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NOTE to editors: See sidebar at the end of story

Café Gathering Seeks to Ease the Loneliness of Alzheimer’s

January 15, 2012 — Alzheimer’s disease can be a lonely, frightening journey undertaken by people who did not volunteer to take the trip. This includes their families and caregivers who are frequently responsible for round-the-clock care that sometimes lasts up to 10 years — or more.

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The unfortunate stigma associated with Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia can mean social isolation for both the person living with the disease and their family and caregivers.

To help ease the stigma, loneliness and stress, and to give people a place to meet with others in a similar situation, several local groups have committed to offering the area’s first-ever Alzheimer’s Cafés, where people with dementia, their family or friend caregivers — and anyone else interested in dementia — gather together in a relaxed atmosphere for music, refreshments, socializing and education about dementia.

The Villages at Sydney Creek in San Luis Obispo; Magnolia, a specialized residence for people with memory disorders in Orcutt; and The Paso Robles Senior Center will each offer an Alzheimer’s Café, with initial help and guidance from the Alzheimer’s Association California Central Coast Chapter.

“We are thrilled to bring an Alzheimer’s Café to the Senior Center,” said Lynda Holt, recreation services manager for the Paso Robles Senior Center. “Any effective intervention on behalf of people with cognitive impairments will be a tremendous service for our community.”

Holt said the success of the center’s Brain Aerobics classes during the past year helped them recognize how much they could help families who have a loved one living with Alzheimer’s disease or other form of cognitive impairment.

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Alzheimer’s Café was pioneered by the Dutch psychiatrist Bere Miesen in 1997 in the Netherlands. There people with dementia, their caregivers, relatives and professionals would meet in a café environment to socialize and unwind. The idea has caught on in the United States, and in Santa Barbara, an Alzheimer’s Café launched in the fall of 2011.

“It’s really wonderful for the people in our communities to now have an Alzheimer’s Café,” said Sara Bartlett, area manager for the local office of the Alzheimer’s Association. “We meet with families all the time who feel isolated and often overwhelmed by Alzheimer’s disease. This café has been very successful around the world, and I believe it will be equally successful in our area.”

She added the Alzheimer’s Association role is that of advisor to the organizations hosting the cafés, but that Association representatives will be present at the gatherings “because we know the value of the social support these cafés offer,” Bartlett said.

Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia and the sixth leading cause of death in the United States.

The Alzheimer’s Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer care, support and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer’s disease through the advancement of research, to provide and enhance care and support for all affected, and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer’s. The California Central Coast Chapter of the association covers San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura and Kern counties. alz.org

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Initially, Alzheimer’s Café will be held quarterly in three separate locations, and anyone is welcome to attend any or all three. If interest in the gatherings is what organizers expect, the cafés could begin being held monthly.

Alzheimer’s Café

Orcutt
10 to 11:30 a.m., Tuesday, Jan. 31 at The Party Barn at Magnolia, 4620 Song Lane. For more information, contact Margie Halsell at 805.310.6996.

San Luis Obispo
10 to 11:30 a.m., Thursday, Feb. 9 at The Village at Sydney Creek, 1234 Laurel Lane in San Luis Obispo. For more information, contact Jenny Molinar at 805.543.2350.

Paso Robles
10 to 11:30 a.m., Thursday, March 22 at the Paso Robles Senior Center, 270 Scott Street. For more information, contact Lynda Holt at 805.237.3987.

For more information on Alzheimer’s disease, the most common form of dementia, or any other type of dementia, please contact the Alzheimer’s Association locally at 800.272.3900, or visit the local chapter online at alz.org. All Alzheimer’s Association services are free to families.