

# Family touts 'dementia friendly' to honor mom

Liz Welter, USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin May 5, 2016



(Photo: Jacob Byk/USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)

MARSHFIELD - Lorraine Bentzler makes hefty sandwiches when she volunteers in the kitchen for the blood drive at the Eagles Club. Egg salad bulges beyond the bread, enough to satisfy the hunger folks have after donating blood.

Bentzler, 83, volunteers at every Eagles Club blood drive and easily spends six hours doing whatever is needed in the kitchen.

"People don't want to taste bread," she said. "They want the good stuff inside the sandwich." She's a spry, talkative woman, but she's also quick to let fellow volunteers know that she occasionally needs a reminder because her memory has slipped.

Bentzler has the textbook symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia among the elderly, which causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior.

Alzheimer's is robbing her short-term memory. Her illness has progressed to the point that it is eroding some of her long-term memories, too. But it doesn't yet affect her capacity to mound egg salad on slices of bread and hand the sandwiches out at blood drives. "I grew up on a farm and there's not much I can't do," Bentzler said.

A new program in Marshfield is helping Bentzler and others with a dementia diagnosis to find help when they need it. Dementia Friendly Marshfield was founded about a year ago by Doug Seubert of Marshfield and his siblings after their mother, who had Alzheimer's disease, died in 2014. Dementia Friendly Marshfield promotes opportunities for people with dementia to be active, and helps spread awareness among local businesses about the symptoms of dementia.

Marge Seubert was a devoted mother and grandmother who was involved in her community and church. As their mother's Alzheimer's disease advanced, her children were challenged to provide her the care she needed, Seubert said.

"We didn't know anyone else who was helping their parents with Alzheimer's and, often, we didn't know if there was a better way to help her," he said.

Seubert, 49, said he didn't realize how advanced his mother's Alzheimer's had become until her neighbors told him she had been wandering outside, confused about where she lived. He had been living with his mother, but had no idea of the symptoms she was exhibiting when he was at work.

"That was when I decided Mom needed full-time care," he said.



**Doug Seubert, left, and his mother, Marge Seubert, pose for a photo in 2007 during a trip to Branson, Missouri.**  
*(Photo: Photo courtesy of Doug Seubert)*

Helping their mother through her final years of life was difficult because Seubert and his siblings felt alone and isolated, he said.

Marge Seubert's children are determined to help other folks coping with a dementia diagnosis and their caregivers have an easier time as the disease progresses.

"It's a true grassroots effort," Seubert said. "We rely totally on volunteers and donations from people and businesses in the community who want to help."

Bentzler and other folks with dementia and their caregivers are getting some needed support through the project initiated by Marge Seubert's children.

The goal of Dementia Friendly Marshfield is to provide opportunities for folks with dementia to remain active, social members of the community, Seubert said. It's a nonprofit and includes Marshfield Area Purple Angels and the Purple Angel Memory Cafe.

The initiative is important because people can wander away from home or institutions and get into life-threatening situations, Seubert said. Many have trouble understanding directions or reading signs; people who try to help by offering lengthy instructions can make them even more confused, and wandering outdoors can be deadly for the elderly. Business and retail employees are trained to appropriately help someone with dementia, he said.

The goal is to have as many businesses as possible sign up for the training, Seubert said.

Marshfield Area Purple Angels works with local businesses to promote awareness about the struggles folks with dementia may have, even when a caregiver is along to help, he said. Businesses that participate will get purple angels to place in windows so that customers know employees are educated about helping clients who have dementia, Seubert said.

The training helps store clerks and workers who encounter those with dementia to understand the hearing and visual difficulties associated with the condition.

"With dementia, a person's field of vision can be much more limited," Seubert said. The distracting hum of voices most people can tune out is magnified for folks with Alzheimer's and they have difficulty with soft or low lighting used in restaurants and stores.

Festival Foods was the city's first major retailer to work with Seubert to train all its staff to understand typical dementia behaviors and appropriate ways to respond to help shoppers.

Providing the highest level of customer service possible is the goal of Festival Foods, said Josh Verstegen, director of the Marshfield store.

"This program is really about being more caring and more aware about dementia and how it affects folks, and that fits into our standards," he said.

Bentzler's daughter, Donna Griesbach, drives her mother to Festival about two times a month to get groceries. The familiarity with the store and the helpful staff brings them back every time, Bentzler said.

"I've been shopping here since before you were born," Bentzler said as she joked with her daughter while Griesbach rolled her eyes, playfully.

Physical and mental activity are important in the senior years, so Griesbach encourages her mother to push the cart and to make the decisions to find items in the store.

Bananas were on the list during a recent trip to pick up groceries with her daughter, accompanied by a USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin reporter. Bentzler knew precisely the location but hesitated when she reached for a bunch. A Festival staff member who was restocking the bananas saw the hesitation and asked if she could help.

"I don't want that many bananas; I'd like a bunch of four," Bentzler replied, and the woman snapped off a section with four bananas.

It's little things like the banana episode that keep the duo coming to Festival, Griesbach said.

The project also sponsors the Purple Angel Memory Cafe, which is a highlight of Bentzler's month. The cafe happens once a month at Wildwood Park Pavilion to provide hands-on activities and social engagement for people with dementia. Seubert and other volunteers provide the supplies and provide assistance when necessary during the Purple Angel Memory Cafe.



Lorraine Bentzler, 83, scoops egg salad onto bread while volunteering at the Eagle's Club in Marshfield on May 2, 2016. Bentzler has Alzheimer's disease but comes at it with confidence. (Photo: Jacob Byk/USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)

"I meet some new people each time and we have a nice time," Bentzler said.

Although Bentzler can't remember what she does at Memory Cafe, she remembers it's fun and she's eager to go to each monthly meeting, Greisbach said.

Elderly folks need activity, stimulation and the sense that they are important in the community, Seubert said.

"Being able to shop, knowing that there's people who will help you, having a place to meet for social activities, all of that is important and often, more so when someone has dementia," he said.

Seubert considers himself fortunate to have had the opportunity to help his mother.

"While some of the times with Mom in her final years were pretty tough, I was blessed to be able to provide a lot of her care," he said. "She took care of all of us. It was our turn to care for her."

*Liz Welter: 715-898-7008, or [liz.welter@gannettwisconsin.com](mailto:liz.welter@gannettwisconsin.com); on Twitter @welter\_liz.*