

Happy Father's Day

ONE SON'S JOURNEY AS A CAREGIVER

Richard Koronkowski, Cudahy



Regina and Richard Koronkowski

This Father's Day, we salute all those who serve as caregivers for their fathers, grandfathers, uncles or brothers, on a journey with dementia. Richard Koronkowski is a caregiver for his father, Richard, who is living with vascular dementia and terminal cancer. We applaud him for the steps he takes to ensure his father is comfortable and living his best life.

Stepping Up as a Caregiver

While Richard does live in the area, he moved in with his mom and dad this year to help with around-the-clock caregiving duties. "Both my parents got COVID earlier this year and it was very difficult," Richard said. "My mom, 90, has always cared for my dad, but COVID exacerbated his condition and she needed help. I am glad I was able to fill this role when my parents need it most. I've helped to give them a better schedule and routine, and ultimately live a healthier life."

Importance of Respite Care

Many people may not know what the term "respite care" even means. As a caregiver, though, it's so critical. Respite care is short-term relief for a primary caregiver, whether it be a few hours or an entire day. "Being a caregiver is exhausting," Richard shared. "For my dad, he's up quite a bit at night and we have to be very careful about wandering, so we're always *on*."

Richard's family is able to take advantage of grant funding from the Alzheimer's Family Caregiver Support Program (AFCSP), which enables Richard's father to attend St. Ann Center for adult day services twice a week for the day. "The respite time my mom and I get is so helpful," Richard said. "It allows us to get things done and take care of our own appointments. It's also a huge benefit to dad so he can get out of the house, meet new people and it helps establish a routine for him."

Being an Advocate When it's Most Needed

"My biggest advice for any adult children caring for their parents is to learn to be an advocate for them, otherwise the system will take over for you," Richard said. "There are a lot of personal decisions that are being made and you have to ask a lot of questions so your loved one gets what's right for them. When my dad had COVID, the hospital was having end-of-life discussions, but that was not actually the case. They just weren't geared for his dementia, coupled with COVID, and the medications they gave him only exacerbated the situation. I didn't feel it was the right way to go and we took him home and he made a recovery. I am focused on my parent's quality of life."

"This Father's Day I want to take dad to a professional barber," Richard said. "I do his shaving, but I want him to look his best this year." Thank you to Richard and all those serving as caregivers for those most vulnerable.