

Standing Up For the Aged

This Sacramento resident takes on substandard nursing homes



By Terry Kaufman
Local Heroes

Carole Herman believes that fate played a role in her aunt's death 29 years ago.

Her aunt, Matilda Anticevich, was overmedicated by her doctor, deemed unable to care for herself, and ended up in a nursing home. There, she died at the age of 79 as a result of sepsis from infected bedsores. Herman was angered by the facility's negligence and indifference.

Following her aunt's death, Herman filed a complaint against the nursing home. While awaiting a response, she maintained a whirlwind schedule as an executive in her husband's software company, visiting offices in Europe and negotiating deals with technology giants. Almost a year and numerous inquiries after the complaint was filed, Herman discovered that it had been conveniently lost and that no action had been taken against the facility. "They had stonewalled me," she says. It was the dawn of her realization that "nursing homes are bad places" and the genesis for FATE—the Foundation for Aiding the Elderly, a nonprofit organization supported exclusively by donations.



Carole Herman is the founder of FATE, Foundation Aiding The Elderly

Herman is the poster child for "local girl makes good." She has lived within five miles of FATE's American River Drive offices for more than six decades, yet she is a familiar face in corridors of power from Sacramento to Washington, D.C. She has appeared on "Geraldo," been interviewed by every major broadcast network, and was featured in *Family Circle* in a story called "Women Who Make a Difference" in 1992. She has taken

her single-minded crusade to protect seniors from nursing home abuse across the country, providing help and support to more than 3,500 client families. Her office is jam-packed with files documenting every case on which she has been engaged.

"The nursing home industry is very powerful," notes Herman. "They're not afraid of the regulators because they know that they won't be held accountable. There are not too

many people who can do what I do." What she does is provide aggressive advocacy for families whose elders have suffered harm while in a care facility, receiving not a dime of government money for her efforts.

Herman recalls a study of state ombudsman programs that she worked on with a major university. "It showed that this is an ineffective program because they're on the government payroll," she says. "They can't go to the press, they can't file complaints. I'm very aggressive because I don't have to be accountable to anyone but my clients. They hate it when I show up, because they know that I'm there for business."

Besides advocating for clients, Herman is devoted to educating the public about their rights. "The elder abuse law was passed in California about 15 years ago, but most people don't know what their rights are," she says. Toward that end, FATE produces an informational newsletter covering topics ranging from conservatorships to prescription drug abuse. Between the newsletter and FATE's website, Herman's goal is "to let people know that they have a place to call."

Despite the many inroads FATE has made in drawing attention to abuses, the problems continue to grow. "The need for advocacy is 10 times greater now than it was when we started," observes Herman. "The issues aren't just in the nursing homes any more. We're now dealing with residential assisted-living facilities and adult day care centers. I'm also spending a lot of time now in acute-care hospitals. As our society ages, with the aging of the baby

boomers, the problems are going to explode. But the system has not exploded to keep up with it.”

On a typical day, FATE’s phones ring off the hook. “It’s never a good phone call,” Herman says. “People don’t call this office to tell us about a good experience with a nursing home.” Although she was never formally trained in counseling, much of her work involves just that. “When people call us, they are very emotional,” she says. “They’re talking about their loved ones. I have to handle them with kid gloves.”

The demand for FATE’s services has prompted Herman to look at opening satellite offices in other large urban centers. She believes that with appropriate financial backing and the right people in place, she could clone FATE’s operations all over the country. “I’ve got the blueprint, but I’ve got to find the right people, people who are pure of heart,” she says. Herman is working with a grant writer to identify resources to support such growth, but she acknowledges the need to line up major donors. “I haven’t really promoted the organization because I’m so busy all of the time,” she says.

Herman recalls the first time she visited a nursing home following her aunt’s death. She was so unnerved, she became physically ill. Today, she is a force to be reckoned with by those nursing homes. “I’m driven to do this work,” she says. “I think that my aunt died to give me my purpose in life.”

For more information about FATE, including video interviews with Carole Herman, visit 4fate.org. To contact FATE, call 481-8329. ●

private businesses that don’t receive SHRA subsidies have objected, saying SHRA is not just financing their competitors but is essentially going into business in direct competition against them.

The End Game?

Three months ago, hardly anyone would have predicted that redevelopment agencies would be on the ropes and facing possible termination. But Jerry Brown has adroitly built a coalition of powerful interests to support his plan to end redevelopment, including the California Teachers Association and other public employees unions. Additionally, the plan’s chances for success have been buoyed by the latest statewide poll released by the Public Policy Institute of California, which found that likely voters favor ending redevelopment by 63 percent to 26 percent.

Our own mayor and city council have made it clear that they are prepared to go to the mat to try to stop the governor’s plan. But given the allies Brown has recruited and the latest poll numbers favoring his plan, it just may be time for our city’s elected officials, all well as officials from other cities, to invite the governor to sit down and explore a compromise.

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