

Montgomery

MONTGOMERY
MAGAZINE

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— 2026 —
**TOP
SENIOR
COMMUNITIES**
IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

LEADING WITH LOVE, BETHESDA'S

**NATALIE
WEST**

BUILDS A LEGACY OF SERVICE

+
SUMMER
FESTIVAL
CALENDAR

Natalie West

**Immediate Past Chair,
Charles E. Smith Life
Communities**

BY CARYN R. SAGAL

Syracuse native Natalie West cherished visiting her great-grandmother at the Jewish Home, feeling comfortable around the caregivers' smiling faces and taking pony rides at the facility's annual fundraiser.

She also fondly remembers seeing her mother as a community leader "asking for support — on the phone, in the grocery store, everywhere — while speaking kindly, sincerely and with gratitude."

"Those experiences with my great-grandmother set a foundation for my love and compassion for older adults which has permeated my life," West says. "And my mom set the stage and influenced my own future philanthropic pursuits."


But first, West honed her communication skills. After earning a bachelor's degree in journalism/public relations and business from the University of Maryland, College Park, she settled in Bethesda and pursued an advertising career.

For several years, she wrote



Natalie West accepts
JWI's Sondra D. Bender
Leadership Award.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL KRESS/JWI



scripts, edited in studio, bought media time and created campaigns featuring Willard Scott, Art Monk and Monte Coleman. Most gratifying, however, was doing pro bono PR for events benefiting the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and the American Heart Association.

Those projects propelled her to reflect on what really mattered and what she wanted to accomplish as a member of the community.

In 1997, after her first child was born, her father-in-law suggested she join the Women's Auxiliary at the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington [now called Charles E. Smith Life Communities (CESLC)] — where he was board president and where both her great-aunt and her husband's grandmother resided.

"As a transplant, I knew I needed to share my time and my talents in order to meet new people and establish

as committed as ever to my service," she adds. "What motivates me after all these years is the same motivation I felt almost 30 years ago — it's all about the love, joy and passion I have for community work, helping to make a difference for an organization and bringing our community together."

Along with her current role as CESLC'S immediate past chair, she is board chair of SeniorCare Ventures (which oversees Smithlife Homecare, a provider of in-home expert health care aides and services for older adults in the Maryland/DC area).

Honoring West for "galvanizing the Washington, D.C. Jewish community and inspiring the next generation of Jewish women community leaders," Jewish Women International (JWI) named her one of its "2025 Women to Watch" as the Sondra D. Bender Leadership Award recipient.

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new roots," West says. "And of course, the idea of supporting CESLC — whose mission was to provide a full spectrum of care to the older adult community — deeply resonated with me."

"It's our job to honor our loved ones by treating them with the dignity, respect and kindness they deserve. We owe them the same care, love and devotion they showed us," she adds. "It's important to be open to the options we have available for our loved ones, and appreciate and be respectful of the good caregivers who are helping us care for them."

West quickly got involved with the Auxiliary and took on more responsibilities. After leading several fundraising, community engagement and programming initiatives over the years, she served as Auxiliary president and later became the third woman in CESLC'S 115-year history to chair its Board of Governors.

"Though I have chaired fundraising campaigns and leadership conferences for the Greater Washington Jewish Federation (GWJF), Momentum, LevX and Norwood School, serving as board chair for Maryland's largest, award-winning older adult community has been the honor of my lifetime," West says. "However, I am not done!"

"One might think I'd be burned out by now, but I'm

"This recognition literally took my breath away and was a very humbling experience," West said. "I've always led with joy and love for this community, and worked very hard. I've taken on roles and done work that is meaningful to me. I've always followed my heart."

"To be named a JWI Woman to Watch has given me pause to embrace the recognition and to truly appreciate the value of my work," she adds. "It will continue to inspire me because there is so much to be done and I know that I have a lot left to give."

And following in her mother's footsteps, West, along with her husband Eric, has passed an affinity for service and philanthropy on to their three children.

"Diving into projects and creating bonds with others while giving back is truly a wonderful experience and they are each doing it," she says. "By modeling for and often with them, we are inspiring our next generation to discover what's meaningful to them and how they can give back."

"It is so important that we focus on the next generation of leaders because they are our future and our hope for making this world a better place," she adds. □

Caryn R. Sagal is a Baltimore-based freelance writer.