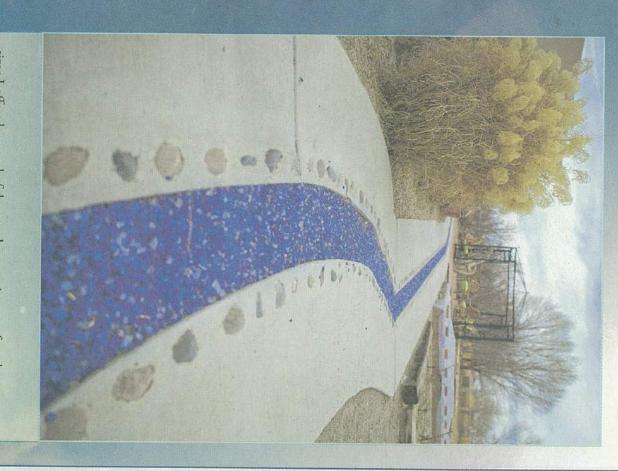
good intentions didn't go quite as planned. "Even in a small group milieu, a person can feel utterly isolated," Lindemuth says. three residential homes in Albuquerque. But in the beginning, her Lindemuth would create them herself. She soon opened the first of If there weren't good options for the elderly who needed assistance.

with being alone. "They say, 'I've lived alone all of my life. Lindemut shakes her head. "But it's not true! They were born into families. Most when we're part of a supportive, loving community married and had children. We're social beings. We all function better She soon realized that many older people correlate self-sufficiency being alone. "They say, 'I've lived alone all of my life." Lindemuth

important to human beings and the elderly often have lost spouses or others who might give them this much-needed connection." She also activities and exercise programs. "We had on-site salon services in Lindemuth wanted to create an environment where people "feel welcomed and part of a community very quickly." Building community my homes, because people who look better usually feel better too. wanted to really improve her residents' lives. She offered all kinds of however, involves more than a token game of bingo. Lindemuth introduced alternative therapies such as acupuncture, chiropractics and Lindemth says. "We provided massages, because touch is so incredibly

Lindemuth even tried to address her residents' attitudes about eating because she knew that better food meant better health. "One

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This was in 1987." Lindemuth's eyes widen with amusement and she soon bursts out laughing. "A cold soup made of raw vegetables? They threw it at me!

on green principles of living where everything supported and people of all ages, a place where a fresh picked lettuce—from her own gardens—would be on her residents' plates, a place founded Even with tomato-stained clothes, Lindemuth didn't give up. She learned from those experiences and vowed to build a community where people of all ages could be involved with

reflection, her face in semi-shadow. "It's such a simple little thing. We're all here to help each other." Lindemuth looks up, her brown-gray hair backlit by the window's one person. We all need to give a little-and why wouldn't we?" think about what makes a real difference in the quality of peoples lives. A lot of it comes down to this: "Community isn't just depended on everything else Since her college graduation, Lindemuth has had decades to

June 24. Tickets are \$45/person. 505.865.8813. Los Lunas. 505.865.8813. www.nmagelessliving.com. Their annual Field to Food gala gourmet dinner and celebration will be held on The Center for Ageless Living is located at 3216 NM 47 south of

authors and readers from around the world to the City Different, March 24-27, 2011: http://leftcoastcrime.org/2011/ chair of Left Coast Crime Santa Fe which will bring mystery Agatha Award finalist and founder of Murderati.com. She is also Pari Noskin Taichert is a multi-published novelist, two-time

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