

Artists with Alzheimer's give back to Memory Walk

By Kevin Kirkpatrick, Daily Register | Posted: Tuesday, September 1, 2009 11:15 pm

Columbia County residents with memory loss are giving back to the annual event that raises awareness and funds for Alzheimer's care, support and research programs.

Nearly 20 residents, from Columbia Health Care Center in Wyocena, Divine Savior Extended Care in Portage and American Way Senior Living in Portage, recently volunteered to work with Wisconsin artist Linda Goehre to create individual artwork representing the "forget-me-not" theme of the Alzheimer's Association.

Several of these works were chosen by Goehre to construct a collage that will be featured at this year's Columbia County Memory Walk.

The third annual event, scheduled from 1 to 4 p.m. Sept. 13 at Riverside Park, benefits the Alzheimer's Association. More than 300 people participated in last year's event, which raised more than \$31,000. "We were asking for (the residents') help for once, instead of helping them," said Carol Olson, outreach specialist for the Alzheimer's Association's South Central Wisconsin Chapter and an event organizer. "It was a very meaningful activity for the residents."

Each year, the Columbia County Memory Walk features a painting by a local artist. This is the first time the event has asked residents with memory loss to create the painting.

Anyone making a donation of at least \$10 to this year's event may honor a loved one or a caregiver at the walk by having the person's name added to the border of the "forget-me-not" painting. The names will be read aloud during a commemorative program following the walk. This painting and reading of names is unique to memory walks in Sauk County and Columbia County.

Each resident's artwork was facilitated by Goehre through her Painting My Memories program for people with dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

According to information provided by Goehre, she tries to help people in all stages of dementia, even those in the most advanced stages, to communicate through painting, "bringing forth emotions and feelings they may no longer be able to verbalize."

Goehre spent about an hour and a half with the residents on this project.

"My goal is to enrich their lives," Goehre said. "This is something that is completely their own."

Goehre presented the finished collage to Olson and other event contributors Tuesday at American Way Senior Living. She had to help Pat Paul, one of the residents who worked on the painting, locate where her paintings were on the collage. Because of her illness, she had trouble remembering participating in the project.

The final product includes two of Paul's works.

After next week's walk, the painting will be available for local organization to display by contacting the Alzheimer's Association Columbia/Sauk Regional Office at 742-9055.

In addition to the painting, this year's event includes entertainment, refreshments, door prizes, individual and team awards, and a special program to honor those with memory loss or dementia and those who assist in their care. The optional memory walk starts at 2 p.m., encompassing two miles along the Wisconsin River levee.

Christine See, director of the Columbia County Aging & Disability Resource Center, is the honorary chairwoman for the event and will lead the walk with Paul Rusk, the executive director of the Wisconsin chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

Participation is open to both individuals and teams of two or more people.

Participants can register for the walk at Riverside Park on Sept. 13 or by calling Olson at 742-9055. All participants will receive a T-shirt and will be eligible for door prizes and awards.

The event is free, but contributions are encouraged. The proceeds are used to benefit local programs of the South Central Wisconsin Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. A portion also is forwarded to the National Alzheimer's Association, which is the leading, private, nonprofit sponsor of Alzheimer's research. Money raised during the memory walk will support research toward a cure for the disease.

"A majority of the money stays local to support local programs and services," Olson said.

The South Central Wisconsin Chapter serves Columbia, Dane, Grant, Green, Iowa, Lafayette, Richland, Rock and Sauk counties.

Sauk County is holding its own Memory Walk on Sept. 26.

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Linda Goehre helped Pat Paul and nearly 20 other Columbia County residents with memory loss create a collage for this year's Columbia County Memory Walk. Paul painted both the top left and middle bottom squares. Anyone making a donation of at least \$10 can honor a loved one or favorite caregiver at the walk by having their name added to the border of this painting.