

Caregiver's Corner Column (November 2013)

Celebrating Family Caregivers

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Tragedy and crisis can come upon a person sometimes with very little, if any, warning. The American Stroke Association has invested much to help individuals become more aware of the signs and symptoms which are often unnoticed yet can leave severe deficits in ability. National and local Alzheimer's Associations have done the same to educate people on the often less sudden slip into the world of dementia which can both slowly and suddenly lead individuals into a world of dependency unknown since childhood. The National Alliance for Care giving recognizes that 65.7 million family caregivers in the U.S. – or 29% of the U.S. adult population – provide important societal and financial contributions toward maintaining the well-being of those for whom they provide care. These individuals are spouses, children, grandparents, siblings, cousins, or many different relationships from the growing number of blended family situations.

The Caregiver Resource Network, with approximately 120 member organizations based in Grand Rapids, Michigan has grown beyond West Michigan as a National resource. The information provided through the CRN website, sponsored events like the November Family Caregiver Series, and speaker bureau have provided resources designed to ease the care giving journey since its inception in 2001. 65% of care recipients receive care 5 years or less, while 31% receive care longer than that with family caregivers providing a majority of the care. The average age of caregivers has risen from 46.4 to 49.2 years of age. November is set aside to celebrate the contributions of these often “unsung heroes” who make up such a valuable resource in a world of tight fiscal budgets.

Dan is one of two children of Wayne and Marjorie's 64 year marriage. Marjorie passed away two years ago suddenly in the home the two built together 55 years ago. Since then Wayne has become a bit more reclusive, yet remains stubbornly independent. He gave up driving before Marjorie passed due to his visual deficit; she did all the couples driving during the daylight hours. Dan's sister resides 250 miles away and due to her career as a finance officer with a major corporation, she only gets home during holidays. She provides assistance managing her father's monthly bills online which his wife had managed for several years. Jim is a neighbor who grew up with Dan and at one point even had a crush on Dan's sister that was quickly splintered during their high school years. Jim sees Wayne every Wednesday at noon and drives Wayne to the local market after they stop at their favorite fast food restaurant for lunch on the way. Dan regularly picks up his father two days each week enabling Wayne to spend time with his two grandchildren and even helping with their homework at times before either Dan or his wife drive him 16 miles home for the evening. Dan discovered a provider of emergency response units at www.caregiverresource.net which he and his sister convinced Wayne was an essential tool costing under \$40 monthly to assist him in remaining in his home while having immediate help available if it is ever needed. He was also able to locate a resource to assist with basic housekeeping tasks twice monthly based upon Wayne's monthly income which is provided through the local senior resource agency on an affordable cost share basis. This family is just one example of the definition and heart of heroism that many family caregivers share. If you are a family caregiver we applaud you for your many heroic efforts, and remind you not to “walk the caregiver path alone.”

Resources: Names used and any similarities are only incidental and not intended to represent any particular family. The following web addresses were either referred to or provided statistical information for this article: www.stroke.org www.alzfdn.org
www.caregiverresource.net www.caregiving.org

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.