

## Lutheran Bridges Program Brings Comfort to Residents with Dementia

Jamestown Gazette | Jul 15, 2014 | Comments 0



Courtesy photos.

Left: Patty Cunningham, coordinator for the Bridges Program at Lutheran applies makeup to one of the participants, as part of their spa experience. The Bridges Program is a day program that specializes in the care of the person with dementia.

Right: Mark Polaski, activities coordinator for the Bridges Program at Lutheran takes a walk down memory lane with one of the participants, using pictures as a way to jog the memory.

Article Contributed by  
**Lutheran**

Dementia comes like a thief in the night slowly robbing its victims of their precious recent memories and steals the traits that gave them their personality and charm. Their loved ones miss their gentle touch and the way they made them laugh. Every 67 seconds someone in the United States falls victim to this cruel and unjust disease. "We know there is no cure at this time," said Tom Holt, Lutheran President and CEO, "But, there are many ways we can bring the person with dementia comfort and peace and help families to cope."

In March of 2013, Lutheran opened its new Bridges Program for residents with dementia. The program recently moved to a newly remodeled and spacious location that includes a kitchen, and other amenities to meet their growing needs. Today, 14 residents enjoy days filled with activities such as baking, singing, reminiscing and movement. Their families have peace of mind knowing their loved one is receiving specialized attention, enhancing their quality of life.

"We chose the name Bridges, because it speaks to making a connection for our residents," said Patty Cunningham, LPN, CDP, coordinator for the program. "We spend much of our time helping them connect to vivid memories from their past. They may not know the date or recognize a family member, but when they hear old familiar tunes, or see photos from history, or watch old movies, their memories are much clearer. It brings us great joy when they become engaged." Cunningham is a Certified Dementia Practitioner. She completed coursework from the National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners.

Because dementia also robs people of their ability to communicate, they have difficulty expressing their ideas, pain, frustration and fear, and will often begin to act out. "We get to know each person well and we learn what triggers changes in their behavior," Cunningham said. "Also, we take great pride in talking with the families to learn about their family life, careers, hobbies, likes and dislikes. All the information we gather is critical to their care plans. If someone was a woodworker, we find that he may enjoy building or putting things together. A housewife may find comfort in folding laundry or tending to a baby. We enter their world. We don't try to force them to understand ours." She said.

The Bridges team also includes an activities coordinator and a certified nursing assistant (C.N.A.). "Activities can help to prevent the progression of dementia and help to maintain range of motion," said Mark Polaski, activities coordinator for Bridges. "And, socializing can ward off loneliness and despair." The staff chooses activities that are dignified and that have meaning for each resident. According to the nursing staff, those who attend the Bridges Program have better appetites, improved sleep patterns and less behavioral challenges. "It's a win-win for everyone involved," Polaski said.

Archives Tags Popular

RSS Feed | Comments Feed

Get the latest updates via email.

Sign up for our  
Email Newspaper



### Jamestown Gazette's Latest Issue



Issue Date: July 21, 2014

### Advertisers



### Contributing Writers



Editor: Walt Pickat



Sports: Bill Burke



Down to Earth:  
JoAnne Tanner

Families are an important part of the Program. "Family members are welcome to come and share a meal or join in an activity," said Rhonda Teeter, C.N.A. and original member of the team. "They become part of our family and Bridges becomes their 'second' home. We're a very close knit group and it's a rewarding career."  
"We can see that the Program will continue to thrive," Holt said. "There is a growing need for this type of care in our community. We're proud of the staff and their willingness to expand their knowledge of dementia. As research develops and more information is available, we will continue to implement new ideas and stay on the leading edge of dementia care."

The Lutheran Home and Rehabilitation Center offers short term rehabilitation, the Bridges Dementia Program and skilled nursing. For more information about Lutheran or senior services call 665-4905 or log onto [www.lutheran-jamestown.org](http://www.lutheran-jamestown.org).



**Filed Under:** Community • Lutheran Social Services

**Tags:** bridges program • dementia • Lutheran • mark polaski • patty cunningham

**About the Author:** The Jamestown Gazette is a locally owned, FREE weekly community newspaper. Located in Jamestown New York, The Jamestown Gazette is designed for the interests and concerns of Southern Chautauqua County's residents and merchants. We build a sense of community and pride by providing residents and businesses with positive stories and timely information that spotlights local citizens, organizations and businesses cooperating and working together.



Faith Matters:  
Scott Hannon



Faith Matters:  
Shawn Hannon



Join Me in the Kitchen:  
Vicki McGraw



Life and Times  
of a Modern Housewife:  
Katrina Fuller



Finding your Family:  
Janet Wahlberg



### World News

- ▶ Venezuelan ex-intelligence head faces drug charges in U.S
- ▶ Rival Libyan militias clash in Tripoli, Benghazi
- ▶ At least 15 killed by shelling of Gaza school; toll exceeds 760
- ▶ Wreckage of Air Algerie plane carrying 116 people found in Mali
- ▶ Ukrainian prime minister quits, parties force new election

### Movie Showtimes

- ▶ Dipson Lakewood Cinema 6
- ▶ Park 60 Drive-In
- ▶ Dipson Chautauqua 2
- ▶ Dipson Warren Mall Cinemas

### Follow Us



### Sponsored Ads