

MATURE Lifestyles

Housing

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'Joining My Journey' program helps dementia residents

BY SUE WEBBER
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Living with or caring for someone with dementia has sometimes been called "the long goodbye."

But in the last year, Copperfield Hill in Robbinsdale has found a way to assist its 50 residents with dementia, along with their families, in that day-to-day challenge.

"Joining My Journey," a program for dementia residents, involves gathering an in-depth history from the family so caregivers will know everything about the patient.

"Dementia causes a great deal of anxiety in the individual, so by being able to go back to a time that they remember, they feel safer, accepted and understood in the present," said Naomi Farr, whose husband, Darrel, built Copperfield Hill. "This has proved to be a wonderful and therapeutic program. The families are also included and educated on how to relate to their loved one who may not remember yesterday but is crystal clear on something that happened 50 years ago."

The "old way" of dealing with dementia patients, Farr said, was to redirect a person with memory loss – to try to "drag them back into reality."

"But the fact is that their reality is 40 years ago," she said. "To do anything else agitates the person. Our reality isn't theirs. We need to step into their reality."

For example, a Copperfield Hill resident a few years ago who had been a farmer became extremely agitated at 4 p.m. every day, and nothing seemed to calm him, Farr said.

"He wanted to get up and get going," she said.

After talking with family members, the staff learned that the patient had been accustomed to milking the cows

each day at 4 p.m.

"Once we found that out, we could assure him that someone else would be taking care of the milking that day," Farr said. "It calmed him right down."

The "Joining My Journey" concept was original with Copperfield Hill in that the facility wrote the program, Farr said. Other memory care facilities may be doing something similar, but "not to the degree we do," she said.

Copperfield Hill staff meets with each patient's family prior to move-in to get a history of the individual's life journey, Farr said. After the patient moves in, one aide is assigned to work primarily with that resident.

"We have the same aides take care of individuals; they get comfortable with faces," Farr said. "The worst thing for a person with dementia is change. They often have a lot of fears. Nothing is more frightening to them than to move. It turns their world upside down."

Staff receives in-depth special training, and they are asked to read the family histories for every dementia patient, Farr said, particularly the individuals who are in their care.

"We do everything we can to get to know our residents," she said. "We find out what they like to eat. Even our [food] servers know the story of each individual's life. It has worked extremely well for all of us."

The program is helpful for family members, too, who often don't know what to talk about when they visit someone with dementia.

"This really helps the family understand the journey," Farr said. "They can join in it, too."

"The response we get from patients is that it calms them and makes them comfortable," Farr said. "That tells me the program is working. We have way fewer behavior issues."

Tim Jackson, whose mother, Verna,



Photo illustration

is a resident in the Memory Care program, said, "There are lots of activities and outings for memory care residents that my mother enjoys, but she really lights up when there is live musical entertainment. She be-bops and dances around and loves to sing along. She

sang in the church choir and I think it brings her back to that moment."

The care of senior citizens evolved naturally for Farr and her husband, a real estate developer, she said.



Tim Jackson is shown with his mother, Verna, a resident in the Memory Care unit at Copperfield Hill in Robbinsdale. (Submitted photo)

Memory

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“In the early 1980s, Darrel saw senior housing coming,” she said. “Robbinsdale is an aging community with a great need for that kind of housing. Senior housing is as much about family as it is about the individual who needs care.”

Darrel Farr built Copperfield Hill in 1985, when his mother was in the market for senior care.

“His dad had died, and his mother was in a regular apartment,” Farr said. “She didn’t drive. Darrel considered her needs and wants.”

His mother was a resident at Copperfield Hill for 14 years before she died.

Farr eventually built 22 senior com-

munities. Currently, the family business includes daughters Lucinda and Ashley and operates under the name Pope Bucknell Co. They own and manage three facilities: Copperfield Hill in Robbinsdale, one in Maple Grove and another in Austin, Minn.

Senior housing has become Naomi Farr’s passion, too, she said.

“Copperfield Hill is definitely my baby; I’ll never be away from it,” she said. “My one big overriding goal is to give purpose to each person every single day, including those in memory care. We have one veteran who puts the flag out every day. That gives him a reason to get out of bed every morning.”

Copperfield Hill’s location on Highway 81, not far from Interstate 394 and Highway 100, is convenient to a lot of its residents’ children, Farr said



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