

# Caregiver's Corner Column (April 2012)

## **Volunteers: Superheroes to the Rescue!**

By Rich Zeck

Do you remember watching old television shows when all seemed lost and everyday people were in peril from some pending calamity? There was gloom and doom, the sky was dark and the melodramatic music was beating in the background. Then at the very last moment a super hero would burst in and save the day. The sky was bright and the music was cheery. All was well again.

Some days caregivers feel like that person on the ledge or the damsel in distress tied to the railroad tracks waiting for the oncoming train hurling towards them and they too are not sure where to turn for help or if it will come. They call out for that superhero and no one comes to their rescue. All is not well.

Caregivers, don't worry it's not a bird or a plane, its Volunteers to the rescue. You no longer have to feel alone and isolated while caring for a loved one. Volunteers are coming to your rescue. They come in all shapes, sizes, ages and stations of life but what they all have in common is compassion for your loved ones and you. They are truly today's superheroes who work in the shadows, masked from society, no one knowing who they are, their deeds un-noticed except by those they serve.

Many people support the belief that being a caregiver is one of the most hazardous and dangerous occupations that a person will ever endure. While it can also be a very self-rewarding job to care for a loved one, the hidden emotional, mental and physical tolls on caregivers can be devastating and even deadly. Volunteers can help lightened the load on a caregiver and provide some much needed respite from the 24/7 care they provide for their parent or other family member.

Volunteers are truly today's superheroes who go where no average person goes. They hear your calls and are on their way to save the day. They are searching the skies for the caregiver signal and respond with reckless abandon to your calls for help. So, who are these shadow dwellers?

Volunteers are older adults 55 and older who have "been there and done that." Many of these volunteers, at one time or another, were just like you the caregiver. They were caregivers for their mom or dad, sister or brother or other family member. Some of them just care. They took care of their loved ones without much fanfare or reward. They served for the sake of serving. With the passing of their loved ones they felt a need to continue to serve and help others.

Volunteers truly get what caregivers are going through. They get the isolation and the feeling of nowhere to turn to for help. Maybe a volunteer crossed their path or maybe

they wanted to make sure that nobody would go through what they themselves may have gone through caring for their family member.

Caregivers do not have to do it all by themselves. Volunteers can come to your house and sit with your loved one while you go out for some “me” time. You can go shopping, to a doctor’s visit for yourself or just out for a cup of coffee and not worry about your loved one at home. Superhero Volunteer is there with them and they are in good hands.

There are many great resources for caregivers and you do not have to yell out for help into the night sky. Help is only a mouse click or phone call away. If you need a break and have been looking for that caped crusader to swoop down and rescue you- look no further. Volunteers are standing by.

For more information on available volunteers call: The Kent County Senior Companion Program at (616) 771-9750; Caregiver Resource Network through the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (616) 456-5664 or (888) 456-5664; or contact your local church to find out if they can offer any volunteer assistance.

***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 IIIE, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at [www.CaregiverResource.net](http://www.CaregiverResource.net) or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664