

Dementia friends: Building a dementia friendly community

BY LOIS BELL
SHERIDAN SENIOR CENTER

metaphor describes one symptom of Alzheimer's dementia.

Dementias have varying symptoms depending on which part of the brain is affected. Alzheimer's has become well-known with the recognizable signs of short-term memory loss with other symptoms emerging as Alzheimer's dementia progresses.

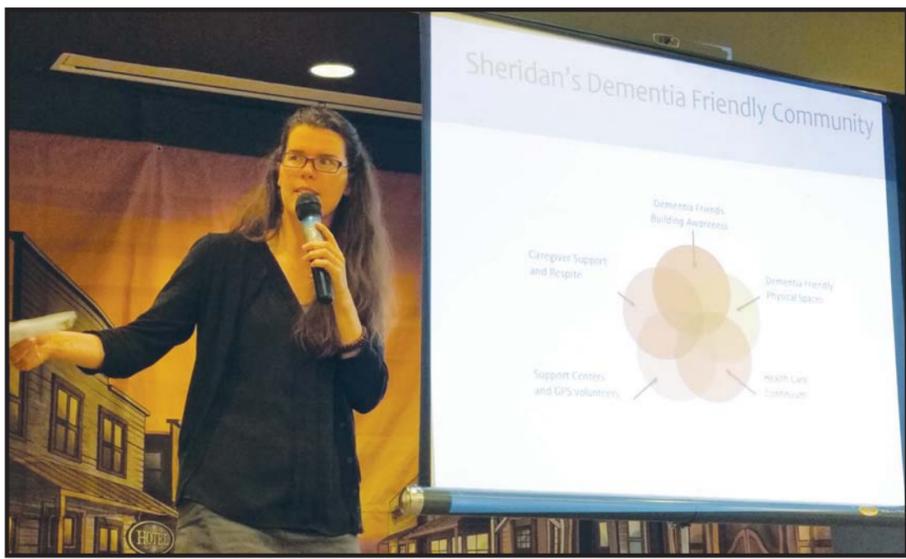
Currently, one in five families is dealing with some form of dementia. It is projected that in 10-15 years, one in two families will be affected by dementia in some way.

In Sheridan County, a dementia friendly community movement is emerging. The movement solidified after five weeks of collaborative community conversation last fall. As a direct result of that dialogue, five initiatives were launched to transform Sheridan County into a dementia friendly community. The mission: build an informed community where those living with dementia and their care partners are respected and supported, continuing to live with meaning, value and dignity.

"It's a community that is welcoming to everyone and touching every sector of our community," said Kay Wallick, a colleague in Dementia Friends one of the five dementia friendly community initiatives.

What is a dementia friend? The initiative's goal is to increase public understanding about dementia and reduce any stigma for those living with or those caring for those with dementia. Dementia Friends offers free public education on what dementia is, how to communicate and support someone with dementia, turn understanding into action, and offer steps to becoming a part of a community-based network in neighborhoods, workplaces and communities. Anyone of any age can be a Dementia Friend. A Dementia Friend can be as simple as learning what dementia is.

"Those living with dementia and their caregivers who are dealing with the complex and time consuming challenges of daily stress often find it difficult to articulate their needs," said Dementia Friend volunteer Heather Comstock. "In real-



COURTESY PHOTO

Heather Comstock shares what it means to be a Dementia Friend to an audience at the Senior Center's "When I'm 64...or more" community presentation on June 7. Comstock is a member of a movement initiated through the Center for a Vital Community to transform Sheridan County into a dementia friendly community.

ity asking for help is harder than it sounds. Depression and isolation are two of the most serious components for those living with and caring for others throughout the dementia journey."

Comstock is on staff with the Senior Center's Family Caregiver Services.

"The heart of this community effort is creating a broader support system that offers resources to current caregivers and their loved ones, while reaching out to those that have not yet accessed services but need them," Wallick said.

Currently there are many resources for caregivers through the Sheridan Senior Center and through privately owned businesses. The movement wants to expand those supports.

There are four elements

that define if a community is dementia friendly. The first is to raise widespread awareness and transform attitudes about dementia and move people to action.

"I am particularly sensitive to those that equate their self-worth by their mental acuity," Comstock said. "We realize that there is a serious social stigma around losing your memory or other cognitive abilities. Those living with dementia and their caregivers are not alone."

Another element is to have supportive options that foster quality of life for persons touched by the disease and for their caregivers and families. A third element is to engage and include people from diverse communities. The fourth element is to create and promote com-

munity life that welcomes and involves every one.

The Dementia Friends team is now beginning to take their message public to Sheridan communities. One community presentation was on June 7 at the Sheridan Senior Center through the Center's monthly "When I'm 64...or more" free monthly life learning lecture series.

Even in its infant phase, the initiative is touching lives and making connections.

"We're finding people who were hidden before," Wallick said. "Hopefully people won't be afraid and will be willing to talk about it."

For support or to schedule a Dementia Friends presentation, contact Heather Comstock at 675-1978.

CENTER STAGE

Thank you Rita Hayworth

My mother is an avid movie buff. Mom knows so much about the actors of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, their personal lives, how many times they were married and on occasion, their life struggles.

Mom told me about Rita Hayworth. For those who don't know, Rita Hayworth was a glamorous film star. Her film career began in the 1930s and peaked during the 1940s and 1950s. She was drop-dead beautiful and Columbia Studios did not hesitate to promote her and publish her glam-photos. She was a 1940s pin-up girl. I'm sure a number of World War II veterans had her pin-up poster. Rita's life was constantly in the public spot-



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light.

During the 1960s, Hayworth began having trouble remembering her lines. Heavy drinking was attributed as the reason. She was prone to angry outbursts that made international news. In the 1970s, her condition worsened. It had to be devastating for her family and those around her.

Hayworth needed money and tried to continue acting but her condition worsened so much that she was forced to retire. She never returned to acting.

For almost 20 years, the glamorous pin-up girl Rita Hayworth was blasted in the media for her outbursts and tagged with alcoholic dementia. Then,

in 1980, a name was given to Rita's demon: Alzheimer's.

German physician Alois Alzheimer had identified the disease in 1906 when he correctly diagnosed a 40-year-old woman with the disease. But Alzheimer's had been forgotten by the medical community until the 1970s. After 20 years, in 1980, Hayworth was correctly diagnosed with Alzheimer's dementia ending a two-decade tortuous journey for her and her family.

Mom tells me that Rita Hayworth's popularity propelled widespread awareness of Alzheimer's dementia. I admit that I truly didn't understand fully about Alzheimer's — or dementia for that matter. I could hardly pronounce the name Alzheimer's correctly without practice. But what a relief it must have been to Hayworth's family to have a name for her condition. It had to be eye-opening for millions of other families when they heard about Rita. How dark and scary a journey it is for someone who does not have a name to the demons that invade their lives.

Understanding about dementia has increased since the 1970s. There are many types with different symptoms.

But there's still much work to do. My friend, Heather Comstock, eloquently said that we are now a generation having to come to terms with dementia, that we are still "newbies" in our collective understanding. I read that with so many more individuals living into their 90s, the medical community is researching if the increase in dementia is a natural part of aging or if it is attributed to other reasons.

Until then, we have a unique opportunity in Sheridan to understand what dementia is and to help those who are living with dementia.

It's not just the person with dementia who lives with dementia but also the people around them who support and care for them.

Last fall, the Center for a Vital Community launched dialogue on transforming Sheridan County into a dementia friendly community. What would that look like? Five initiatives emerged from that dialogue and work is underway. The initiatives are taking their infant steps but look for great transformation from their work and more information to come.

So, what's the message for now? Please ask for help if you are caring for someone with dementia or suspect dementia may be in your circle. Talk with your family, friends and medical professionals.

Need some direction? Call Heather Comstock at the Sheridan Senior Center at 675-1978. Heather and others are in the thick of the movement.

And thank you to the beautiful Rita Hayworth who not only gave us a body of film work to cherish but who guided us to recognizing Dr. Alzheimer's discovery that affects so many. You can better deal with a demon with a name.

LOIS BELL is the communications director at the Senior Center. 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.

SENIOR CENTER HAPPENINGS

• Caring for a loved one in the Tongue River Valley? Would you like to know resources are available to help you? A Caregiver Support Group meets on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 1 p.m. at the Tongue River Valley Community Center in Dayton. Please stop by. There is no charge and walkers are always welcome. For more

information, call or contact Michelle Keller, TRV Program Director for the Sheridan Senior Center at 655-9419.

• The Sheridan Community Land Trust has partnered with the Senior Center to offer six hikes this summer. There will not be a charge. Folks will meet at the Senior Center at 9 a.m. and proceed to the hike sites by carpool or own transportation.

Upcoming dates are: June 23; July 7 and 19; and Aug. 1 and 24. For more information, call Jean Harm at the Sheridan Senior Center, 672-2240.

• Knitting classes with Donna on Thursdays, June 16 – July 28, from 1-3 p.m. in the Sheridan Senior Center's Art Studio. Suggested contribution is \$5 per session paid to the instructor.



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Fun and Food

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Entrée Choice* or Soup Kiosk

Sun - Turkey Fillet	
Mon - Baked Steak Teriyaki	Mexican Chicken Soup
Tue - Parmesan Fish w/Tartar Sauce	Turkey Noodle Soup
Wed - Swedish Meatballs over Egg Noodles	Creamy Chicken Soup
Thu - Pork Wings	Black Bean Chili
Fri - Hawaiian Chicken	Mexican Beef Soup
Sat - Meat & vegetable Pizza	

• Home Delivered Meals

Mon - Pinochle	Double Deck	1:00 p.m.	Lobby
Tue - Sibley Lake Fishing Trip		8:30 a.m.	
Wed - Table Tennis		1:00 p.m.-3:30 p.m.	Dining Room
Thu - Knitting w/Donna		1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.	Art Studio
Sat - AARP Smart Driver Class		9:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m.	Community Room

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