

PROFILES IN SERVICE

Phil and Cherry Jacobus

Deep Roots and Service Help Porter Hills Grow



UMRC &
PORTER HILLS

Cook Valley Estates residents Phil and Cherry Jacobus have deep roots with Porter Hills.

“It goes back to my work with Hartger & Willard mortgage company,” Phil begins. “Harold Hartger, president, and a few others from Westminster Presbyterian Church had an idea in the 1960s for a senior housing development. At that time there was nothing in the way of a modern design for senior living in Grand Rapids.”

A committee formed to assess the need, design, and financing for this idea. This group included Don Porter (he and his wife, Ruth, owned some land where Porter Hills was eventually built), Jack Bowie, Bill Martindale, Horace Barton, and Harold Hartger. “I was involved primarily with the financing,” says Phil.

WDDC was the local architecture firm in Grand Rapids that created the design, and Owens Ames Kimball (OAK) was the builder for Porter Hills. Next came the financing. “The Federal Housing Administration had some funding available at that time for senior living, offering 40-year financing at a low rate. Our loan was approved, but we still needed working capital,” explains Phil. “At that time, Isabella Home decided to close its doors. They agreed to provide funding and resources to Porter Hills to proceed, and some of their board members joined the Porter Hills Board.”

Porter Hills opened in 1970, the first modern senior housing project in West Michigan. Phil’s father, who had recently retired from Ford Motor Co., volunteered in Porter Hills’ office in its early days, and Cherry’s dad, W. Glen Harris, served as the Porter Hills chaplain.

Phil spent nine years on the Porter Hills Board, ending in the 1990s when he retired. During his board tenure, Phase II of Porter Hills was completed, adding an apartment wing and free-standing homes along the driveway. They also received funding to develop assisted living projects, including Meadowlark in Sparta.

“It was exciting to be part of the initial project, a new concept of senior living, and watching it grow,” says Phil.

Phil and Cherry, a retired pediatric and emergency room nurse, have long been active members in the city of Grand Rapids and their Westminster Church family. They continue to support Porter Hills through their gifts to the Porter Hills Foundation. “We live here and are part of the community, and we want to see it keep going,” says Phil. “It’s a nice, secure feeling to be part of a community like this.”
