

# True Pioneers

By Lauren Searson

Photography by Angie Grandizio



Whether it's active residents Jerry Altman (left) and Lillian Zale braving the traffic on their walks or executive director, Arnold Eppel's continual drive to enhance life at Atrium Village, there is no question this community is full of pioneers.

“Looking back on my experience, I hit a homerun,” says Jerry Altman. He is, of course, referring to his move to Atrium Village, a senior retirement community located in Owings Mills. Not only does this community offer the amenities and care Jerry had been looking for, but its vibrant atmosphere enabled him to find his ‘soul mate,’ Lillian Zale.

While they consider themselves best friends, the two also refer to one another as ‘pioneers’ in

reference to the day that cemented their friendship. Jerry and Lillian are avid walkers and on that particular afternoon, they decided to disregard the sign that warns individuals about crossing the highway.

“We decided we felt like pioneers and were going to brave the traffic,” says Jerry. And they did just that...a number of times.

Although they walk the same road together today, the one that led each of them to Atrium Village is quite unique.

Jerry, a Cincinnati native, had just graduated from high school when the country was on the eve of World War II. After enlisting in the Army Air Force, Jerry had met his wife and spent a good portion of his time overseas in England. With the birth of their first child following the war, Jerry returned to school and received his degrees to become a lawyer.

They eventually settled in Baltimore where they enjoyed the perks of a convenient location. When his wife passed in 1981, Jerry remained busy with his work as a military reservist.

“The Air Force was happy with my work and I retired as a colonel in the Department of HHS ATW as a supervisory attorney, but my greatest accomplishment was receiving the Distinguished Service Award,” he says.

But there was another great accomplishment in store for Jerry when his son approached him about making the transition to a retirement community that could provide the services he needed. At the time, Jerry had been experiencing cardiac problems and was living with his daughter, who had her own health concerns, and her family.

Having lived in military communities for most of his life, he was apprehensive about the move, but had heard nothing but great comments about Atrium Village. What he discovered was that Atrium Village complemented his lifestyle perfectly.

“I wanted enough space to relieve myself of house-keeping duties and I don’t like cooking because I think eating is a social experience, and this community fit perfectly into that,” says Jerry.

Surrounded by similarly active individuals and different opportunities, he has immersed himself

in the social environment by helping with the Veterans’ Group and attending public affairs meetings at Atrium Village. He also plans to volunteer in a read-aloud group for residents with vision problems. Fortunately, it was this on-the-go lifestyle that led Jerry to Lillian.

“To find a soul mate is a bonus,” says Jerry, “Because we shared the same feelings and thoughts, it developed into a great friendship.”

Lillian was born in Brooklyn, NY, and since her parents were from Europe, she spoke Yiddish and Polish until she went to school.

“I fell in love with school. I wanted to be a psychiatrist; I was going to teach people how to live the most wonderful life,” she says.

Following her studies, however, Lillian became a teacher, a profession she enjoyed that enabled her to

be with her two children more. Over the years, she was able to utilize her psychology background in other part-time jobs, including working with children and adults with special needs in hospitals.

When her husband passed away, Lillian was not quite sure what to do having lived in their Long Island home for 47 years. Although she continued to work,

her sons had moved to Baltimore and discussed the next step.

“I was not unhappy, but I was not in the world I had lived in - that was disappearing,” she says. “They said, ‘We found a place that we think you can afford that could work out for you.’”

It was two years ago that Lillian made the move to her apartment in Atrium Village. To this day, she enjoys the freedom of no home-maintenance and constantly being surrounded by others. In fact, she is

*Continued on page 28*

**“I’ve found a home here, I’ve met many welcoming people and I’m very happy.”**

— Lillian Zale



Jerry and Lillian found kindred spirits, but so did Gladys Gordon and Helen Hoffman!



**Jerry, Lillian, and their peers take advantage of Atrium Village's complimentary transportation for medical, dental and various social activities.**

known by Jerry and her peers as one who can remember the lyrics to any song written since the '20s and for her knowledge of literary classics.

"I've found a home here, I've met many welcoming people and I'm very happy," she says.

And this attitude is exactly what the staff at Atrium Village strives for on a daily basis, especially its newly appointed Executive Director, Arnold Eppel, who came to the community after having served a storied career as the executive director of the Baltimore County Department of Aging.

This government agency is the largest area agency in the State of Maryland, and under Arnold's leadership, it created and managed countless programs that have garnered local and national attention. The most well-known program is the annual Baltimore County Senior and Baby Boomer Expo. The Expo attracts thousands of Baltimore County residents and put Arnold front and center to meet and better understand the region's issues, offerings and challenges.

After completing his graduate studies in the innovative Erickson School of Aging Studies at University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), Arnold was inspired to transfer his experience, training and education to a different venue, which led him to Atrium Village.

The position has allowed him to focus his talents and energies on the needs of a tight-knit community as opposed to the massive geographic reach of Baltimore County. Arnold himself is a resident of Owings Mills and lives just a few minutes from the community which only enhances his connection to the surrounding neighborhoods and his ability to serve as a leader.

Arnold's enthusiasm and drive to make Atrium Village "the best retirement community in the state" are unwavering. He is a fixture in all parts of the community soliciting feedback from the residents, talking to staff and focusing on ways to improve and innovate. His enthusiasm and expertise lends itself to Independent Living, As-

**"To find a soul mate is a bonus. Because we shared the same feelings and thoughts, it developed into a great friendship."**

**-Jerry Altman**

sisted Living, and Legacy Court, or Memory Care.

The constant aspirations of the staff and the offerings of the community further prove to residents like Lillian and Jerry, and their families, that they made the right decision.

"At the time, people told me I should have moved in with my children," says Lillian, "I thought, they have their own families and homes, and I'm part of that family, but I want my own place."

And with her budding friendship and a retirement community that strives to meet individualized needs, Lillian certainly found the right place. At Atrium Village, whether it's simply stretching the boundaries of a walk or exceeding expectations in retirement living, there is no question that there are several "pioneers" among its residents and staff. GRL



Learn more about Lillian and Jerry's journey in their full video interviews as seen on [retirement-living.com](http://retirement-living.com). Look for this video icon in other articles for additional interviews featured on our website.



# Atrium 1/2 pg Ad to come.