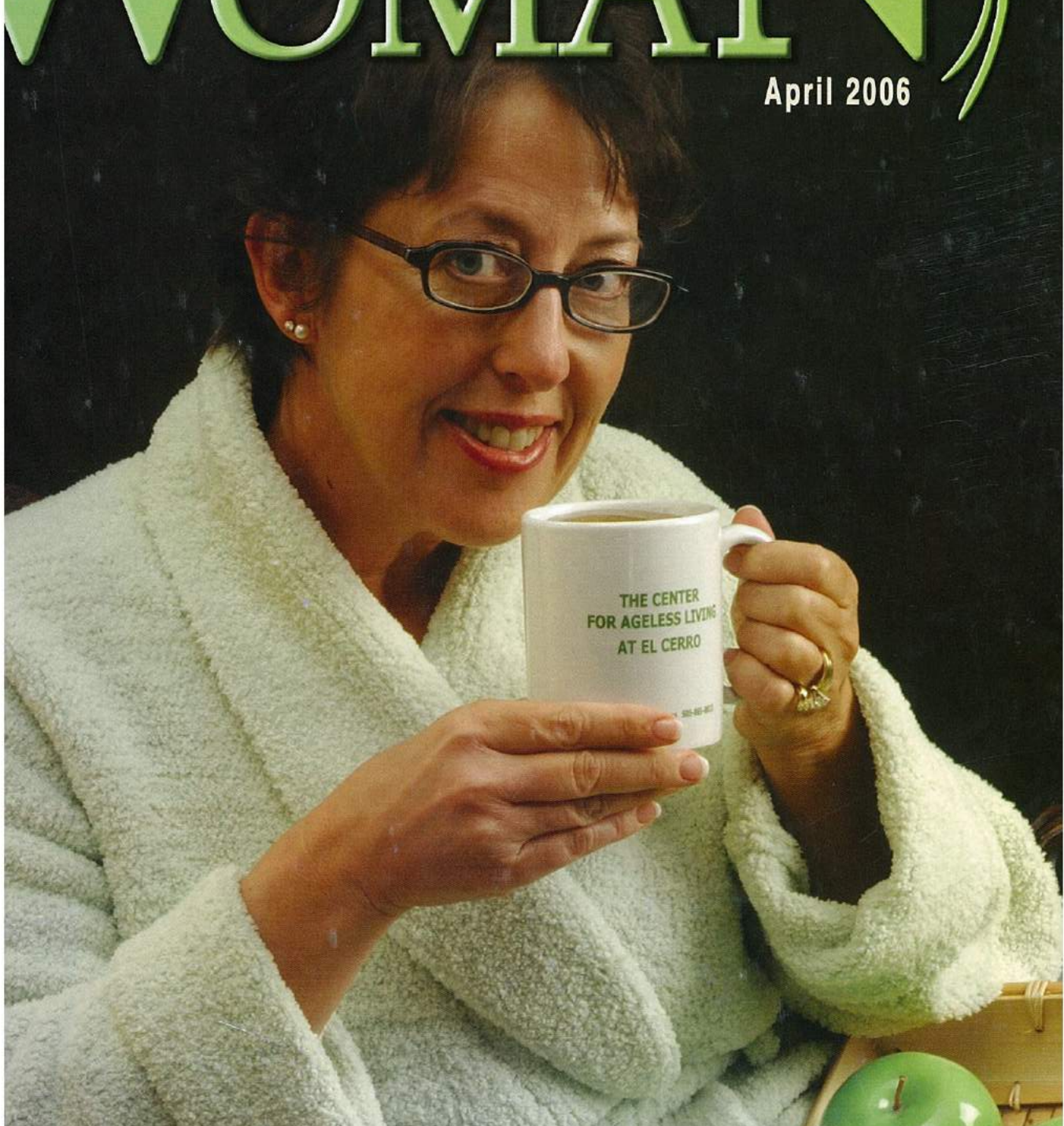


New Mexico WOMAN

April 2006



g Gracefully at The Center for Ageless Living
op 25 Women-Owned Businesses in New Mexico
en and Leadership: A New Paradigm

Aging Gracefully at The Center for Ageless Living

By Lisa J. Tabet

Photos by Geistlight Photography



Suzette Lindemuth is in the business of change. Changing the way people view aging, that is. As director of The Center for Ageless Living, Lindemuth believes that love and support help people age gracefully. She is working tirelessly to set new standards for all assisted-living facilities and services.

The Center for Ageless Living is a large campus in Los Lunas, New Mexico. One of the reasons she chose to locate the Center in Los Lunas was because of its rural feel. "It was easier to establish a sense of community where that feeling is already very strong," she says. Proximity to Albuquerque is also an asset. The Center initially received a very warm welcome from the community, and continues to enjoy its support.

Symbolism and change are reflected in the logo for the Center, which features a branch with five different leaves. Each leaf represents one of the service components of the Center which provides a diverse package of services: the assisted-living program, the non-medical homemaker and attendant programs, a day spa, a gourmet rotisserie, and a community park program.

"Our goal is to reduce the isolation that comes with aging," says Lindemuth, who wants to offer people alternatives to the nursing home. "With the cultural diversity of New Mexico, we must make sure that the patient is not isolated from the family," she continues. "We know how important that family is in the Hispanic culture, so our staff is equipped to support Hispanic clients. We recognize that in the aging process, first language is important—95 percent of our staff is bilingual," she says.

Her theory on aging and the negative effects of isolation were inspired by Betty Friedan, whose book *The Fountain of Age*, helped Lindemuth realize her vision for the Center. "The book really opened my eyes. I can see how important a community is as we age," says Lindemuth. "One of the missions of the Center is to look at how to support the whole family, not just the senior in need of care."

The Center is the largest provider of assisted-living facilities for the disabled and elderly in the state. The Center also offers Senior Living Systems, an assisted-living program that provides personal care while centering on dignity, respect, and enhancing the independence of seniors. There are currently 30 rooms designated for this service.

Personal Living Systems is another pro-

gram offered at the Center. This service offers non-medical homemaker and attendant programs for those experiencing difficulty with healthcare conditions. The service provides help with daily activities such as housekeeping, laundry, and personal hygiene. There are five apartments on the campus devoted to this program. Lindemuth also works with other programs in the Albuquerque area to provide services for Medicare clients.

Opened in 1990, the Center hosts both the disabled and the elderly with a current age range from 57 to 98. Lindemuth says the average age of her clients is between 80 and 85.

One of the issues unique to the business of aging is the fact that people are changing the way they look at the process. She believes this change will push the assisted-living market in new directions.

"As people age they are asking important questions about their future," she says. "What does long-term care really mean?" is one of the most frequently asked questions. She hopes she can answer that question by providing an alternative to the traditional nursing home scenario. "Baby boomers in particular are looking at care options for their parents and asking themselves, 'Would I want to live here?'"

Lindemuth thinks the next generation of seniors will be comfortable with The Center for Ageless Living. One of her favorite stories of her experience over the years is about a woman who sought care for her mother at the Center. Several years after her mother passed away, the daughter herself, in need of care, decided to live at the Center. "It was such a good feeling to know that she valued our services enough to trust us not only with her mother, but with herself," says Lindemuth.

Another thing Lindemuth really enjoys are the couples who come to live at the Center together. "It is wonderful to see the support they give each other in their golden years."

"I don't think people are afraid of aging. They are afraid of aging poorly," she says. Practical questions about the ability to drive, or peoples' appearance are very commonplace. "The best way to handle these fears is to look at preventative things we can do now to stay healthy," Lindemuth adds.

Part of her commitment to preventative measures can be seen in the brand new Garden Gate Spa, located on the campus. The spa offers therapies, treatments, and services that support aging gracefully.

Lindemuth believes that the body, the mind,



and the spirit are all elements of well being that must be nurtured. Her goal with the spa is to offer services that help to reduce symptoms associated with aging conditions, such as arthritis, circulation and respiratory problems, depression and menopausal symptoms, and grief and loss. The spa is also open to the public and offers a full range of spa treatments at reasonable prices.

The Center also features a community park program. The program offers the opportunity for volunteers and community groups to participate in gardening projects, education, and workshops. The gardens are integrated into the assisted-living program, and the produce raised is used in the rotisserie. Lindemuth herself is on her way to becoming a master gardener.

In addition to the spa and the park program, The Center features the Green House Rotisserie. The rotisserie provides a health-conscious menu prepared with many of the herbs and seasonal greens grown in the garden. The menu features Chic Chicken, salads, hand-kneaded breads, and desserts. Between treatments, spa goers can enjoy healthy dishes by the fireplace in the pool-side outdoor eating area. There is a meditation pond and a place to walk and watch birds. The garden facilities are available for community and family use. This spring, Lindemuth plans to unveil a 1,600-square-foot Yoga, Tai Chi, and meditation studio.

Through the Center, Lindemuth and her staff deal quite often with hospice patients. The hospice program provides special care for people who are near the end of life and for their families, either at home, in freestanding facilities, or within hospitals, who are near the end of life and also for their families.

"We are really grateful that we can allow people to stay here during that time," she says.

In the event that the person in need of care has family out of state, Lindemuth adds, "The fact that our caregivers can sit with patients so that they aren't alone is very meaningful."


The Center has a very high staff to client ratio. As the facility grows, Lindemuth plans to expand the staff as needed. Right now, there is a six-month waiting list for new clients. Lindemuth expects this waiting list to go down when a new phase of construction is completed. The new construction will include 15 new beds.


Originally from Pennsylvania, Lindemuth has had an interesting journey to The Center for Ageless Living. After receiving her undergraduate degree from Bloomsburg State College with degrees in anthropology, sociology, and art history, she went on to get her master's at the University of Northern Colorado. She relocated to Fort Collins, Colorado.

Family circumstances led her to Albuquerque where she decided to settle. She enjoys bike rides, sewing, yoga, gardening, and travel. Her family includes her partner of more than 10 years and his two sons.

"I have a very supportive family. My parents always made me feel like I could do anything," she says. Initially, she worked in healthcare, and then in corrections. She helped implement a new generational jail facility and was the head of a recreation and education project. "I learned a lot about planning and development during that time," she says.

Lindemuth uses her ability to help others. "We are put on earth to help each other. In the healthcare industry, we really see a significant outcome for our efforts. It is so rewarding to see the immediate effect on peoples lives, and the positive effect we have on those who feel lost in the system," she says. "And it is important to look at the long term opportunity to change as a chance to help many, many people age gracefully." **N:W**

 **The Center for Ageless Living**
(505) 865-8813
www.nmagelessliving.com

 Lisa J. Tabet is a New Mexico native who studied print journalism at the University of New Mexico. She lives in Albuquerque with her husband John and their fetching kitten, Sydney.