



Archbishop Blase J. Cupich, Pat and Shirley Ryan and Dr. Joanne C. Smith, president and CEO of Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago.

INSPIRATION AND TRANSFORMATION

BY SUSAN B. NOYES

Two cutting-edge organizations where progress and innovation in the field of rehabilitation abound, **RIC's AbilityLab** and **Pathways**, will be joining forces as the **Shirley Ryan AbilityLab** thanks to a record gift from **Shirley and Pat Ryan**.

Need inspiration to lean in and embrace your faith, intellect, gifts and power to create impact? Please get to know **Shirley Ryan**. Other-centered, eloquent and determined, she is a social entrepreneur extraordinaire, whose strategic and values-driven work consistently creates opportunities that lift up others. Thanks to a record gift from Ryan and her husband Pat, **Pathways** — a leading nonprofit research and rehabilitation center for children struggling with developmental delays founded by the Ryans decades ago — will join best-in-class Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago (RIC) research hospital, with the new institution renamed in her honor — “**Shirley Ryan AbilityLab**.”

Ryan resisted the renaming until she realized, “It’s important to use all of the strengths we have to inspire others too. “I’ve just always acted on the Lord working through our third son, Corbett,” she explains. Their youngest was born with physical challenges. As a result, and through prodigious efforts, Ryan sought, applied and developed the best possible care — first for him, then for all children through Pathways.

Ryan’s name has long been a great force for good. It opens powerful doors and reinforces best practices. A lifelong learner, Ryan studies issues deeply before settling on the most strategic course forward. When she acts, she creates opportunities for as many others as possible too. For these reasons, U.S. presidents from both parties have asked her to advise them. Also, she serves on the executive committee of the board of directors of the **Lyric Opera of Chicago**, and

on the board of directors of the **Art Institute of Chicago**, the **Alain Locke Charter Academy** and the **Chicago Council on Global Affairs**. She recently received an honorary doctor of laws degree from the **University of Notre Dame** and was recently honored by the **Chicago History Museum** for distinction in civic leadership.

Ryan credits her husband of 50 years, Pat, who founded **Aon**, leading global provider of risk management, insurance and reinsurance, and human resources, as well as holding company **Ryan Specialty Group** (RSG), and who is probably Chicago’s most successful entrepreneur in recent history, with giving her strength to act too. “It’s easy when you have the giant power of this man behind you,” Ryan grins. But those who know the couple well understand that the success of each is a tribute to the other and evidence of the power of a loving union.

The concept at the core of the new hospital — putting all patients at the center of the closest possible collaboration between researchers and clinicians in a world-class, positive and empowering environment called an “AbilityLab” — has proven to be transformational at Pathways and in an RIC pilot program. RIC and Pathways are also known for strategic online dissemination of best practices, which are accessible to all.

The scale of RIC’s research enterprise is the largest of its kind in the world, and will continue to grow in the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab. Currently, more than 200 research projects are underway,

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funded by both private and public supporters, including the **National Institutes of Health**, the **National Science Foundation**, the **United States Department of Defense** and the **National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research**. Additionally it is an academic home and clinical partner for the **Department of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation at Northwestern University** in the **Feinberg School of Medicine**.

"We are investing in science and technology more than any other place of our kind on the planet," says RIC President and CEO **Dr. Joanne Smith**. "A new era in physical medicine and rehabilitation, perhaps a whole 'new category' in medicine, starts with this merger and our new facility."

Ryan stresses that the work is about more than science and physical rehabilitation though. "We're breaking down stereotypes," she explains. "The hospital will be a miracle workshop — literally a miracle workshop. It is about building on our strengths, our abilities. Everyone has them. It is not about our limitations. It is about what I can do, and what you can do. About [Board Chair] **Jude Reyes**, Joanne Smith, the technologists, clinicians and researchers who will collaborate on the same floor too."

With characteristic loving, faith-filled and community-building words, Ryan inspires all to lean in and do more — to believe and work towards better together. We can all do this too. ■

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Arms + Hands Lab — one of five applied research and therapeutic spaces in the new hospital. This lab will serve patients with any kind of functional impairment affecting the arms and hands (e.g., those recovering from stroke, spinal cord injury, etc.).

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