

The Colorful Life of Larchmere's Margaret Mueller

by Angela Townsend

If you've ever eaten at Felice Urban Cafe, the restaurant housed in a restored home on Larchmere Boulevard, chances are that you've met Margaret Mueller.

Owner of the restaurant, which opened in 2006, Mueller, 85, delights in chatting up patrons. Since the longtime resident of Shaker Heights and Geauga County moved into a renovated home on East 126th Street, she spends even more time there.

The restaurant business is the most recent – but hardly the last – chapter of Mueller's eclectic career.

An unassuming heiress – her father, Dr. James Reid, founded Standard Products Co., a Fortune 500 auto-parts manufacturer in Cleveland (now a division of Cooper Tire & Rubber) in 1930 – Mueller and her husband raised five children. She was married to Werner Mueller for 49 years, until his death in 2001.

Mueller said her husband encouraged her entry into politics.

"Do you think I should run for Congress?" Mueller asked him. "He said 'Go, girl. Go.'"

She ran as a Republican and lost four times, her final defeat in 1992 against Sherrod Brown.

While she chalked both campaigns as a great experience, Mueller discovered that politics was not her forte.

"The problem with politics, if you are your own person and tell the truth of what you believe in, it doesn't matter what party you're in," said Mueller, who later switched over to the Democratic party. "The people really often don't want to hear too much about what you really believe in."

Politics was one of the few things at which Mueller didn't succeed.

After returning to school and earning a master's degree in elementary education from Case Western Reserve University in the 1960s, Mueller worked as a teacher for some time, then went back to school again for a second master's in social-services administration.

For 11 years Mueller was a probation officer at Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court, until a memo she penned that bristled at the ways of the male-dominated court got her fired in 1984. She filed – and



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won – a sex discrimination lawsuit. She got her job back, but didn't stay long.

Around the same time, Mueller and her longtime friend, philanthropist and preservationist Maxine Goodman Levin, bought and renovated one of the old Prospect Avenue row houses together.

"We were just crazy," Mueller said. "We liked the idea of fixing up old broken-down places."

While she won't divulge her latest venture, Mueller said she wants it to be on Larchmere – perhaps buying another property. But it definitely won't be another restaurant. One is plenty, she said.

Margaret Mueller at Felice Urban Cafe is cooking something else up for her next venture

"This is a little gem. I want to keep it just the way it is," Mueller said of Felice, which underwent a chef change earlier this year.

"I'm into all kinds of stuff," she said. "The other day I said to one of my sons, 'I have an idea' and he said, 'Oh, Mom – please!'"