

Toll of Alzheimer's struck close to home

Deborah Alexander
Staff writer

(December 28, 2006) — Christie Engelfried knows about the impact of dementia and Alzheimer's disease on a personal level.

Her mother suffered from dementia and memory loss after some small strokes. Her mother-in-law was initially treated for acute depression before being diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

It was the 1980s. Few knew what Alzheimer's was.

"It took a long time to diagnose," Engelfried recalled of her mother-in-law's illness. "There was little or no support."

Both women died in 1990. Soon after, Engelfried earned a certificate in the gerontology program at St. John Fisher College to gain a greater understanding of the aging process and learn more about dementia. She also began volunteering with the Rochester chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

The volunteer work stopped in 1995 so she could care for her father, who had become ill. He died in 2000, and Engelfried, who was a licensed clinical social worker in private practice, retired in 2002.

Three years ago, she resumed volunteering after training in dementia-specific care at the Alzheimer's Association.

Engelfried, 63, said anyone can volunteer.

"There is no need to be a professional, just a caring person who is willing to help others, make them comfortable and talk to them about their feelings and lives," she said.

The association, she added, supplies excellent, ongoing training that educates volunteers about the disease. "If you don't have what you need, there is always someone to turn to for support and follow-up."

Currently, Engelfried is a facilitator with the early stage support group at Monroe Community Hospital. For three to 10 hours a month, she leads a life discussion or



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JEFFREY BLACKWELL staff
photographer

"No matter the challenge, we all still have feelings and need love and respect from everyone around us," says Alzheimer's Association volunteer Christie Engelfried.

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reminiscing group, using music, photographs and other objects to stimulate a patient's memories. The group determines where the discussion goes.

"As a facilitator, I create an environment to share what is going on in the group," she said. "The participants talk about their careers or hobbies. I help keep a positive note."

Engelfried has lived in Rochester for 39 years and has been married for 41 years to Fred Engelfried, who works for a company that makes weather stripping in Farmington, Ontario County.

She also enjoys tennis, sewing and taking courses, with plans to sign up for Spanish and art classes in the coming year.

After the holidays, Engelfried will work as a care line volunteer, offering support over the phone to Alzheimer's patients by talking to them about their day and how they are doing.

She will also work in the Memories in the Making program, which uses art as a way to communicate and allow patients to express their feelings and build self-esteem.

Engelfried said volunteering does not require a huge time commitment to affect a person's life. The successful volunteer has to have an interest and find a good fit. For her, the Alzheimer's Association fits.

"No matter the challenge, we all still have feelings and need love and respect from everyone around us," she said.

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 Christine Engelfried discusses her family members' battle with Alzheimer's disease.

About the agency

Name: Alzheimer's Association Rochester Chapter.

Address: 435 East Henrietta Road, Rochester, NY 14620.

Year founded: 1981.

Greatest needs: Volunteers. "Our need is more in the priceless treasure of a human being," says Teresa Galbier, local chapter president.

Number of volunteers: 185.

Total revenue: \$1.3 million for 2005-06 fiscal year.

Web site: www.alz-rochesterny.org