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Barrington Area Council on Aging to reopen 'memory' program at Lake Zurich library

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Jan. 28--Starting in May, Barrington Area Council on Aging is restarting a care program for people with memory loss by working with Ela Area Public Library District to host a monthly session.

The "Memory Café" is a program designed for people with mild or early-stage memory loss and their caregivers to enjoy activities together that stimulate conversation, socializing and information-sharing, according to the BACOA website.

Administrators at Barrington Area Council on Aging say they also see the library in Lake Zurich as a "dementia-friendly" setting, as libraries are parts of the community serving as useful information centers.

The first Memory Café is May 21 and will meet once a month, officials said.

"We felt Ela library was a good and neutral location for the Café and it supports caregivers with resources," said Pam Pellizzari, BACOA memory programs director.

She also said Ela library is in the center of the council's service area, which covers Barrington, North Barrington, South Barrington, Lake Barrington, Barrington Hills, Deer Park and Tower Lakes.

The council helps 1,400 people annually with such programs as Meals on Wheels, support groups for seniors and caregivers, and counseling on insurance, benefits and Medicare, among others.

The original Memory Café started in 2016 at the White House community and cultural center in Barrington, but it ended when attendance declined as the care needs of members had changed, said Pellizzari, a certified dementia practitioner.

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Memory Café activities are still in the planning, she said, but they could include music, pet therapy and games.

Pellizzari takes registration for attendance and screens them by telephone to determine if the program is appropriate for individuals.

Christy Wagner, outreach coordinator for Ela Area Public Library, said her department had been concerned about serving "unseen" library patrons.

"Seventy percent of people living with cognitive issues are still living at home and we wanted to reach out to them more and their families," she said. "We also had been researching a Memory Café and visiting other cafes like in Crystal Lake when this opportunity came up to partner with Barrington Area Council, which we feel is meant to be."

She and Pellizzari said caregivers at times feel isolated by spending much time with their partners and stop going out to socialize and have fun.

At the library, kits are available and contain materials that start conversations between the elderly and caregivers, such as photographs of U.S. national parks and Broadway hits.

The kits also contain themed DVDs, music CDs or a Cubs baseball cap to illicit more memories of places and events for those with memory issues.

"We're trying to touch all the senses we can for people with memory issues. The use of music is an important component in both the caregiver kits and Memory Café," Wagner said.

In another program for individuals with memory loss, the Barrington Area Council on Aging is expanding its existing "A Day Out" sessions at Lutheran Church of the Atonement in Barrington. The program now has an art therapist, adding to the existing music and movement therapists.

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"Our goal here is to provide appropriate therapists and engaging activities," Pellizzari said. "When you have someone with dementia, you want focus on the abilities that remain and art, music and movement therapies help our group members express themselves."

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A Day Out allows caregivers to drop off their partners then go spend time running errands, seeing friends or relaxing by themselves, organizers explained.

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Meanwhile, those with mild cognitive-related issues engage in social activities and connect with others through use of board games, crafts, music and physical activities.

Lake Barrington resident Gail Collier has been married to her husband, Joe, for 48 years.

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He's in the intermediate stages of Alzheimer's disease, and they have been participating in A Day Out since May, Collier explained.

"I'm an artist and can spend time in my studio totally uninterrupted," she said.

Mary Salach's husband, Mike, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's a few years ago, and she needed guidance for herself and Mike -- who live in Inverness.

Without activities to do or places to go, people with the disease tend to sit around, sleep or just watch television, she said.

"They have to get organized and for Mike, this program is a lifesaver. He looks forward to it every week by meeting friends and doing such interesting things," said Salach.

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