

10-Year Anniversary for Local Non-Profit

To kick off their milestone anniversary, the Alzheimer's Support Center will host a dinner and "Dancing with the Stars" event at the Janesville Performing Arts Center on Saturday, April 12th. This is the second year for their dance competition/fundraiser, but the story of how the Center began goes much farther back.

Set the time machine to 1994. A group of professional caregivers has been meeting, and has decided that a local office, dedicated to the needs of people with Alzheimer's Disease and their caregivers is necessary in Rock County. From 1995 to 1997, the Rock County Dementia Steering Committee holds successful fundraisers with the money to be used for opening a local office. A national organization is contacted, but does not believe that Rock County warrants its own office to support patients and caregivers. With the assistance of attorney Dave Feingold and Pete Wanner (then the Executive Director of the Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin) money is placed in an account entitled "Alzheimer's Fund of Rock County."

Fast forward to April 7th, 1998. Larisa Chmielewski (then Stirrat) begins working as the Outreach Coordinator, one day per week in a cubicle located at the Rock County Job Center. This is the official birth of the Alzheimer's Support Center! Larisa meets with individuals and families affected by Alzheimer's Disease or a related dementia, giving them resource information, tips on caring for their loved one, and often a shoulder to lean on. She facilitates support groups and is an advocate for these individuals and families.

Now jump ahead a few years and you'll find that Larisa and members of the Board of Directors for the Alzheimer's Support Center have worked hard to secure funds to meet the growing needs of our communities. What was once a part-time Outreach Coordinator is now a full-time Executive Director position. More support groups have been started. The Stateline Area Memory Clinic is formed, the first of its kind in Rock County. Housed at the Beloit Clinic with Dr. Ron Kodras as the primary physician, patients questioning memory problems can now have a specialized appointment. Comprehensive testing is completed to rule out other conditions, and then possibly diagnose a type of dementia. Larisa serves as the ASC's representative at every appointment. Test results are discussed at the second appointment and then shared with the patient's regular physician, who will continue to see the patient.

An Education Coordinator is added as a full-time position. The ASC finds Tammy Pence to fill this position with vast experience in home health care and adult day services. Her main role is to provide dementia and caregiving education to family caregivers, professional caregivers, emergency personnel, and anyone interested in attending an educational event.

Partnering with the Council on Aging, the highly competitive Memory Care Connection Grant is applied for and awarded. This partnership is the only one of its kind to be awarded a full allotment of funds. All other Wisconsin grantees have to share their allotment with other counties. The Council on Aging has funds to provide respite to caregivers, and the ASC begins a bold memory screening initiative at the Beloit Clinic. Any patient 65 or older has their memory tested with a new screening tool. If results show impairment, further testing is recommended. Results of this initiative show that of

the individuals who agreed to further testing, 89% showed additional impairment. This allows for earlier diagnosis, which allows more time for future planning and a chance to begin medications or other therapies sooner. These findings are so profound that Dr. Kodras and Larisa are invited to share the results at the State conference for the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute-affiliated memory diagnostic clinics.

In 2006, a second memory diagnostic clinic is added in Rock County. The Janesville Geriatric Assessment Clinic is one of only 29 others in the State, including the one in Beloit. Dr. Steven Bartz heads up this clinic, located at Mercy South. Tammy serves as the ASC's representative at each appointment. In 2007 Larisa makes the decision to be a stay-at-home mom, working only a few hours a week for the ASC, which opens the door for Nicole Morgan to become the new Executive Director. That same year, Dan Wilcox's position of Fund Development/Public Relations Coordinator changes from a contracted position to full-time employment.

Now step out of the time machine, and you will find in 2008, the ASC is pleased to be able to share with local communities experience in hands-on caregiving, resource referral, support group facilitation, case management, assisted living, nursing home & hospice work, providing caregiver education & advocacy! Our commitment continues to be to empower individuals to accept, overcome and cope with the challenges of Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias by providing education, encouragement, support, community service and advocacy. We still meet one-on-one with individuals and families, facilitate support groups, work with the memory diagnostic clinics and partner with many agencies, including the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute. This trip through time is by no means a comprehensive list of all the innovative projects we've been involved in or of all the great organizations we have worked with. We want to say thank you to all those who have been with us since the start, and all those we've had the pleasure of meeting along the way.

We hope you'll join us April 12th to celebrate 10 years of service to our local communities. We have some exciting local stars and starlets that have been paired together to take lessons in ballroom dance from area instructors. Audience participation is key at this event because at intermission you will be able to pledge money for your favorite couple to help them earn bonus points towards winning the competition! And remember all funds raised stay here - to serve our own neighbors, families and friends. That's why the Alzheimer's Support Center was started, and that's the way we'll stay. To reserve your tickets, please call the Janesville Performing Arts Center box office at 758-0297 or visit the box office at 408 S. Main Street in Janesville. This is a highly anticipated event so early ticket reservations are suggested.

Finally to close, I'll quote Margaret Mead. Artwork with this quote was purchased by Larisa during one of the trips she made to Washington D.C. to have heart-to-heart conversations with our politicians. It epitomizes the essence of the birth of the Alzheimer's Support Center and the artwork still hangs in our office today. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world: indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

~article submitted by Nicole Morgan, Executive Director, ASC