

COMMISSIONER'S MESSAGE



Randall A. Hoak
Commissioner

The Department of Senior Services has seen an unprecedented amount of change over the past several years. We have seen changes in health care, changes in funding, changes in priorities, and changes in staff. As we continue to promote the well-being of older adults it is important to look back at where we came from. I have had the opportunity to experience first-hand the impact of the department

throughout my career. I'd like to share some of those impressions...

One of my very first impressions of the Department of Senior Services came 12 years ago on a sunny Sunday afternoon at the Graycliff Estate. Former Erie County Senior Services Commissioner and Aging network pioneer Cliff Whitman was volunteering his time at the Frank Lloyd Wright designed residence. Cliff served as Commissioner until 1988 before moving on to other opportunities in the aging network; Cliff passed away this past July. He will be missed, but will be

remembered for his dedication to serving older adults, and the impact he has had on the aging network.

My next major impression of the department came when I met a woman with a bright smile and a passion for serving caregivers. As a volunteer facilitator for the department's Powerful Tools for Caregivers program I was trained by Miriam Callahan, the Project Coordinator for our Caregivers Resource Center – that was in 2008. Miriam's passion and energy were contagious to the group of trainees as we set off to schedule classes in our communities. When I came to the department in 2012 Miriam had continued to build on a career dedicated to what can often be a very vulnerable population. Miriam has implemented new programs, touched thousands of lives, and has trained the next generation of aging service professionals. Miriam retired from her position in July of this year and will be missed in the office. We wish Miriam well, and congratulate her on her retirement as she moves into a new chapter.

This issue of NY Connects is dedicated to caregivers; you will find articles that provide insight and resources to caregivers. As the department looks to better serve those who get up every day to meet some very serious challenges, we will continue to look to partners and professionals like Miriam, to meet the growing need.

NYCONNECTS is published by the

Erie County Department of Senior Services
(716) 858-8526

Mark Poloncarz
County Executive

Randall A. Hoak
Commissioner

Funded through grants from the NYS Office for the Aging

www2.erie.gov/seniorservices



Are You Properly Registered to Vote?

Let your voice be heard! Vote on
General Election Day, Tues., Nov. 3rd

For information on registration:
Erie County Senior Services (716) 858-8526 or
Erie County Board of Elections (716) 858-8891

COMING ATTRACTIONS

WWW2.ERIE.GOV/SENIORSERVICES

October 1	Powerful Tools for Caregivers Workshop at The Dale Center, Lockport
October 8	Powerful Tools for Caregivers Workshop at ECMC, Buffalo
October 21	Powerful Tools for Caregivers Workshop at Annunciation Parish, Elma
October 28	Public Hearing at American Red Cross, Buffalo
October 30	Stay Fit Dining Halloween Lunch with Donut at your Erie County Dining Site
November 3	General Election Day
November 23	Stay Fit Dining Thanksgiving Lunch with Pumpkin Pie at your Erie County Dining Site
December 23	Stay Fit Dining Thanksgiving Lunch with Apple Pie at your Erie County Dining Site

NYCONNECTS

ERIE COUNTY
SENIOR SERVICES
NY CONNECTS

(716) 858-8526

BEATING CAREGIVER "SYNDROME"

CLASSES AVAILABLE IN MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

One in five Americans--from Millennials to Seniors--find themselves in the role of caregiver to a relative or friend. Dozens of studies show that the anxiety, depression, and even anger affect those helping an aged parent, a sick child or incapacitated spouse can cloud decision-making, upset all other relationships and impact the health of the caregiver. Without intervention, caregivers are much more likely to die before their care receivers.



is physically healthy but no longer recognizes him.

- The daughter of a woman diagnosed with alcohol-induced dementia, Susan, finds herself unable to hold down a job due to the stress and demands of caring for her mother -- while her sister refuses to assist.

Do these caregiving stories sound familiar? The names have been changed, but the stories are true.

- After caring for her chronically-ill husband for over ten years, Julia's health is in decline because she just didn't take the time to see her doctor.

Powerful Tools for Caregivers, a national program developed by Legacy Health Systems (Portland, Oregon) and Stanford University, addresses these and many other problems facing caregivers. It is a series of 2 and 1/2 hour classes, held weekly for six weeks. Multiple sessions are offered throughout the county each year. Some locations offer free respite care to

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"This month we are saluting caregivers all around Erie County and working together to keep seniors and their caregivers connected to what's happening in the community. Inside you'll find great ideas for classes, resources, and programs for our caregivers and seniors, so please use the information and stay connected!"
Erie County Executive
Mark Poloncarz

CAREGIVER RESOURCE CENTER

(716) 858-2177



Caregivers: This Day Is For You!

Caregiver Workshop & Resource Day

The Erie County Caregiver Coalition & the Alzheimer's Disease Assistance Center will offer a day of **free workshops** to help caregivers learn ways to reduce stress and make everyday chores easier. Whether your loved one is physically frail or has memory loss, you will find useful information. Workshops: Activities for Those with Dementia, Dealing with Challenging Behaviors, Legal/Financial Issues, Who's Helping the Family Caregiver?, Managing Caregiver Feelings, The Conversation Project, Partnering with Your Physician, and Laughter for a Happy, Healthy Life.

Saturday, November 7, 2015

8:00 am – 3:00 pm

Millennium Airport Hotel ~ 2040 Walden Ave. ~ Cheektowaga

Lunch and materials will be provided.

Although there is no cost for the workshop, **reservations are required**. Please call (716) 858-2177 or email caregiver@erie.gov at the Erie County Senior Services Caregiver Resource Center.

Supervision for memory impaired adults is available, please inquire when making your reservation.

BEATING CAREGIVER SYNDROME *continued from page 1*

facilitate caregivers' attendance.

Under the auspices of the Erie County Caregiver Coalition, certified class leaders with personal caregiver experience conduct the classes. Time and time again the class leaders witness the transforming results of the program. Caregivers are able to reduce personal stress, communicate better with loved ones and health care professionals, increase their ability to make difficult care decisions, and better balance their own lives. Throughout the series, participants receive information about available local resources and brainstorm solutions to common problems.

After attending the six week series, each of the above individuals described an improvement in their outlook:

Jim says he is better able to handle his anger over the situation with his wife: There's comfort in knowing you're not alone. It helps to talk to others with similar challenges--and learn new ways to handle everyday problems.

Susan reported that her relationships with her mother and her sister were improving. She had had to adjust her expectations and her approach: I have 2 Bachelor's degrees and a Master's degree, but I didn't have a clue about what to do about mom. I learned so much in these classes.

Julia said the series was life-changing for her. After the first class, I realized I couldn't help my husband if I wasn't 'around.' I went right home and made an appointment with my doctor.

Powerful Tools for Caregivers classes are co-sponsored by The University at Buffalo-School of Public Health and Health Professions and The Erie County Caregiver Coalition. Class size is limited and pre-registration is required. A fee of \$25.00 defrays the cost of The Caregiver Helpbook, distributed to all participants. Blue Cross/Blue Shield of WNY and Independent Health cover this fee for their members. For more information and a list of upcoming sessions, and to pre-register, call (716) 858-2177, or e-mail caregiver@erie.gov.

Submitted by a PTC class leader

ERIE COUNTY DID YOU KNOW?

FUN FACTS AND LOCAL NEWS



to poor eyesight. Without Rural Transit, I would not be able to shop or get to my doctor" said Clarence resident Charlotte Carnes.

More than 130 volunteers serve as drivers, dispatchers, and driver aides in order to support those who need a ride to maintain an independent lifestyle - and more drivers are always needed, especially during the winter months when many snowbirds head to warmer states.

Rural Transit has become more like a family rather than an "organization" with lifelong friendships between fellow volunteers and clients. Volunteers share holiday celebrations, luncheons, and appreciation picnics. "The passing of my wife created a void in my life which RTS and the wonderful clients filled. No amount of money can compare to the feeling of happiness I get from helping others. I look forward to the days I volunteer. Actually, volunteering for RTS has helped me as much as my riders" said 7-year volunteer Ralph Miller of Hamburg.

If you have any questions about their service, would like to register or volunteer, please contact them at (716) 549-5098 or <http://www.ruraltransitservice.org>.

HEALTHY LIVING SELF-MANAGEMENT WORKSHOPS

If you or someone you know has diabetes or a chronic condition, these evidence-based workshops are just for you. The Living Healthy Self-Management workshops are 6 week programs that are 2 ½ hour class sessions held once a week. Our workshops will help teach you different ways to better manage your health and the aches and pains you may feel throughout your day. The goals of the workshops are to decrease your time in the hospital,

pharmacies, colleges, work places, nutrition sites, adult day cares, grocery stores, banks, salons/barbers, and many other destinations.

"I had to give up driving due

increase your physical activity, increase your energy levels, and to help you work more effectively with your healthcare professionals. Our current participants are seeing incredible results from attending our workshops.

We are also looking for Volunteers who may be interested in peer leading these workshops. If you can read and don't mind talking to a group you can be a Peer Leader - we will train you. We have a 5-day training set up for October 21st, 23rd, 26th, 28th and November 4th from 8:30 am - 4:00 pm at the Cheektowaga Senior Center located at 3349 Broadway, Cheektowaga where breakfast and lunch will be provided at no cost to you. For more information, to register for a workshop, and/or to volunteer to become a Peer Leader please call us at (716) 858-8526 or email us at choosehealthy@erie.gov.

WHAT'S IN THE SOCK?

Use your fingers to figure out the 4 objects in the sock.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

This is a fun game that is played at our Memory Cafes. Ahead of time put 4 objects in a heavy sport sock. Tie the sock so it is closed at the top. Ask people to feel the objects thru the sock and try to identify what they are. It's more difficult than it looks!

Type of objects:

- Quarter (coin)
- Sparkplug
- Clothespin
- Allen wrench
- Nail clippers
- Marble
- Spoon
- Bottle of nail polish
- Spool of thread
- Pen



Note: Be sure objects are not sharp enough to pierce material.

ERIE COUNTY DID YOU KNOW?

FUN FACTS AND LOCAL NEWS

THE CANE CLUB

My name is Ziggy Kucewicz, Sr., once owner of Ziggy and Zon's World at the Airport Plaza in Cheektowaga.



I've started a project now called the "The Cane Club." What is it? It's an informal way to greet those of us who need the use of a cane to get around safely and as comfortably as possible.

As you maneuver at the mall, grocery store, church, etc. when you, as a 'cane holder' approach another 'cane holder' you gently tap their cane with yours and say "Have a great day!"

You'd be surprised by how they appreciate this gesture and respond with a big smile and a "You have a great day too!" Give it a try; you'll be happy and they will be happy that you did it.

ROBO CALL SCAM TARGETS OLDER NEW YORKERS

The New York State Office for Aging has been made aware of a new robocall scam that attempts to lure older New Yorkers into providing their personal information over the phone. The voice on the robocall identifies itself as the New York State Office for the Aging and asks the individual answering the phone to press a button if someone in the home is over 65 and would be interested in receiving a free Medic Alert pin and \$3000 in coupons for food or other items.

This is a SCAM. The New York State Office for the Aging does not give away items, money or coupons and will NEVER solicit personal information over the phone.

If you receive a similar call, you should HANG UP IMMEDIATELY. Reports of financial scams should be reported to the Consumer Protection Division of the NYS Attorney General's Office at 1-800-771-7755, the NYS Department of Financial Services at 1-800-697-1220 or the NYS Department of State (518) 474-8583.

VIDEO - "A BEAUTIFUL DEATH"

This video discusses end-of-life issues faced by Americans today. Take the time to view this informative video as it follows Paul Scheier, his family and his Hospice doctor over the final 38 days of this life. Go to <http://web.consumerreports.org/endoflife.htm> to view the video.

Consumer Reports will be adding more soon that you should know about. It's called the Conversation Project and it's exactly that: a project to guide and support you and your family as you start to talk about these difficult, at times painful and scary, subjects.

The centerpiece of the project is a downloadable "conversation starter kit" that you can use to clarify your own end-of-life feelings and begin talking with your loved ones about them. It even gives suggestions for icebreakers to get the conversation going, like "I was thinking about what happened to Uncle Joe, and it made me realize..." The kit is available in English, Spanish, French, and Mandarin.

In addition you can download a kit that will help you have the conversation with your doctor—possibly an even more challenging prospect than having it with your family, given our health care system's single-minded focus on aggressive curative care.

You can find this info at <http://theconversationproject.org/>.

RURAL TRANSIT SERVICE CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF PROVIDING TRANSPORTATION - HERE'S TO 25 MORE!

In 1990, Rural Transit Service began its mission of providing transportation in the Towns of Evans and Concord. Twenty-five years later, in 2015, Rural Transit services 25 municipalities and gives between 10,000 and 15,000 safe rides per year to seniors, disabled and low/moderate income residents of Erie County. Their familiar vans and gracious volunteer drivers are on the move Monday through Friday, 8 am - 4 pm, to dialysis clinics, medical offices, physical therapy,

CAREGIVING COMES FIRST FOR ERIE COUNTY SENIORS

A MESSAGE FROM ERIE COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARK POLONCARZ



As Erie County Executive, I am honored and humbled to work with outstanding men and women in all county departments who serve their community in many different ways, doing good work to help others and improve Erie County. The Erie County Department of Senior Services is home to many such individuals, doing their utmost to make sure that our seniors can easily access the programs and services that they need. In one way or another, caregiving is a constant and always comes first in all that the Department does, and they work hard to demonstrate that every day.

It can be exhausting to care for a loved one, with caregivers often neglecting themselves due to the stress of providing care. The Department of Senior Services offers "Powerful Tools for Caregivers" classes that can help individuals in this situation; many times, it is helpful to hear the experiences of others caring for their own loved ones and the classes also offer information on how to handle stress, improve self-confidence, better communicate feelings, and locate helpful resources. Participants also learn how to improve their ability to make difficult decisions and find balance in their lives. These tools help caregivers take care of themselves, so please contact caregiver@erie.gov for more information.

This month we are wishing a fond farewell to Miriam Callahan, who recently retired from Senior Services after many years of being a passionate and articulate spokesperson and advocate for senior issues. As Project Coordinator in the Department, Miriam was up to her elbows in projects such as the Powerful Tools classes, Caregivers' Workshops, the Memory Café, workshops on Chronic Disease and Diabetes Self-Management for seniors, and many others. Miriam's constant search for ways to "spread the word" on these programs led to more seniors and caregivers accessing information that's important to them, and her energy and enthusiasm will be missed while her spirit remains.

The Senior Services department is also involved in caregiving in many other ways, reaching out to assist seniors and keep them involved and active as they age. Helping to provide nutritious meals and fitness classes at area senior centers, providing van transportation for senior needs through the "Going Places" program, and offering free adult education classes with University Express are just a few of the many ways that the Department is keeping seniors connected and cared for. Is there a specific concern or issue that is important to you as you age? If so, you'll want to take part in one of the upcoming public hearings the department is holding this fall, giving seniors, their families and caregivers, and community agencies an opportunity to discuss what matters most to them as they age. The information gathered at these hearings will help us to build a community that is more senior-friendly and inclusive, so we hope you'll plan on attending. For more information, please call (716) 858-7532.

PUBLIC HEARING

WWW2.ERIE.GOV/SENIORSERVICES

Everyone has an opinion about what matters most as they age and Erie County Senior Services is interested in hearing what's important to you. Commissioner Randy Hoak invites all seniors, their families, and friends to attend the department's public hearing.

- Wednesday, October 28, 2015 at the American Red Cross, 786 Delaware Avenue from 3:00-4:00 PM

This is an opportunity to voice your opinions about the future plans for our Erie County programs and services for adults 60 and older.

ERIE COUNTY HERE FOR YOU

LOCAL SERVICES AND PROGRAMS



SENIOR WISHES PROGRAM BRINGS JOY TO LOCAL SENIORS

Ted, 90, is a lifelong baseball fan and his children and grandchildren all played the game. His wish was to be in a suite with his family and share

their love of baseball. Senior Wishes and the Buffalo Bisons granted his wish and made it even more memorable by having Ted, dressed in his personalized jersey, throw out the first pitch of the game on July 1. He was also honored as Veteran Hero of the game. Tears of gratefulness and joy flowed from everyone as Ted, his wife Alice, and his children and grandchildren experienced a true VIP evening together.

Joan's, 74, wish was simple. She dreamed of having her family altogether again for a family dinner. Senior Wishes provided dinner for the 14 members of her family to enjoy time together. She said they sat around for hours after the meal, "making memories."

Who takes care of the caregiver? Mary, 81, is the caregiver for her husband. She is unable to leave the house very often so her yard is her respite. She hoped to one day be able to replace the old, torn glider she was using to sit and read during the quiet moments of her day. Senior Wishes provided her with a new glider and patio set to create a comfortable sanctuary for her to read and pray.

Syd MacDougall, Resident Services Coordinator at Belmont Housing Resources, notes the impact of the Senior Wishes program: "The wishes that have been granted to a couple of my residents have been life transforming for them. They walk taller, smile more broadly, and exude a joyful spirit of gratitude and thankfulness. It has given them a confidence that I hadn't observed before, combined with hope for their futures. It has been a joy to watch!"

Senior Wishes knows that just because you are

aging, it doesn't mean you give up on your dreams. Senior Wishes grants low income seniors, aged 65 and over, meaningful experiences that they are hoping, wishing and dreaming of. No medical diagnoses is necessary and you must be physically and cognitively capable of experiencing your wish. Visit www.seniorwishes.org for wish guidelines and an application, or call (716) 508-2121.

GOING PLACES VAN SERVICE

As a service to older adults (aged 60+) in Erie County, the Department of Senior Services offers the Going Places Transportation Program. The curb-to-curb van service is available to seniors without access to regular transportation. Reservations for health-related trips may be scheduled up to two weeks to the day in advance. Non-medical trips may be scheduled one week to the day in advance. A brief registration is required for service.



A suggested contribution is \$3 per one-way trip or \$6 per round-trip; wheelchair service is \$8 per one-way trip or \$16 per round-trip. Contributions are voluntary. Any amount you wish to give is greatly appreciated and will be used to expand the transportation program. All contributions are confidential and no one will be denied service if unable to donate. Because of the demands for senior transportation, travel may be limited to the nearest available facilities (with the exception of trips for health purposes).

Call (716) 858-RIDE - 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday.

ERIE COUNTY STAY FIT

FOOD, FRIENDSHIP AND FUN

Advice on Preventing Falls as Given by Members of the Erie County Falls Prevention Coalition

Many older adults and caregivers worry about their loved ones falling and hurting themselves. Fortunately, there are several things that can be done to reduce the risk of falling. The following is some expert advice from members of the Erie County Falls Coalition.



Suzanne Desfosses-Gilliam, President at Touching Hearts at Home

Falling is the number one reason that older individuals enter the emergency room but it is also the most preventable. Developing stronger legs will significantly reduce the chances of falling. Seniors here in Erie County are fortunate because everyone over the age of 60 is eligible to participate in the CLUB 99 body strengthening exercise sessions being held at senior centers throughout Erie County.



Amy Braun, BSW, CCM at BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York

1. Talk to your loved one about the risks of falling. **2.** Encourage seniors to talk to their health care providers to assess the fall risk. **3.** Ask if they are experiencing any vision, hearing, or balance changes. **4.** Talk about the medications they are taking and any side effects. **5.** Make sure your loved one gets regular eye and hearing checkups. **6.** Encourage older loved ones to attend balance and exercise programs.



Beth Moses, BSN, RN, AEMT - Trauma Injury Prevention/Education Coordinator at ECMC

Make your home safer by picking up the clutter, removing trip hazards, lighting your way to the bathroom, lighting your stairs, installing hand rails on both sides of any stairs, fixing uneven walkways, and installing grab bars or assistive devices in the bathroom. It's up to you; making your home safer will significantly reduce your chances of falling.



David May, Physical Therapist, Cert. MDT at Sisters Hospital

1. Keep active through exercise such as walking, exercise classes, Tai Chi, Yoga and line dancing. **2. Vision:** Make sure your glasses prescription is up-to-date and that your lenses are clean. **3. Vestibular system:** Your inner ears play an important part in balance. If they are weak, you may get dizzy, experience vertigo and/or lose your balance easily. Practice keeping it strong by moving your eyes and neck to the right and left while sitting and progress to standing/walking. If you feel dizzy while performing these then seek the advice of a health professional to help you. **4. Appropriate (sensible) foot wear** for the activity you will be performing -don't wear flip flops or high heels while walking for exercise. **Keep your life and health in balance.**

Free home safety evaluations, CLUB 99 Exercise (Leg Strength) classes, Matter of Balance classes - for more information call Erie County Senior Services/NY Connects at (716) 858-8526.

INSURANCE RESOURCE CENTER

(716) 858-7883

DURABLE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT (DME): WHAT FAMILY CAREGIVERS NEED TO KNOW

Durable Medical Equipment (DME) is one of the most important aspects of home health care. It's important for family caregivers to know what DME is, what is usually covered by insurance, and how to choose and use the right DME.

From Medicare's perspective, DME is equipment that is:

- Durable. That means the DME is strong enough to be used over and over again.
- Medically necessary. The DME is prescribed by a doctor, and used only by the person who needs it to treat or manage a disease, injury, or disability. Examples are diabetic supplies, hospital beds, oxygen tanks, walkers, and wheelchairs.
- Used at home. Home can be a residence, assisted living facility, or nursing home.

Medicare will pay for DME only when it is ordered from a vendor that participates in Medicare. (See Medicare's guidance at <http://www.medicare.gov/coverage/durable-medical-equipment-coverage.html>) Many other insurance plans follow Medicare rules about paying for DME, but there may be exceptions.



Others, including Medicaid, have their own DME lists and rules. Check your family member's insurance plan for details.

Getting and Maintaining DME

It is important to choose DME that is reliable and easy to use, meets your family member's needs, and fits within the available space. Ask your family member's doctor to arrange a home assessment by a nurse or therapist to discuss what type of DME will work best in the home.

Equally important, be sure you (and other family members and paid caregivers) know how to use and maintain it. A technician may bring the DME into your home, set it up, and show you how to use it. Be sure to request an instruction manual and a phone number to call with any questions, especially if something goes wrong. Find out how your insurance handles repairs. While DME is complicated, it can make a big difference in your and your family member's lives.

Adapted with permission from www.NextStepInCare.org Durable Medical Equipment (DME), available at for free in English, Spanish, Russian, and traditional Chinese.

PAYING FOR LONG-TERM CARE

Long-term custodial care can be very expensive. In Erie County, the cost of personal care in your home through a licensed agency averages \$24/per hour. An assisted living facility's average cost is \$3,500 per month and a skilled nursing facility's average cost is \$9,600 per month. Long-term care is usually paid by a beneficiary's personal assets and income, Medicaid, the Veteran's administration, long-term care insurance, or another government program.

Long-term Care Insurance is sold either through individual policies or is available through membership in a group that offers long-term care insurance to its members. The insurance company has the right to underwrite, or determine the criteria for which they will sell you a policy. Additionally, they have the right not to sell you a policy and the criteria can vary from one company to another. There are policies that

could protect all your assets - these types of plans are available for New York State residents under the New York State Partnership program. The plans offer both home care and institutional care coverage. For more information, please call the Erie County Department of Senior Services Insurance Resource Center at (716) 858-7883.

Medicaid is a program for the poor. If you are elderly, the monthly income cap for an individual is \$845.00. Any monthly income above \$845 must be paid for your care or for health, dental or long term care premiums. There is a resource cap of \$14,850 plus a home, vehicle and prepaid burial allowance of any value. For more information about paying for long-term care, please call the Erie County NY Connets at (716) 858-8526.

ANNUAL SENIOR SERVICES PICNIC

A NEW TRADITION BEGINS IN 2015

Over the years many senior centers have hosted a summer picnic. So during the summer months it was not unusual to have 25 to 30 separate picnics being held throughout Erie County. This year it was decided that Erie County Senior Services would sponsor and present a two-day summer event that would bring together seniors from all parts of the County. On July 8th and 9th a total of more than 700 enthusiastic seniors converged at the Como Park Bowen Grove Road Shelter in Lancaster. None were disappointed.

For a donation of just \$3.00 per person the attendees were treated to an all American picnic meal including a hot dog, hamburger, pasta salad, potato salad, fresh cut watermelon and a beverage. There was music and live entertainment, outdoor games, and raffles. Even though everyone did not win a prize they were all winners by benefiting from a great day featuring food, fun and sun. Based on the overwhelming exuberance displayed by all those in attendance, it was quickly decided that this two-day picnic event will now be an Annual Senior Services tradition.



Picnic Games - Just like the Masters Golf Tournament! Except that golf balls were replaced by marshmallows.



Lots of great food!



The Gang is all here. Cheektowaga Seniors' (Mad Hatters)

THE ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEER RESPITE PROGRAM: CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER BY VISITING THE CARE RECEIVER

When RSVP Alan Blackburn retired from the National Weather Service office in Buffalo, he knew he wanted to do something that would make a difference in people's lives. His wife, Barbara, who already was an active RSVP volunteer, handed him the list of RSVP volunteer opportunities and suggested that he might find something to interest him. He noticed that the Alzheimer's Association was looking for volunteers to provide respite for those providing care for a family member affected by a dementia. "I knew that respite was a critical need because caregivers need time to get away from a responsibility like this that requires their attention 24 hours per day, or they will burn out. I also figured that my help might be even more needed because fewer males were likely to volunteer for a role like this."

Alan visits men who are affected by Alzheimer's disease to provide a few hours of respite for their wives. Alan usually goes to the individual's home once a week, for 2 or more hours, depending on the caregiver's plans. "In every situation, the time that I spend with the man has been really valuable for the wife. Most of the time, she goes out, perhaps shopping or to lunch with friends. She gets to see people that she no longer can go out with. But the caregiver sometimes just uses the time to take a nap because she has been up most nights. Her husband's sleep is disrupted by the Alzheimer's disease."

The visits are also valuable to the care receiver. "I think the chance for them to socialize with someone other than their wife can be very helpful. People with Alzheimer's disease often become very isolated. They are less likely to go out with

friends or spend time in any social settings due to the confusion and restlessness. Most of the time the husband is probably only with his wife and may no longer get to other guys. During my visits, we may sit and converse or do word search puzzles. If the dementia has made conversation difficult (dementia often results in problems with finding words), then we can look at photos or watch TV together." Alzheimer's disease is progressive, so eventually most people are not able to stay at home any more. Alan has visited a number of different people since he started as a respite volunteer; his longest assignment was a year and a half.



Alan described the most important skills needed for a respite volunteer as patience, compassion, and being able to interact and accept the individual on the level where he or she is. "Don't expect more than

what's possible." Being a respite volunteer can be surprisingly rewarding. "I am gratified by the relief and joy of the caregiver for the two hours of time that they can relax or get things done but I also feel rewarded by the relationship I develop with the person with Alzheimer's and their family members. You get to know that person, his caregiver, and their families – from going through old photo albums together to reminiscing, or a son or daughter might pop in. The person that I am visiting may never learn my name, but they do recognize me as someone familiar and seem to enjoy that I am there just to spend time with them."

Need:

For a person living with dementia, the disease can impact not only memory and thought, but also their social life. It is not uncommon to hear families mention that their social circle has shrunk since getting a diagnosis. As the disease progresses, it becomes more difficult for a person with dementia to initiate activities. However, it

has been shown that regular socialization can improve the quality of life for a person with dementia and caregivers.

For loved ones, caring for a person with dementia is a full-time responsibility. While many take on this role willingly, it can be emotionally, financially, and physically demanding, as well as isolating and stressful. Opportunities to care for one's self are limited, and obtaining support can be costly.

Too often, a caregiver forgoes medical appointments, haircuts, plans with other family members simply because they have no one available to stay with their loved one for a couple hours.

In-home Social Respite Program:

Trained respite volunteers visit adults living with dementia in their homes for a few hours each month. Volunteers provide socialization, supervision and meaningful activity for an individual with dementia in a familiar and comfortable environment. Activities can include reminiscing about the past, listening to music, playing a game, going for a walk, reading aloud, participating in a craft, etc. The program is aimed to improve the lives of:

- The individuals living with dementia by increasing meaningful activity and social connections.
- The caregivers by providing safe supervision of their loved one while they spend a few hours on themselves.
- The volunteers by creating new bonds and feeling a sense of purpose by helping these families.

The respite program offers a very low cost option for families to get help in the home. Volunteers **DO NOT** provide any personal care or medical care. The purpose of a volunteer is to be a friend and ensure a safe environment for a brief time.

Volunteers are trained by Alzheimer's Association staff to understand the basics of dementia, challenging behaviors, effective communication,

the benefits of social engagement and how to appropriately adapt activities.

Families who participate in this program are typically dealing with moderate stage dementia, where supervision is needed, but a person can still safely complete activities of daily living and does not exhibit aggressive behavior. To ensure appropriateness and safety, the staff visits and interviews participants prior to introducing to a volunteer. There are often more requests for companions than available volunteers. The Alzheimer's Association is in need of dedicated, motivated, compassionate individuals to be friendly companions for persons in the WNY area to enhance their quality of life and prevent caregiver burnout.

In-home Respite in Action:

Last winter, the daughter of a man with Alzheimer's disease called the Alzheimer's Association on behalf of her mother, who is the full-time caregiver. She stated that her mother needed help so that she could get her hair done, get lunch with her daughter, or simply take a nap. She shared that her father was friendly and physically healthy, but that he was very attached to her mother, making it impossible to have any time for herself, and that his communication was limited which can make forming relationships difficult.

Around that same time, one of the chapter's in-home respite participants moved to be closer to family in Florida. Her friendly visitor expressed that she missed her monthly visits so much, she was hoping to be matched with another family ASAP. This volunteer has been matched with this family, visiting 3-5 times each month for 6 months. While the participant has limited verbal communication, he and his companion connect through smiles, books, walks, and more. The daughter who made the original call wrote a letter to the chapter last month expressing her gratitude for the volunteer and the inexplicable difference it has made on her mother's mood and her father's quality of life. When asked if I could share their story, the volunteer exclaimed "Anything to let people know how valuable the Alzheimer's Association is to families!"