

Eileen Niedzwiecki CNR SAS '72

Inspired To Serve

Eileen Niedzwiecki CNR SAS '72 applied to four colleges after high school, but it was The College of New Rochelle that immediately won her heart. "I felt a comfort level immediately after stepping onto campus for the first time," said Niedzwiecki. For Niedzwiecki, the first on both sides of her family to attend college, that sense of comfort deepened into an adoration that would span five decades and encompass a large portion of her career.

This summer, as Niedzwiecki retired from Mercy College as Director of CNR Development,



Photo by John Raiola

she looks back at an extensive tenure of working with CNR alumni that began just weeks after her graduation in May of 1972. Amidst numerous challenges leading up to the

2019 closure of CNR through its ultimate partnering with Mercy, Niedzwiecki said it was a definitive commitment to service, one she honed as a student, that helped sustain her. Though the names and physical landmarks changed in the last two years of her career, adoration for her alma mater remained solid.

Niedzwiecki's undergraduate experience at CNR was one immersed in continuous change from its very beginning. During her freshman year, she recalls entering a dining hall where the all-female students dressed for dinner and abided curfews. Just two years later, students were wearing blue jeans on campus. Against a



backdrop of a nation wrapped in the social and cultural change of the civil rights movement and widespread protests against the Vietnam War, it was a transformative coming of age. "It was like the world blew up, broke apart and changed all at once," said Niedzwiecki.

Despite it all, the mission reflected in the Ursuline values was a guiding force for Niedzwiecki. As her classmates departed following graduation, she remained, making CNR her workplace and home for another four years as Resident Director of Maura Hall. She and her husband Michael, who was finishing his degree at nearby Iona, began their newlywed life as residents in campus housing. "It was amazing. As a young couple we lived in a kind of wonderful cocoon there," said Niedzwiecki, who describes the comfort of entwining her career with a steady social life of faculty dinner parties. Her first child was born as the residence staff prepared for freshman orientation, and Niedzwiecki, not missing a beat, helped coordinate with her colleagues via an old-fashioned landline phone from her hospital bed.

With a growing family in tow, she would leave that first position, following her husband Michael's career abroad. Through moves to London, Chicago, San Francisco and back to New Rochelle, she remained an active and engaged CNR alumna, nurturing friendships with fellow classmates. "It's always been a central part of my life, and there's no question it stayed with me, especially having lived at CNR for those eight continuous years," said Niedzwiecki.

Her career would yield many fascinating turns, including positions at St. Vincent's Midtown Hospital, The Ursuline School in New Rochelle and Mercy Center in the South Bronx, but somehow her CNR roots kept calling her back. From 1994-2005, she would serve as Director of Alumni Relations, and in 2015 she would sign on once again as Director of Major Gifts. This time, her creative spirit and

dynamic skillset would come at a time when her alma mater needed her most. CNR's financial crisis and the events surrounding it would test Niedzwiecki in ways she could have never imagined.

Describing the sheer determination, she and her colleagues were forced to face an insurmountable obstacle, and she said learning that CNR would ultimately close its doors was devastating. "We had been running on adrenaline and we truly believed we could save CNR," said Niedzwiecki. Yet, devastation gave way to a new hope and a new chapter with a Mercy College partnership.

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With trademark optimism, she pivoted her efforts and her energy into preserving the CNR legacy by building a new council, leading outreach and programming all positioned in a new home base for its alumni, at Mercy. "The welcoming reception and the positive encouragement that CNR alumni offered President Hall was unbelievable. That was a new high that confirmed we'd done the best we could do in spite of it all," said Niedzwiecki.

Niedzwiecki's commitment to the Ursuline motto of "Serviam" or "I will serve" does not end with retirement. From her newly adopted hometown of Newport, Rhode Island, she intends to remain tuned in to all the future holds for CNR alumni, and has no intention of overlooking what has served her for a lifetime. Envisioning her alma mater's heritage carrying on is a "gift," she said, one she might not have ever foreseen in its darkest hours. "I will always do my best as a CNR alumna to live our motto, 'Serviam' by preserving our legacy and helping the program in any way I can."



Eileen's yearbook photo from 1972

Photo: CNR Archives



Front: Patricia Ahearn Mastellon SAS '65; Marlene Melone Tuter SAS '71; Renee Blackwell SAS '95
Back: Rosa Puleo Napoleone SAS '75; Eileen Niedzwiecki SAS '72; Kathryn Watts Atterberry SAS '73 - At a Strawberry Fest outside of the Castle Garden on the New Rochelle CNR campus

Photo: CNR Archives



Class of 1972 at "Your Father's Mustache" mixer with other area colleges.

Photo: CNR Archives



Eileen Niedzwiecki and her husband Michael with some of their grandchildren.

Photo provided by Eileen Niedzwiecki