

Family affairs

Senior communities can be party central

Was it your parents' or grandparents' house that was the hub for family gatherings, celebrations and parties? That does not have to end after they have moved to a senior community. Even though the old house has been sold, senior communities are happy to help families carry on their traditions by hosting parties, showers, dinners — even weddings — in style.

In fact, The Mather, an upscale continuing care retirement community in Evanston, hosted its first wedding May 26. And it wasn't two residents getting hitched. It was one of their kids.

"My parents are unable to travel, and I didn't want to get married without them," says the bride, Kathleen Kline Moore. She and her husband, Allan Moore, live in McLean, Va. The ceremony was held across the street from The Mather at the First United Methodist Church, which Moore attended growing up. The reception and other events were held at The Mather.

The invitation read: "IT'S A DESTINATION WEDDING! But not just a nameless resort in a place like Hawaii, Cabo, or Istanbul. Anyone can do that. We, on the other hand, are going to THE MATHER, a brand new retirement community in

Evanston, Illinois..."

Moore likens their experience at The Mather to that of a luxury hotel, from the service to the food to the accommodations. Of the couple's 40 or so guests, some stayed in empty Mather apartments, including the couple. Only the price was less than expected, Moore says. There was an event planner, a chef, a pastry chef, and a number of staff involved. The food and service were five-star, Moore says. "They even helped us find a photographer who turned out to be phenomenal."

Moore's mother, Mather resident Pat Kline, agrees. "The Ritz-Carlton couldn't have done it any better," she says.

On the Friday night before the Saturday wedding, the family had food and drinks in the fireplace lounge. After the ceremony, the family took photos on the 11th floor outdoor terrace where they enjoyed champagne toasts and hors d'oeuvres. Later they enjoyed dinner and dancing in a private room set up for the occasion.

"The most fun thing was that the other residents were as excited about it as we were," Moore says. "It was a happy occasion."

Kline says she has attended other family events at The Mather, such as memorial services and birthday parties. "They say, 'This is your home and we want to make it comfortable for you,'" she says. "It is the warmest staff that you could ever find."

Indeed, the staff came through in the clutch when guests started arriving in town earlier than expected, on Thursday night. "They put together a dinner for us in a special room on the spot. They really went above and beyond," Moore says. "It was important because it was the first time some of our family members were meeting each other."

Great family events don't have to be as involved as a wedding. Linda Kunicki, marketing director at La Grange Pointe in La Grange, says bringing community and family together is what made her want to work there in the first place. "It was part of our original philosophy," she says.

This intimate independent living community has only 30 apartments, but features a large flower-filled terrace, a fireplace lounge with adjacent gathering space and another lounge on the second floor.

Resident Jackie Stewart Navarre's family has held a Christmas dinner in the fireplace lounge, a young grandson's birthday party on the terrace, and a pumpkin carving party in the craft room.

Navarre says the staff made everything easy, from set-up to clean-up. There was no charge for using the rooms. Furniture and tableware were provided. Cleaning was included. All she had to do was bring in the food.

"Upon reserving the space, staff asked how many guests would I have, their age range and what I



Bride and groom Kathleen Kline Moore and Allan Moore (top) had a "destination wedding" at The Mather in Evanston where her parents live.

planned to serve. They wanted to know how I wanted the furniture arranged, where the food would be served, whether it would be a sit-down dinner or buffet style. They asked what tableware I needed and offered to make coffee. Whenever I try to thank them they always say, 'That's why I am here,'" she says.

La Grange Pointe has not yet hosted a wedding, but it had a wedding shower for a resident's granddaughter last year. "It was my idea," says resident Dorrie Lemanski. "I had been told we could do any type of celebration, and I thought it would be really great."

Lemanski's daughter Marci Lemanski helped organize the shower for her niece Lauren Lendman, and 30-40 guests. La Grange Pointe's centralized location got rave reviews from relatives driving in from far-flung suburbs.

"The lovely space felt just like my mother's former living room," Marci

Lemanski says. "The staff took care of the details prior to the event so we could focus on the food, decorations and special effects to make it a personal and lovely experience for Lauren and her grandmother and me."

The Lemanskis knew that La Grange Pointe could throw a great party because they celebrated Christmas there as a family in 2010. "My parents always did Christmas Eve," Marci Lemanski says. "They were very social and they had a large home that was great for entertaining. So we did the same thing here."

Other popular family events that attract family at La Grange Pointe include the annual Easter egg hunt and the New Year's Eve party. The party started small when La Grange Pointe first opened, and is now swelled with family members. "It's getting later and later every year," jokes Kunicki. ■



The terrace at La Grange Pointe in La Grange provides the perfect setting for family parties. The senior community has also hosted bridal showers, Easter egg hunts and the popular New Year's Eve party.