

THE ENTREPRENEUR

## “CALL ME RETIRED BUT IN DENIAL”

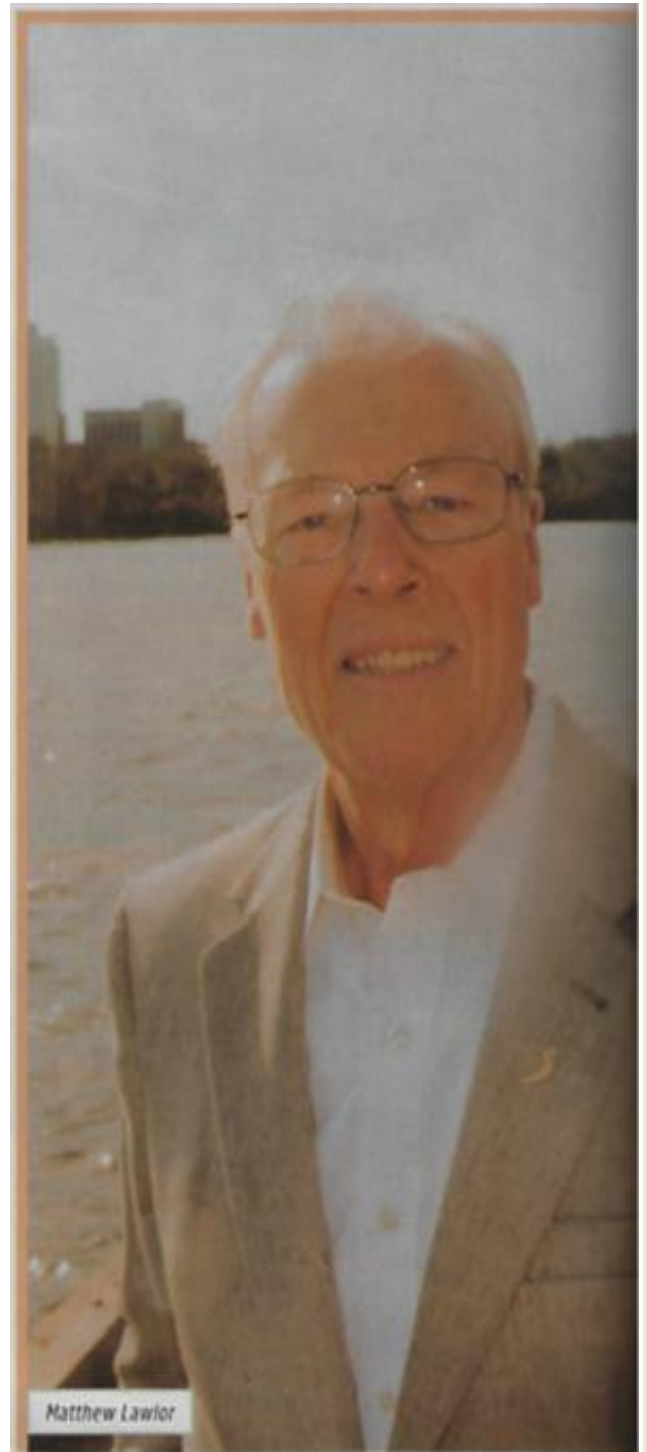
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### **MATTHEW LAWLOR HAS NEVER BEEN AFRAID TO GET**

in the trenches with his employees. Earlier in his career, when he was an executive with Chemical Bank (now JP Morgan Chase), he would go to a Manhattan branch every Friday and work as a teller. “I never could balance my account at the end of the day,” he jokes. “The tellers that were back there with me enjoyed seeing the boss respecting what they were doing. Obviously, I shared that respect for them. I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t balance the account and smile at customers at the same time. The boss isn’t somebody to oversee so much as coordinate. We are equals. That builds team. Everybody has a role.”

Lawlor, now 71, says it was that mutual respect and teamwork that held the key to his professional successes—and it also served him well when he launched his first business.

Lawlor founded Online Resources, a Virginia-based internet banking corporation, in 1989 and served as its chairman and CEO for 20 years. Once every six months, he would go into the call center to handle incoming calls. “The point was ‘I respect what you are doing,’” he says. “You do it better than I do, and together we make a team. Connection is the key in building teamwork.”



When he felt it was time to move on, Lawlor wanted to give back but also feed his love of entrepreneurship. In 2013, he founded the nonprofit Ceca Foundation as a way to celebrate caregivers for the physically and developmentally disabled. He was inspired after witnessing the care his mother received. Currently in around 35 facilities, the foundation gives awards and cash bonuses to standout staff members.

“If you go to skilled nursing homes or many healthcare communities, it is a struggle for these institutions to deliver healthcare,” he says, noting they’re often squeezed by regulations and state and federal spending requirements that impact their ability to pay good wages— which in turn leads to staff turnover and compromised patient care.

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“It’s very obvious that anything you can do to motivate people who are touching the patient or a resident in a nursing home, anything you can do to reward them (is appreciated) because I think many are under recognized,” Lawlor says. “They are not paid a lot of money for what they do, but they are very important and their touch can make a difference to a patient.”

As someone who could technically be retired, the DC resident says he enjoys the flexibility of running his own nonprofit. It allows him time to travel and pursue other interests, yet also taps into his love of.

entrepreneur hopes to expand Ceca Foundation nationally. “I need purpose,” Lawlor says. “Call me retired but in denial. I retired for just one phase of my life. I need purpose moving forward. The skill set that I have is basically entrepreneurship. I’ve built organizations before. I am just redirecting my life now to something that is building an organization that is really designed not for making money, but for providing benefits for others.”

*This excerpt appeared in Northern Virginia magazine in its February 2019 issue in a series called “Second Acts”, and was written by Gina Gallucci White. The copy has been recreated for legibility.*