



Martha Allegri (center standing), program administrator of The Hamlet, a Mercy Medical lifecare community and Hamlet residents Charlie and Edna Hilsenroth, enjoy sharing stories on the veranda of their cottage.

A Masterly Painted Life Portrait

Six years ago, Charlie and Edna Hilsenroth made a decision that changed their lives. The couple decided to become some of the first residents at The Hamlet, a newly built Mercy Medical lifecare retirement community in Fairhope, Ala. The Hamlet offers residents independent living in the comfort, style and security of resort-like accommodations plus a lifecare package ensuring healthcare in Mercy’s continuum at today’s costs. The Hamlet currently has 18 cottages and a fine dining clubhouse arranged in a park-like setting that creates a close neighborhood.

The Hilsenroths have been more than satisfied with the superb quality of living at The Hamlet, and after six years know their decision was paramount to their peace of mind. After a lifetime of giving of themselves in their careers, in their community, and in their service, the Hilsenroths are now enjoying a lifestyle that gives back.

Edna Hilsenroth was born and raised in Mobile, Ala. Charlie Hilsenroth was born in Manhattan, N.Y., raised in Jersey City, N.J., and earned his law degree in New York state as well as his doctorate of Jurisprudence. Their paths crossed while both had a birds-eye office view of Capitol Hill in Washington, DC working for the government. They had both been widowed for many years, and married in 1971.

The Hilsenroths had extensive careers in the US public health service. At the height of his career, Charlie Hilsenroth was the executive officer for the

Bureau of Medical Services. Matter of fact, Charlie Hilsenroth’s career is one of the reasons Mercy Medical expanded and exists today. As Hilsenroth puts it, *“I had the fortunate opportunity of being involved in programs launched after WW II. I was one of the organizers of the Hill-Burton Act, which was designed to provide federal grants to local communities for hospitals and to help modernize construction. The late Senator Hill of Alabama was the principal sponsor of that legislation.”*

Baldwin County’s Thomas Hospital and Mercy Medical as well as hospitals across the country were built because of the Hill-Burton Act and Hilsenroth’s work.

As humanitarians, the Hilsenroths were extremely active in volunteerism. A twenty-eight year stint as volunteers in the Baldwin Senior Travelers took the couple around the world as they led and organized trips to Europe, Asia, Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, to name a few. Volunteerism also brought Edna to Mercy Medical when they finally moved to Alabama in 1978.

Mercy Medical, which is sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy and a member of Catholic Health East, introduced The Hamlet at a dinner and presented the lifecare concept. The Hilsenroths attended.

“Lifecare rang a lot of bells for us. Because of the Hill-Burton Act, one of the fine things I did, was attend the annual hospital meetings. At the Catholic Hospital

Association convention, I realized how dedicated the Sisters of Mercy were to their cause and to their beliefs. We talked about it and realized that we were getting older and knew we would eventually become infirm. We wanted to make some choices so the children wouldn't have to. That's the peace of mind we were after," clarified Hilsenroth.

Peace of mind is one of the top reasons residents choose Mercy's lifecare retirement program. Planning early before a crisis happens promotes better decision making. Lifecare residents' monthly fees don't increase based on levels of care, which means they purchase tomorrow's long-term healthcare with today's dollars, hedging off inflation. Mercy's lifecare program also provides residents more leisure time since residents are free from the responsibility of house maintenance and yard work.

"When we had our home, I eventually gave up the hedge trimming. We had a guy that came and did the lawn, which was every week during the growing season, and it's a long growing season. We don't miss that or the annual appraisals and higher taxes, or the escalating insurance rates. You are looking at two people who are scarred and lived through the Great Depression. As Edna says to me "you've still got a two-cent stamp mentality," and I do. We have always been frugal, let's put it that way," stated Hilsenroth. "Lifecare requires a substantial investment of our long-term acquisition of resources, and we regard this as a good portion of our children's inheritance," explained Hilsenroth.

When the Hilsenroths considered where to retire, they both knew Fairhope was the top choice. "The opportunity for us to stay in Fairhope was a consideration in coming to The Hamlet. The beauty of the community, the town, the flowers, the flower boxes on poles, the trees, and the pier are tremendous attractions to us and to everybody else. If you know about the Fairhope community, then you know the way we feel; and we felt that way for a long time starting in the winter of 1973, on my first visit down here. Fairhope is a great town. Living in Fairhope is a rehearsal for living in heaven," stated Hilsenroth.

Mercy's healthcare continuum is another deciding factor in residents choosing lifecare. Mercy's healthcare continuum includes assisted living, memory care, rehabilitation, skilled nursing care, long-term care, home care and hospice. Although the Hilsenroths have not used other services in the continuum, they have seen it work for their friends.

"A very good neighbor of ours, whose husband died, is now over in Carroll Place (one of Mercy's assisted living communities). We know what's happening and what we can look forward to. My friend tells me she loves it and says I can't wait for you to come over," said Edna Hilsenroth.

The Hamlet fosters a family-like ambiance and bonding friendships. Residents are surrounded by neighbors and friends who share similar interests, activities and concerns.

"There are a limited number of cottages. In the dining room and outside of the dining room we are virtually one big happy family. And when something happens to one of us, it is amazing how the rest of the community responds. It is just as though we are true family," said Hilsenroth.

Mercy's lifecare retirement communities also live by the philosophy that an active lifestyle coupled with good nutrition can lead to a longer, happier and healthier life. Planned activities, events and trips are another wonderful enrichment of the lifestyle.

"Outside of delicious meals, we enjoy different occasions. We've had bands in the clubhouse, a harmonica player, people form the Mobile Opera, Veteran's Day celebrations, Valentines and Mother's Day activities. Plus we get transportation to area events in Mobile," said Hilsenroth.

When asked if the Hilsenroth's would recommend Mercy programs to family and friends, the response was overwhelming.

"Absolutely, yes, emphatically yes. We don't understand why some of our friends don't do what we did, but we do understand how difficult it is to give up a home. But just walk in here and see this beautiful cottage. We hope they don't wait too long before making a decision. In other words they need to be ambulatory and live independently for a reasonable period of time as we have," explained Hilsenroth.

The Hilsenroth's shared their life philosophy through an illustration published in the newspaper on New Year's Day. It depicts one man looking at a framed but empty piece of art titled "life" while another man tells him "You can stand by and watch it emerge or you can help paint it." Apparently, the Hilsenroths didn't just let life emerge. Edna and Charlie Hilsenroth masterly painted a life portrait.

For more information about Mercy Lifecare Retirement and The Hamlet call 251.928.5413, or toll free, 800-323-2391 or go online at www.mercymedical.com/The_Hamlet.