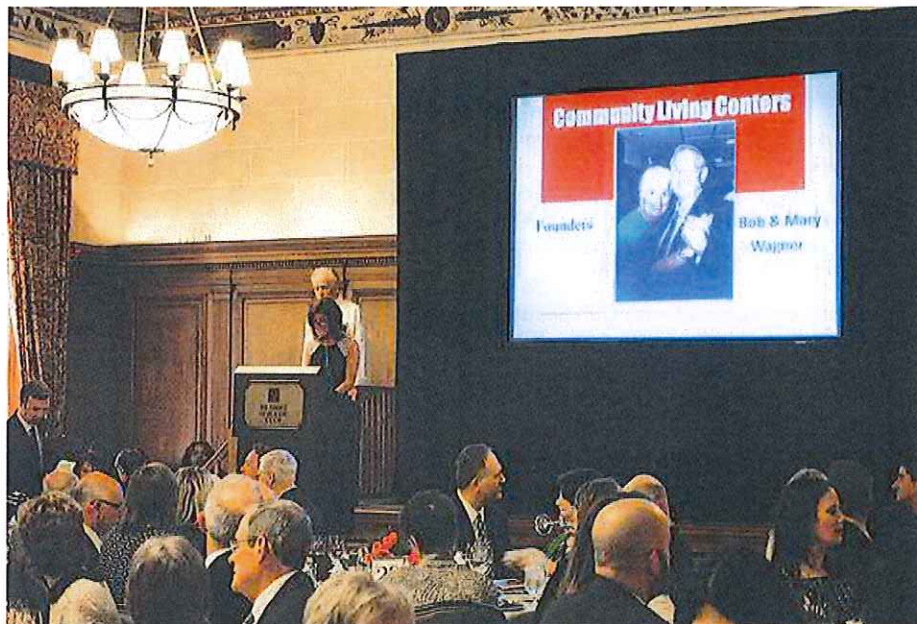


FARMINGTON HILLS, OAKLAND COUNTY

# Farmington-founded group homes connect with residents, gala on tap

By Sherri Kolade



An upcoming gala, the 39th annual Celebrity Chefs Dinner, will be held at 6:30 p.m. April 15 at the Detroit Athletic Club, 241 Madison Ave. in Detroit, to support the Community Living Centers initiative. Pictured, speakers address the crowd at a past gala. (Photo provided by CLC)

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FARMINGTON HILLS/OAKLAND COUNTY — Nearly 50 years ago, a mother fought to keep her son from being institutionalized because of his developmental disability.

Her actions ended up helping her son and about 200 others with developmental disabilities through the opening of Community Living Centers, located throughout Oakland County.

Mary Wagner — a special education teacher described as a pioneer behind the group home concept — helped in the deinstitutionalization movement for people who have special needs, helping them become more inclusive in the community. She passed away in 2001.

“She went against the grain, when at that time, in late '70s and '80s, anyone who had challenges (would be placed in) an institute of a large scale, and she said, ‘Absolutely not,’” said Emily Karlichek, CLC marketing and development director. “Her son still lives in the program, and we live out her legacy. Our residents live, work, play and pray in the community.”

Today, 11 group homes under the Community Living Centers are found around the county.

Wagner established CLC and her first group home in 1968.

“In the late '60s, the Wagner family moved from a little ranch-style home on Loomis Street in downtown Farmington to the original Wagner House on 13 Mile Road in Farmington

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Hills, which would house six adult men with disabilities and the Wagner family,” Karlichek said, adding that the group homes have seen a lot of growth and change since opening in 1968 in Farmington.

“Friendships have been built,” Karlichek said of CLC residents. “It is our own community, but we want to be a part of the bigger community.”

An upcoming gala, the 39th annual Celebrity Chefs Dinner, will be held at 6:30 p.m. April 15 at the Detroit Athletic Club, 241 Madison Ave. in Detroit, to support the initiative.

Business and individual sponsorship types vary from \$250 to \$10,000.

Sponsorships are due by March 26 to Emily Karlichek, Community Living Centers, 33235 Grand River Ave., Farmington, MI 48336.

More information on sponsorships may be found at [www.clchomes.org](http://www.clchomes.org).

Karlichek added that last year, CLC collected \$1,000 in sponsorships for the gala; this year, they will take home at least \$7,000 in sponsorships.

She said CLC, while thankful for donations, hopes sponsors attend the gala.

“Let us put your brand with our brand and get you exposure,” Karlichek said.

Volunteer support could come in the form of community engagement with Cub Scouts, or similar groups, cleaning up the homes in the fall or spring.

“The homes are in desperate need of cleaning,” Karlichek said, adding that those in need of hours for National Honor Society or similar groups are welcome to volunteer.

“Weed, rake — put a few plants around. That is huge for us, because it all gets back to, ‘What would I want?’ I would want to come to a home that is beautiful, and that is what we want,” Karlichek said.

Volunteering at the homes also goes back to Wagner’s message: “Let your heart be seen in your actions today.”

Laura H., who lives at CLC’S Freedom House in Farmington, knows a bit about volunteering.

“I work in a church; we clean the bathrooms and vacuum the church area, clean off the pews and make sure the books are upright,” said Hogan, who volunteers at two churches. “It’s good.”

Laura and other CLC residents work with Jewish Vocational Services, which provides vocational services for people with developmental disabilities, according to [www.thearcww.org](http://www.thearcww.org).

“Some have regular jobs in the community, work at Kroger, Oakland Community College (and) work at some pillars in the community,” Karlichek said.

Freedom House resident Lois H. said she has been with CLC since eighth grade.

“It’s a nice thing to do — meet new people,” Herman said of volunteering.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Staff Writer Sherri Kolade covers Farmington, Farmington Hills, Farmington Public Schools, and Oakland Community College for the Press. Sherri Kolade has worked for C & G Newspapers since 2013 and graduated from Central Michigan University.

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