

## LEGACIES Obituaries

**IRA J. MILLER 1920-2009**

# Helped start Little City

**By Trevor Jensen**  
TRIBUNE REPORTER

Ira J. Miller was among a group of parents who started Little City 50 years ago because they were unhappy with the housing and services available for their disabled children.

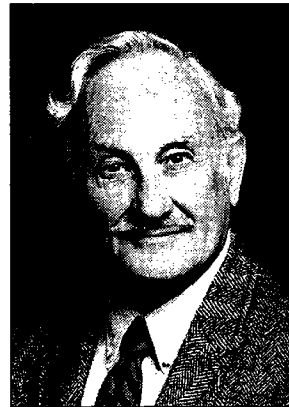
Mr. Miller, 88, died of a blood clot on the lung Friday, June 26, in Northwestern Memorial Hospital, said June Baker, his companion of 19 years. He was a resident of Chicago's Edgewater Beach neighborhood.

He was one of the 37 original Little City board members who gathered the money to open the group's campus in Palatine, then the outer reaches of suburbia, on Dec. 13, 1959, a Little City spokeswoman said.

Mr. Miller's son, Randy, was born in 1952 with severe brain damage. The boy's parents were told he needed to be institutionalized, but there was a long waiting list for placement in public facilities and private residential and treatment options were far too expensive, said Mr. Miller's ex-wife, Sara.

Along with other frustrated parents, the Millers raised money over several years to start Little City. A talented speaker, Mr. Miller was chosen as president of the Little City Foundation and helped develop endowments and fundraisers to keep Little City going.

Randy Miller, who died in 2005, lived at Little City for only about five years before



Ira Miller's group has helped disabled kids for 50 years.

having to be moved elsewhere because of the extensive care he required.

But Mr. Miller remained involved in Little City throughout his life, said Joyce Asher, development director for the foundation from 1999 to 2005.

"He was very adamant that parents be advocates for their children," Asher said. "He was always very proud of his son, and he was proud he could do something to help."

Mr. Miller was an attorney who maintained a solo practice downtown. He kept up on legal issues involving the disabled.

"I knew if there was something going on in City Hall or the state legislature [involving mental disability issues] I would hear from Ira Miller," Asher said.

Mr. Miller grew up in Chicago and graduated from Marshall High School. As senior class president, he

was in charge of the prom but had trouble finding a hotel for the event because his class included African-Americans, Baker said.

Determined to include everybody, he kept trying until he found willing management at the Belmont Hotel on Sheridan Road. Years later, whenever he drove past the place (now the Belmont House, a residential building) he'd say, "The Belmont Hotel. They're OK."

He put in a couple of years at the University of Chicago law school before enlisting in the Army in 1942.

Assigned to an intelligence unit, he studied German and Italian in Madison, Wis., before shipping out to Europe. As the Allied forces advanced, his job was to secure German documents before the Nazis destroyed them, Baker said. On occasion, he donned a Nazi uniform and mingled with locals to gather information behind enemy lines, said Baker and family, including his daughter Batya. He also witnessed the liberation of several German concentration camps, said his daughter Pamela. After the war, he got a law degree from DePaul University.

He later oversaw fundraising for Israel Bonds and was vice president of development and planning for the College of Jewish Studies (now the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies).

He also is survived by a sister, Blanche Feld, and two grandchildren.