

## 50-cent coffee, priceless experiences at Mather's



Customers Sam DiMatteo and Larry Kolden spend some time in the Café.

By Patrick Butler

Larry Kolden and Sam DiMatteo are just two of those who during the past nine years have come for the food and stayed for the programs at Mather's -- More Than a Café, 7134 W. Higgins, Nina Kuzniak said.

Kolden, in fact, has his paintings and drawings on display this month. And DiMatteo -- a grandnephew of the founder of Dominick's supermarkets -- is a regular when he's not doing paintings of his own, making model airplanes, writing poetry or putting the finishing touches on an upcoming children's book, *The Gooseneck Putter*, said Café manager Kuzniak.



Mather LifeWays Café manager Nina Kuzniak helps customers April 1.

*They come for the coffee and they stay for the myriad enrichment opportunities at Mather's — More Than a Café in Norwood Park.*

Kuzniak's job includes arranging everything from tai chi and yoga classes, computer workshops and an upcoming crash course on "street smarts and self-defense for everybody" to special events like the 5:30 p.m. on Friday, May 14, appearance of "living history" actor R.J. Lindsey, playing philanthropist Alonzo Mather, who started it all.

"If you wanted to write a book about someone, write one about him," said Mather LifeWays spokesman Stuart Greenblatt.

Mather, whose forebears included Cotton Mather, of Salem Witch Trials fame, made his fortune developing a "humane" railroad car for livestock, founded a home for retired housemaids originally described as "aged ladies of refinement from good families" that paved the way for today's Mather LifeWays Foundation, Kuzniak said.

That legacy includes residential communities for seniors, a training program for caregivers of older adults and three Cafés (3235 N. Central and another on 83rd Street, as well as the Higgins Avenue location), each with its own individualized programs, including four levels of computer classes from the basics all the way up to creating electronic greeting cards and making useful spreadsheets.

"Anyone who says older people don't understand computers has never been here," Kuzniak said. "I often learn from the customers."

While you don't have to be a senior to patronize the "very af-

fordable" café with its 50-cent bottomless cup of coffee, you must be at least 55 to participate in any of the activities.

The Higgins location, which is open six days a week, attracts about 120 people a day, said Kuzniak, who also trains staff to "help customers have the lives they want to lead" by steering them toward activities that help them overcome "impossibilities."

Which may help explain why the Higgins Avenue Café hasn't had any staff turnover in four years, Kuzniak said.

"Shirley over there may be a receptionist. That's her job title, Kuzniak said. "But many people confide in her. She has an impact on people that goes beyond just welcoming them here."

Kuzniak added that some of today's employees started out as customers, then became volunteers and finally went to work at Mather.

"The 'Café Plus' concept has worked so well we have a program where we teach other senior services around the country how we do it," Greenblatt said.

For more information on Mather's programs call (888) 600.2560.



Ann Lonergan, of Jefferson Park, participates in a tai chi class April 1 at Mather LifeWays Café.