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Health

Sister Helen Amos' big act



Karl B. Hille, The Examiner
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BALTIMORE -

Learning her letters from the Sisters of Mercy in Mobile, Ala., Helen Amos found the roots of a lifetime of commitment and service she continues today at the helm of Mercy Medical Center.

She came to Baltimore in the 1950s to get a teaching degree and enter the novitiate. Today Sister Amos sits on the board's of numerous charities, including Mercy Ridge, Loyola College, St. Mary's Seminary and two Georgia Sisters of Mercy hospitals, and is chairwoman of Mercy Medical Center and the Downtown Partnership.

"The perennial challenge is to maintain enough passion to be truly invested in the causes that I've given myself to," Amos told The Examiner recently. "Although there are many of them, I want to really give myself to them and try to help them, not in a superficial way. I think with a lot of busy people, the temptation is to not live in the moment — to be always thinking about what's coming next."

How does she do it?

It helps that the board of trustees decided seven years ago to hire a layperson for their CEO and have Amos take over as full-time chairwoman.

Sister Amos has her own secret.

"I'm fortunate to be a person who likes to rise early and give my first couple of hours of the day to physical exercise and prayer. Sometimes, you can return to it later in the day, but more often, not," she said.

Amos also keeps her focus on Mercy by visiting patients in the hospital's 228 beds.

"I know this because I've been a patient here myself. Sister visits patients up on the floors," hospital spokesman Dan Collins said. "Sister was doing that when she was president and CEO, too."

Current CEO Thomas Mullen has worked with Amos since he came to Mercy in 1991 as a financial officer. "For us there's a value in her background at Sisters of Mercy, and there's a continuity there," he said. "She has really strong leadership skills."

She grew up in the south, but Amos has spent most of her life in Baltimore. "I didn't grow up in Baltimore, but I consider myself a Baltimorean. I think it's a wonderful city and a city with a lot of opportunity. ... Baltimore has developed around us and beyond us, but Mercy has managed to keep itself relevant to the city of Baltimore."

A not-for-profit, like all hospitals in Maryland, Mercy goes further with its commitment to treat all people, "regardless of their social class, standing in the community and economic circumstances"

Amos has no plans to leave the board of trustees any time soon, she said. "We're getting ready to redo the major portion of our hospital — the inpatient tower." Just last week, Mercy settled a pending lawsuit over the preservation of a block of 1820s row houses that occupy that space.

Mercy agreed to record the buildings consistent with professional standards and create a display about the buildings and their history, according to a statement from Mercy about the agreement.

"My focus over the next several years it to do everything I can to make this a successful transition. That building that's going up one block north is going to be Mercy Hospital in Baltimore for the next 50 year," Amos said.

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