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## New tools to help Alzheimer's

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Author: Randy Kraft, WFMZ.com Reporter

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Randy Kraft, 69 News

About 180 people were armed with the new tools to do a better job helping Alzheimer's patients – and themselves – after attending a first-ever Lehigh Valley Caregiver Conference Friday at the Best Western Hotel & Conference Center just north of Bethlehem.

Those attending were about evenly split between professional caregivers and family members who care for people with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

They learned that the entire family, including the patient, should be involved in implementing a plan for that patient's long-term care.

From keynote speaker Patti Kerr they also learned that embarking on the "journey" of caring for someone "disappearing behind the veil of Alzheimer's" can last four to eight years. She added: "There are individuals who have lived as long as 20 years." Kerr, a certified Alzheimer's educator, advised caregivers to focus on what they do right each day, not on moments when they get angry or upset, and to be "gentle and kind to yourself."

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She said caregivers need to realize those with Alzheimer's "are not doing any of this purpose. They are not disagreeing with you for the simple sake of starting an argument. It's up to us adjust our expectations. You can't change the diagnosis. You can't change their perception. And you can't control what they're thinking."

She also said: "They are focused most of the time on being in the present moment." and encouraged caregivers to share those moments. "Don't say 'remember' because chances are they don't and they can get upset. Don't insult or upset them by constantly saying 'of course, you remember.'"

Kerr got a knowing laugh from the audience when she said: "I'm sure all of you know you'll never win an argument with someone with Alzheimer's. Just let it go." She got the same reaction when she said: "Chances are

they are going to tell you what they really think."

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NEWS DIRECT FROM LEHIGH VALLEY BUSINESSES & GOV'T AGENCIES A Service from PR Newswire

Primary organizer of the conference was Karen Francis, a certified dementia practitioner who is admissions and marketing director at Arden Courts Memory Care Community near Allentown.

Francis said the Alzheimer's Association has an annual conference in King of Prussia, but it is too distant and inconvenient for many local caregivers to attend.

"This disease has become an epidemic," said Francis, adding that more than 25,000 people in Lehigh and Northampton counties have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or a related type of dementia.

She said planning for the conference already was well underway in March when well-known businessman Charles Snelling killed his wife, Adrienne, who had Alzheimer's, then committed suicide. The Snellings were 81. He was his wife's primary caregiver.

Francis said reporting by the local media romanticized Snelling's murder-suicide rather than focusing on telling other people where to get help when struggling to care for a loved one.

She said the Snellings were not in a support system that could have helped them. She stressed murder or suicide "is not the answer. I get really upset about it. This is a tragedy. He could have gotten help."

She said too many local people either don't know where to go for help or are reluctant to ask for help. She recommended one place to start is by calling the Alzheimer's Association's 24/7 help line at 800-272-3900.

Francis told those at the conference people are wrong if they think they don't really need any support. She said support groups are about learning as much as they are about supporting each other.

Francis was introduced to the audience as the conference "brainstormer" by Dr. Francis Salerno, associate chief of geriatrics at Lehigh Valley Health Network. He said another key organizer was Judith Stanczak, a deputy administrator at the Lehigh County Office of Aging and Adult Services.

Francis said she lost three of her favorite people to Alzheimer's, "most recently my father. I do know it is hard to watch someone you love lose their independence. But there is some reward in being able to give back to them what they have given to you."

Francis acknowledged caregivers find it hard to see the bright side of things when

constantly taking care of someone with the disease: "Maybe there are some days that it's impossible to find a bright side to things."

Kerr, the keynote speaker, is author of "I Love You...Who Are You?" – subtitled "Loving and Caring for a Parent with Alzheimer's."

Kerr, who lost both her mother and grandmother to Alzheimer's, said she wishes she had her 275-page book when she was caring for her mother. It includes tips based on interviews with more 100 caregivers, both professionals and family members.

She thanked family caregivers for attending, saying: "I know what it takes to get a day away from care giving."

Kerr offered many tips to make life easier for both patients and caregivers. For example, she made business cards stating: "This is my mother. She has Alzheimer's."

Thank you for your patience and understanding." She handed them out if her mother became loud or agitated in a restaurant or other public place: "People fear what they don't understand," she said, but added when she gave others a card, they became her allies in calming her mother.

Stressing the disease does not only strike the elderly, Kerr told a heart-rendering story about a 32-year-old man with Alzheimer's who was the father of three. Every morning his youngest 6-year-old child would say: "Daddy, do you remember who I am today?"

Salerno later led a conference session on "The Hazards of Hospitalization." Stanczak led another called "Find Peace of Mind." Francis led one called "Calming and Comforting Through the Senses."

Other conference speakers included Bob Marino, a board member of the Delaware Valley chapter of the Alzheimer's Association; Dr. Daniel Ray, chief of palliative medicine & hospice at Lehigh Valley Health Network; Dr. Robert Barraco, chief of geriatric trauma at Lehigh Valley Health Network; Dr. Bushar Iqbal Malik, medical director at St. Luke's Headache Center, and Atty. Sally Schoffstall.

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#### Local Headlines from PR Newswire

##### **Pennsylvania DCNR Names New Manager at Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center**

HARRISBURG, Pa., Wednesday, June 27, 10:33 AM

##### **Air Products to Broadcast Third Quarter Earnings Teleconference on July 24**

LEHIGH VALLEY, Pa., Tuesday, June 26, 2:19 PM

##### **Research Finds Pa. Kids 5 Times as Likely to Suffer Violence at Academically Failing Schools**

HARRISBURG, Pa., Tuesday, June 26, 8:47 AM

##### **Carnegie Mellon and Lehigh Lead in Launch Of New Program To Bolster Manufacturing Innovation**

PITTSBURGH, Monday, June 25, 12:04 PM

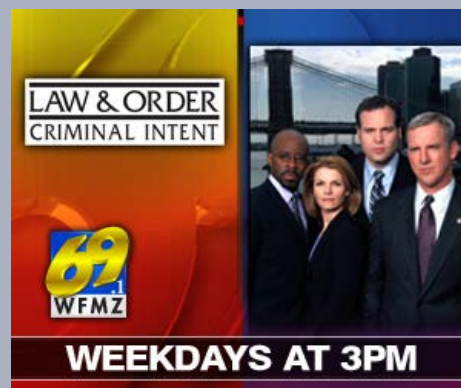
##### **Daichi Sankyo, Inc. Receives FDA Approval to Package Product at New Facility in Bethlehem, PA**

PARSIPPANY, N.J. and BETHLEHEM, Pa., Monday, June 25, 9:59 AM

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**Dana Kenney**

This was a fabulous conference and we are fortunate to have had it held in the Lehigh Valley. Thank you Karen Francis, and all, for making it happen. I and those who attended with me are looking forward to next year. I am almost done with Patti Kerr's book -- Who Are You? Loving and Caring for a Parent with Alzheimer's --and it is GREAT! While I have NOT had to deal first hand with Alzheimer's as a caregiver, I

### MORE LEHIGH VALLEY AREA NEWS

**Bethlehem's OraSure plays starring role in CDC pilot program**

**Easton administrators proposing a new tax for commuters**

**Campers with diabetes share experiences, learn lessons**

**Program educates students beyond what medical schools offer**

**Easton begins search for new superintendent, does not renew McGinley's contract**

**Man who murdered woman outside nightclub sentenced for raping child**

**Car plows into Dunkin' Donuts; 4 people rushed to hospitals**

**Berks woman's killer to serve additional time**

### LEHIGH CRIME HEADLINES

**Man who murdered woman outside nightclub sentenced for raping child**

**Officials: Puppy found tied to dumpster**

**Man arrested for copper theft at Bangor home**

**Berks man accused of attempting to spy on 2 other co-workers at DeSales**

**Man pleads guilty in drunk driving crash that killed baby**

**Police: Three in custody after gunfire, car chase**

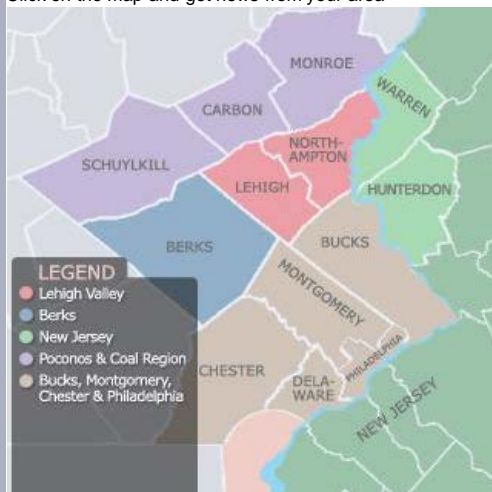
**Man linked to triple homicide arrested in drug raid**

**Judge's denial of appeal keeps serial killer on death row**

**Man pleads guilty to 2011 murder of mother**

### AREA NEWS

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### LATEST FROM THE NEWSROOM

**8:05 PM Bethlehem's OraSure plays starring role in CDC pilot program**

**7:06 PM Easton administrators proposing a new tax for commuters**

**6:06 PM Summer campers treated to day of fun in sun in Baseballtown**

**6:03 PM Golf tournament benefits people trying to overcome addiction**

**5:59 PM 70,000 may be cut off from cash assistance if Pa. budget passes**

**5:53 PM Suspect shot during attempted bank robbery pleads guilty**

**5:52 PM Pickup truck driver injured in crash on Route 61**

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How cruise lines fill all those unsold cruise cabins and how to get in on it. [More](#)

### 5 Early Signs of Alzheimer's



Worried about Alzheimer's? These 5 signs of Alzheimer's show before memory loss occurs. [More](#)



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Biographies & Appearances  
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Helpful Links  
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Pump Picks  
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Scoreboard  
H.S. Football Schedules  
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NFL  
NBA  
NCAA Football  
NCAA BB  
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Local Stocks  
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Freddy Awards  
Contests  
Music Monday  
At The Movies  
TV Listings  
Zany Facts and Wacky News

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Food and Recipes  
Family  
Money  
Auto  
Pump Picks  
Health and Education  
House and Home  
Travel Getaways  
Talk With Your Doctor  
Summer

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Calendar  
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Unsung Heroes  
Furry Friends  
Employment  
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Lost Pets

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