

# Westchester & Fairfield County Business Journals

## CARING FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T ALWAYS CARE FOR THEMSELVES

BY GEORGETTE GOUVEIA

**W**hen Rita C. Mabli was a child, she observed how doctors and nurses cared for her dying father.

“That taught me a lot about where to go in my future,” she said.

Where she went was United Hebrew, which she has served for 47 years – rising to president and CEO and helping to transform the 104-year-old nursing home into a 7.5-acre complex of complete senior resident and client services in the process. It’s why she said that of her many honors – which include a Crain’s New York Notable leader award and a Distinguished Leadership Award from the American College of Health Care Administrators – she’s “over the moon” about being inducted into the first class to receive McKnight’s Pinnacle Awards on March 7 in Chicago, as it speaks to those who’ve dedicated their lives to “caring for those who can’t care for themselves. And isn’t that what we’re supposed to do?”

Mabli would be the first to acknowledge that “it takes a certain type of person” to do this work – increasingly important as the nation ages. According to the Urban Institute, “The number of Americans ages 65 and older will more than double over the next 40 years, reaching 80 million in 2040. The number of adults ages 85 and older, the group most often needing help with basic personal care, will nearly quadruple between 2000 and 2040.”

Having some 540 dedicated staffers for more than 600 residents and clients, an almost 1:1 ratio, “is what makes United Hebrew different and special,” not to mention five-star rated. You can see this, she added, in the continued vigilance toward Covid, with United Hebrew being among the first to vaccinate residents and staffers and holding monthly vaccination clinics. United Hebrew is also at the forefront of decreasing the use of antipsychotic drugs to calm dementia residents, as studies and anecdotal evidence have shown the drugs only worsen the patients’ condition.

“We are below the standard and national benchmark in using psychotropics,” Mabli said.

And United Hebrew has a less than 1% rating for facility-acquired pressure sores, otherwise known as bedsores, which can

be deadly. She credited a staff that is trained in skin care and vigilant in changing, turning and feeding those who cannot do so for themselves.

But the facility is not just about meeting standards of care but transcending them with quality of life. Mabli pointed to Christmastime, when each staffer played Secret Santa to a resident.

“I can’t tell you the response, the number of residents getting gifts,” Mabli recalled. “It was incredible. It’s not just hands-on care. It’s emotional care.”

Indeed, the word “family” has become almost a cliché in the health-care field, but for Mabli and her team, who often seem to spend more time with residents than they do with their own relatives, United Hebrew is a family. That became particularly clear during the pandemic.

“I would say Covid was a defining moment for the country and certainly for those of us who work in health care,” she said.

While some sank under the weight of the challenge, United Hebrew rose to it, she added, with herself and staffers working 90 days straight, discharging those residents who could safely be placed in the care of family and keeping those who could not in touch with loved ones via iPads.

The United Hebrew family tree spreads out over the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Campus with services in a number of buildings. They include Burke Rehabilitation at United Hebrew; long-term skilled nursing at The Kramer and Skalet Pavilion; private geriatric care management services with Raven Care Advocates; Health at Home, a certified home health agency; Willow Towers Assisted Living at The Beverly and Alfred J. Green Pavilion; an increasingly intensive variety of dementia-care services through the Griffen Activity Program and Phoenix Memory Neighborhood at Willow Towers, and Willow Gardens (The Malcolm and Patricia Lazarus Pavilion), United Hebrew’s newest facility; and independent senior housing at the 135-unit Soundview Low-Savin Apartments and the 32-unit Meadow Lane Apartments.

With a three-and-a-half-year waiting list, Mabli is working with her board of directors and their strategic plan to build another pavilion that would create addi-



Rita C. Mabli, president and CEO of United Hebrew of New Rochelle, is among those eldercare professionals who'll be inducted into the first class of McKnight's Pinnacle Award winners March 7 in Chicago. Photograph by Lynda Shenkman. Courtesy United Hebrew of New Rochelle.

tional, much-needed affordable housing. She’s also applying for a grant for AI technology that would cue residents on medications, appointments and the like. And Mabli is among those urging New York state Gov. Kathy Hochul to include a 20% increase in the nursing home Medicaid rate for the state fiscal year 2023-24. <https://www.leadingagency.org/advocacy/advocacy-action-items/urge-governor-to-provide-a-20-medicare-increase-to-nursing-homes/> (While 75% of nursing-home residents rely on Medicaid to pay for their care, the rate of reimbursement from the state hasn’t changed in 15 years.)

Mabli’s mother, Lucy Mabli, was a United Hebrew resident, living in the Soundview Apartments from 1980 until her death in 1991. “She used to make lunch for the staff. She was a terrific cook.” A sweatshop seamstress with an eighth-grade education, Mabli’s mother nevertheless imparted the wisdom that has guided the CEO: “She taught me to be firm but kind.”

Mother and daughter – the youngest of four who included three much older brothers – had a bond forged in part by the adversity of their lives in the Bronx. When Rita’s father – Sebastian “Sam” Mabli, who owned a leather business – died, 12-year-old

Rita and her mother were left with “literally nothing.” Food stamps, Medicaid and Rita’s scholarships to Cardinal Spellman High School and what is now Iona University in New Rochelle (Bachelor of Arts in Communications) and its LaPenta School of Business (MBA) saw them through.

Fresh out of graduate school, Mabli went to work at United Hebrew in 1976 as director of personnel. She was named COO in the late 1980s, becoming executive vice president and CEO in 1994 when her predecessor left. Mabli was made president in 2005.

It was while Mabli was at Iona that she met her husband, Patrick Hardiman, a retired national audit partner for Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Ltd., the international professional services firm, and a retired professor of finance and accounting at Iona. (They have a daughter, Lucy, named for grandmother.) Today, Hardiman teaches a course in World War II history at United Hebrew’s Willow Towers, part of the enrichment on the campus that includes arts programming.

For Mabli, United Hebrew remains a family affair.

For more, visit [unitedhebrewgeriatric.org](http://unitedhebrewgeriatric.org).