

Local group looks to raise awareness about Alzheimer's, dementia

BY ADAM HOCKING
EDITOR

MARSHFIELD — Doug Seubert has personal experience with the process of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's. He lost his mother in December of 2014 after her prolonged battle with the disease, and now Seubert is spearheading a movement to raise awareness and increase communal education around Alzheimer's and other dementia-related diseases.

In March of this year, Seubert and his family started a local nonprofit group called the Marshfield Area Purple Angels (MAPA). The Purple Angel is an international symbol for dementia caregivers, and the group works with local businesses to make them dementia friendly, promotes home care for individuals with dementia so that they can maintain familiar and comfortable surroundings, and connects caretakers with education and resources.

"Dementia friendly communities are communities that are aware of people that have dementia. They know what the signs and symptoms of dementia are. They make their businesses, their parks, their public spaces welcoming to people with dementia," Seubert said.

Seubert has met with Mayor Chris Meyer and management at Festival Foods to speak with them about the roles that local government and local business can play in making a dementia friendly community a reality. Training managers and staff in these businesses to recognize signs of people that have dementia and how to interact with them is part of the goal.

Having a special checkout lane in a grocery store for individuals with a dementia-related illness is just one example, Seubert said, of a step a business could take to become more dementia friendly.

"Marshfield strives to be a welcoming community to everyone and a place that our residents are proud to call home. This includes those who are suffering from or those caring for loved ones with dementia. Working toward being a dementia friendly community is one small way we can recognize the unique needs of those in our community that deal with memory loss by

helping residents, business, and government officials understand the obstacles they face on a daily basis and work toward creating an environment that is supportive to their needs through training, assistance, and awareness," Meyer said.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Health, "Alzheimer's disease and related dementias are already straining Wisconsin's long-term care system, and the number of people affected is expected to increase dramatically as the baby boom generation ages."

Department of Health Services Secretary Kitty Rhoades is leading an effort to redesign the care system for people who have Alzheimer's or dementia. One of the main strategies in this effort is to increase community awareness and services, a role in which groups like MAPA figure to play a prominent role.

"There isn't going to be a lot of additional funding to get these programs started, so a lot of communities are turning to nonprofits," Seubert said.

MAPA was started via a Seubert family fund and is sustained by private donations, though Seubert said expenses are minimal. The group recently had its first memory café event with special guest Howie Sturtz for individuals with dementia-related diseases and their caretakers to socialize, learn, and have fun.

Seubert referred to Alzheimer's as the long goodbye.

"It (the battle with Alzheimer's) was a good 14 years with my mom. Things change, and your relationship change(s). You know, I became caregiver, but I was always her son. You can't lose that," Seubert said. "People's identities really change as you go through this, and it's a really hard process. And then realizing when that person no longer recognizes you as their son or their husband or wife can be very, very hard for people."

For more information, education, resources, or to learn how to get involved locally in making Marshfield a dementia friendly community, visit marshfieldpurpleangels.org, call 715-383-0897, or email Doug Seubert at doug@marshfieldpurpleangels.org.