

## Learning to cope as a caregiver

BY LOIS BELL  
SHERIDAN SENIOR CENTER

SHERIDAN — A family member needs more help with shopping, cleaning, making a meal or managing their checkbook. Sometimes the change is slow. Other times the change is sudden. Whatever the reason, life has changed. The changes also affect their circle of family and friends. A caregiver emerges — often a family member — with the responsibilities for daily care often falling primarily on that one person.

In many cases, caregiving begins at home whether in the care receiver's own home or in a family member's home. The reasons range and can be a combination of finances and family values. But the role of caregiving is not something families train for; the learning curve and the responsibilities of caring for a loved one are intense especially when the duties fall primarily on one person. Caregivers emerge in their new role without coping skills.

"Caregivers' health is susceptible to being compromised," said Stella Montano. "They become exhausted. It is not unusual for a caregiver

er to notice that their own health is deteriorating."

Health effects can include high blood pressure, increased cholesterol levels, depression, headaches, even possibly a heart attack or a stroke.

Montano is the director of Family Caregiver Support Services at the Sheridan Senior Center. Her programs are available to caregivers of all ages who are caring for a loved one whether a spouse, sibling, parent, friend or grandchild.

Aside from raising a grandchild, caregiving often embraces a range of care for those who have suffered an accident or a debilitating disease. Caregiving can also include caring for a loved one living with a dementia.

So how can one cope in a new role of caregiving? Seek help and seek to understand the changes in your life.

In cooperation with the University of Wyoming, the Sheridan Senior Center is offering a support workshop for caregivers. "Our Family Journey" is a workshop designed by Stanford University to teach caregivers how to cope with the stress of caring for a loved one.

Different from a support group whose agenda is driven by participants, a workshop is designed to guide participants through specific, teachable objectives. Support groups and workshops can complement each other.

"Caregivers who attend support groups agree that the support group is a very important coping tool in their tool box," said Montano, who facilitates weekly support groups at the Senior Center.

Learning coping tools is one of the objectives of the "Our Family Journey" workshop.

"Any caregiver can benefit from this workshop," said Montano.

The first five-week workshop began on Oct. 31 for weekly two-hour sessions. Caregivers utilize the services of the Senior Center's Day Break program for their loved one while they attend the workshop. Day Break offers onsite care for adults who can benefit from supervision during the day while providing respite to their caregiver.

One of the early objectives of the "Our Family Journey" workshop is to guide caregivers to identify all their emotions and to



COURTESY PHOTO | SHERIDAN SENIOR CENTER

**Coping with demands on your time and energy as a caregiver can be learned. Stella Montano, director of Caregiver Support Services at the Sheridan Senior Center, recently launched a five-week workshop to teach caregivers how to recharge their personal batteries as they care for a loved one.**

recognize that varied and conflicted feelings are legitimate.

"Caregivers will often feel anger and resentment toward their loved one, toward their family who aren't helping them, and toward their circumstances," said Montano. "Then they feel guilty for these feelings. These are all perfectly understandable and normal reactions to a change that has changed the direction of your life."

Coping skills for caregivers is another objective ranging in topics including dealing with difficult behaviors, communication, problem solving, working together, community resources and relaxation techniques.

"One relaxation technique is for the caregiver to listen to their favorite music while preparing a meal," said Montano. Sounds simple but not something a caregiver might consider doing for themselves. Many

relaxation techniques are short "breaks" in routine that can provide a recharge for the caregiver.

November is National Caregiver Month recognizing the valuable and significant roles of caregivers in our society both socially and financially.

A second workshop is being scheduled. Those interested can contact Stella Montano at 672-2240 or at fcg@sheridanseniorcenter.org.

### CENTER STAGE

## How I cared for the man I loved despite debilitating odds

As Hans Solo in Star Wars once said, "Sometimes I even amaze myself." This is true of me as well, although I'm not a spaceship pilot who rescued a princess from an ominous Death Star.

For six years, I cared for my late husband, Bill, who was totally blind and partially paralyzed. He was 19 years older than me. When we met, I was in my 40s, and he was in his 60s. When we married in September of 2005, he

was walking, albeit with a cane. Three months later, he suffered the first of two strokes that confined him to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. I'm visually impaired, so how did I bathe, dress and feed him and transfer him from bed, to wheelchair, to recliner, to commode?

I doubt it would have been possible without the help and support of Laura Andrews, the occupational therapist at Sheridan Manor, where Bill spent nine months after his first stroke and another couple of months after his second. She didn't say, "I don't know how you can do this if you can't see." Instead, her mantra was "Let's see if we can figure it out."

For two months before Bill came home in September

of 2006, she worked with us every day on dressing and transferring him from the bed to the wheelchair. Because of my limited vision, figuring out how to do these things was a challenge, but she was patient. We tried one technique after another until we finally found ways that worked.

Someone suggested to a local carpenter ways he could modify our house for wheelchair accessibility. When that was done, she came home with us to work on transferring Bill from the wheelchair to the recliner and commode and vice versa as well as between the bed and wheelchair. She also gave advice on toiletting and other personal care issues. When Bill suffered his second stroke in 2007, we did it all again, but this time, Bill was only in the nursing home for a couple of months. I must admit there were times when Bill landed on the floor, but fortunately, he was never seriously hurt, and no one questioned my ability.

My caregiving feat would also not have been possible without the services provided by the senior center's Help at Home program. An aide came to the house three

days a week to give Bill showers because this would have been too difficult for me. Not only was I grateful for the extra hands, I also appreciated having another set of good eyes around to notice lesions, bruises or other medical issues with Bill about which I might not have known due to my lack of vision.

Day Break, Meals on Wheels and Goose Creek Transit were also helpful, and I occasionally attended caregiver support group meetings at the senior center. Friends and neighbors helped us from time to time.

Being a caregiver can be a challenge, even with good eyes. If not for the support of others, Bill would probably have spent the last years of his life at Sheridan Manor. He might not have lived as long. Despite his paralysis and the difficulty I had caring for him, we spent six happy years together. That's amazing.

ABBBIE JOHNSON TAYLOR is the author of four books including "My Ideal Partner- How I Met, Married, and Cared for the Man I Loved Despite Debilitating Odds." Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan Community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.



ABBBIE JOHNSON TAYLOR

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\*entrée only offered for Home Delivered Meals

Mon - New hours at the Senior Center begin, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Mon - Fri		
Tue - Veteran's Wall of Honor Display		Lobby
Wed - Alterations & Mending by Marcine	8:30 to 9:30 a.m.	Art Studio
Thu - Knitting with Donna	1:00 to 3:00 p.m.	Art Studio
Fri - Conversation Pit	8:00 a.m.	Dining Room
Sat - Breakfast/Biscuits & Gravy	7:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.	Dining Room

**Lunch Service Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., 7 days a week**  
211 Smith Street Sheridan, WY 82801 (307) 672-6079  
Senior Center Main Phone: (307) 672-2240

### SENIOR CENTER HAPPENINGS

- The Senior Center recently announced new hours effective Monday, Nov. 7. The new hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Mondays through Fridays. Weekend and holiday hours are 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The building will be open at 7:30 a.m. on Saturdays that breakfast is served.
- Day Break ribbon cutting and open house, Monday, Nov. 7. Ribbon cutting at 1 p.m. and an open house for the public is 1-3 p.m. The new Day Break facility is located at 241 Smith St., next to the Sheridan Senior Center.
- Caregiver Conference, Thursday, Nov. 10, 61 Gould St., 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. featuring Jo Huey, speaker and author of "Ten Simple Solutions for Caregivers and Don't Leave Mama Home with the Dog." This conference is a suggested contribution of \$10 payable at registration at the door. To register for the conference or for respite care for your loved one, call Stella Montano at 672-2240. A block of rooms is available at Best Western; call 674-7421 and ask for the Sheridan Caregiver Conference rate.
- The Veterans Wall of Honor at the Sheridan Senior Center will be on display Nov. 9 through Veterans Day. Stop by and

- see more than 300 original interviews and profiles of Sheridan County veterans. The Wall of Honor will be displayed in the temporary lobby wall of the Senior Center.
- Card making with Heidi Roesler, Saturday, Nov. 12, 12:30-3:30 p.m. in the Art Studio of the Senior Center. Call 672-2240 to reserve a spot as space is limited. The fee is \$7 per person payable at the class; there is a suggested contribution of \$5 for those who are 60 and older and registered with the Senior Center. Instructor provides all materials but you can bring your own if you wish. Enter by the north doors of the building.
- Conversations in History, Wednesday, Nov. 9, 10:30 a.m. with historian Helen Laumann. Topic: Historic dude ranches. Meet in the Community Room.
- Biscuits and gravy breakfast with eggs, fresh fruit, juice or milk, coffee or tea, Saturday, Nov. 12, 7:30-9 a.m., Sheridan Senior Center, 211 Smith St. Individuals registered with the Senior Center may use their Senior Center meal tickets. Please call 672-2240 before Nov. 10 to let us know that you're coming. Pay at the door that morning.

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