

ANNE K. ZIMMERMAN, 89

By Gayle Worland and Tribune staff reporter
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Energetic and driven, yet caring and compassionate, Anne K. Zimmerman combined her understanding of nursing with a commitment to workers' rights to break new ground in the nursing profession.

Mrs. Zimmerman, who throughout her career held a number of prestigious administrative posts in the field, was the first female president of the Conference of Medical Society Executives of Greater Chicago and worked to increase funding for baccalaureate and master's programs in college nursing programs across the state. In 1997, the American Academy of Nursing presented her with its Living Legend award.

She was "one of a select handful of courageous women and men who, over the last 60 years, transformed nursing from an underpaid and underappreciated job to a respected profession," her grandson Brendan Burke wrote in a tribute.

Mrs. Zimmerman, 89, of Chicago, died Wednesday, Sept. 10, in St. Joseph Hospital in Chicago after a brief illness.

Born Anne Larson, the Montana native was the oldest of five children and in her late teens cared for her ailing mother, said her daughter, Nancy Burke. After three years of training at St. Mary's Hospital School of Nursing in Helena, Mont., Mrs. Zimmerman became a pediatrics nurse and in a few years was named executive director of the Montana Nurses' Association.

After working as associate director of the California Nurses Association, Mrs. Zimmerman came to Illinois to head the Illinois Nurses Association from 1954 to 1981. She also was president of the American Nurses Association from 1976 to 1978.

In the late 1970s, she received an honorary doctor of humane letters degree from Loyola University and became the first professor named to the Niehoff Endowed Chair at the Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing at Loyola.

"Anne had a deep commitment to the welfare and education of nurses and ... an unwavering dedication to excellence in patient care," said Illinois Nurses Association president Mary Maryland.

Mrs. Zimmerman, who lived first in Evanston, followed by several decades on Chicago's Near North Side, was "very tactful but always said what she thought," said her daughter, a psychiatric mental health nurse and teacher at the University of Illinois College of Nursing, where Mrs. Zimmerman's writings are archived. "She was very compassionate and could see all sides of questions. She was a problem solver."

In her later years, Mrs. Zimmerman was a founding member of the board of the Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. "She was committed to the idea that work is to be respected and appropriately compensated, whatever that work is," her daughter said.

Mrs. Zimmerman loved to have her grandchildren and great-grandchildren sleep over at her home, and she passed on two favorite sayings to them: "Do something, don't just stand there," and, "You can always do more than you think you can."

In an interview at age 83, Mrs. Zimmerman told the Tribune that people often asked her if she still worked as a consultant. "And I say, 'I am more of a consultant,'" she said. "Today I mostly listen to nurses' problems, and I try to figure out how they can be more effective. ... I encourage young people to take responsibility, to grow and to enjoy the profession."

Along with her daughter, Mrs. Zimmerman is survived by two brothers, George and Don Larson; a sister, Virginia Nelson; four grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

A memorial reception will be held from 3 to 8 p.m. Sunday in the McCormick Lounge in Coffey Hall at Loyola University, 1000 W. Sheridan Rd., Chicago. A memorial mass is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Monday at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, 708 W. Belmont Ave., Chicago.