



Man of many callings

Robert Kramer President and CEO, NIC

FOR SOME, the road to their career is relatively straight and narrow, paved with a few key interests and underlying passions. For others, that path is long and winding, dotted with decades of unique experience and life-altering detours.

No question, Robert Kramer belongs to the latter group.

When one looks where Kramer has been, it seems almost unfathomable that he would come to direct the National Investment Center for the Seniors Housing & Care Industries, and ultimately, be revered as one of the most influential players in long-term care.

As a Harvard student in the early 1970s focusing on government political theory, he seemed destined for a life in politics – a fitting role, given that his father served in the Eisenhower administration as assistant attorney general and his

grandfather worked as both a speechwriter for Franklin Delano Roosevelt and assistant secretary to the treasury. But a brief hiatus after Kramer's sophomore year at Harvard led him down a decidedly different path – at least temporarily.

While hitchhiking through Europe, he met Dr. Francis Schaeffer, a respected theologian who built a Christian fellowship community in Switzerland.

"I heard about him in a youth hostel. He was one of the most brilliant minds I've ever come across, and he had a profound impact on my life," recalled Kramer. "He made the Christian faith intellectually thinkable. That was a big step on the path to my own spiritual journey and it helped make me the critical thinker I am today."

With his interest in his faith piqued, Kramer returned to Harvard, earned his degree, and then headed to Oxford to study theology. He continued in that vein, earning a Master's of divinity degree at Westminster Theological Seminary. A brief career in ministry ensued.

"I was right out of divinity school, preaching four times every Sunday to a congregation of 1,000,"

Resume

1972
Graduates from Harvard University with an undergraduate degree in government

1973
Graduates from Oxford University with a degree in theology

1977
Earns a Master's of Divinity degree from Westminster Theological Seminary

1983-87
Serves as Maryland state legislator

1985-87
Serves as founding executive director of the National Association for Senior Living Industries.

1991
Co-founds the National Investment Center for the Seniors Housing and Care Industries Inc (NIC)

he said. "I did it for two years and loved it, but it wasn't my calling."

Already a pillar of the Annapolis community, Kramer was asked to serve in the county government and develop adolescent drug and alcohol abuse programs. Then, in 1982, he ran for state legislator and won. From 1983 to 1987, he represented Annapolis in the Maryland General Assembly, and it was there where he first became exposed to the seniors housing and long-term care industries.

"An admiral walked into my office and told me he wanted to start a retirement community. He asked for my help," Kramer recalled with a smile. "I didn't even know what a CCRC was, but when an admiral asks for your help, you say, 'Yes, sir,' and figure it out from there."

Soon after, the speaker of the state House asked Kramer to serve on a joint House/Senate committee to rewrite the state's continuing care regulations. In 1985, he was asked to serve as founding executive director of the National Association for Senior Living Industries. That political experience, coupled with his two-year stint with NASLI, further solidified his interest in senior care and housing.

Kramer left politics in 1987 to spend more time with his wife and three young daughters — a decision that shocked many in Annapolis and Washington.

"I recall how earnest a delegate he was. He struck me as a guy who was always going to give 110%," noted Stuart Samuels, assistant managing editor for the Annapolis newspaper *Capital*. "I was surprised he got out of politics. We all thought he had a long and bright political future ahead of him."

But again, Kramer seamlessly shifted gears, forming the consulting firm Kramer & Associates in 1989. Two years later, he and several former NASLI colleagues formed NIC to fulfill what they saw was an unmet need for quality research data that would make investors more willing to offer capital. NIC began conducting its own research in 1995.

Kramer's commitment makes him a terrific advocate for the industry, says Sarah Sumner Duggan, senior vice president, healthcare division, GMAC Commercial Mortgage Corp.: "He stays so focused because he genuinely cares about this industry. He leads NIC like he leads his life – with a lot of enthusiasm."

While his businesses, politics and faith all play a big part in his life, Kramer's biggest passion remains his family. He and his wife, Diane, who runs a senior care ministry in Annapolis, have been married for 34 years and have three accomplished daughters.

Kramer admits he'll probably never become idle.

"My life has been filled with so many exciting twists and turns. Everything I've done has been slightly different, yet somehow uniquely related," he says.

"I'm always excited about the next possibility." ■

— By Julie Williamson