

SAM SLUSHER AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE FOR SENIOR ADULTS **ELONA VERVECKKEN**



The youngest of seven sisters, Elona Verveckken was born in 1941 in Konigsberg, Germany, which is currently known as Kaliningrad, Russia.

Elona suffered during her childhood. She lost her mother in 1944 and her father was sent to a concentration camp. At four years old, Elona was unable to walk due to starvation so her older sister carried her into a hospital. Her sister then perished before being able to return for Elona. With no place to go and being one of the many children that didn't have families, she was transported in a freight car to an orphanage. Eventually, Elona was found in the orphanage by her biological sister, Irmgard.

In April 1953, Elona was adopted and moved to Argental, Germany. After finally feeling the love of a parent, her adopted father passed in March 1957. He was always so good to her and she could not accept his death. Being unable to have kids of her own, Elona's adopted mother was always distant and cold to her so Elona went back to her sister Irmgard's home. Irmgard and her husband Klaus maintained

guardianship of Elona until she turned 21. As a strong and passionate young woman, Elona completed a four-year degree in culinary school. Elona pursued her studies to become a chef working in various hotels and restaurants.

At the age of 22, she had the urge to move to Australia; however, the Embassy wouldn't allow her to go and simply asked her if she had relatives in other countries. Her sister Edeltraut and brother-in-law Charles lived in America and sponsored her to come to the States. On December 29, 1963, she moved to Shreveport, LA. Elona took a job delivering menus in the P & S Hospital since she couldn't find a job in her industry. From there, she was offered a job as the manager in the restaurant across from the hospital. A year later, Elona moved to Dallas, where she got a job at the famous Cabana Hotel working nights as a cashier. Preferring to work during the day, she found another job at the Baron Restaurant in downtown Dallas. It was during this time the two owners told her they wouldn't hire Germans. But being the persistent woman she is, she told them to give her a chance, and if they were not pleased, they didn't have to pay her. She got the job!

In 1967, she met the love of her life, Raymond Verveckken after dating his roommate for a short amount of time, proving that love is found in the least expected way. They went for their first date on Valentine's Day, and seven weeks later, they got married. They had their first son, Raymond Verveckken, Jr. on Valentine's Day. The following year he was followed by two more children, Verruschka and Hans.

Over the years, Elona and Raymond have run very prestigious art galleries, antique shops and were in the auction business. Elona is devoted to her children and five grandchildren. This year, Raymond and Elona celebrated 53 years of marriage. She says the most important things in her life are her loving family and her devoted relationship with the J. She has been volunteering for a number of years and enjoys it with all her heart. She would say the J has really been a blessing to her. As a supportive and communal facility, the J has truly made a huge impact on her life by having the fellowship with so many wonderful people from all walks of life.