

FEATURE

Day center offers families break from caregiving



Seniors
MONTHLY FEATURE

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In August 1994, Mary "Mick" Dunn's father, Stanton Dunn, passed away. So she moved in with her mother, June, in

Farmington to take care of her. A month later, her mother suffered a massive stroke that paralyzed her left side, and Mick began taking care of her around-the-clock.

"I was taking care of her all day, and working nights, and it was just impossible," Mick Dunn said, adding that she was awake as much as 21 hours a day. "It was unhealthy for me and for her."

About a year ago, the mother and daughter read a notice in a bulletin of St. Patrick's Church in Victor. It told of a program called Home & Heart, operated by St. Ann's Home, a private, not-for-profit nursing home in Irondequoit. Home & Heart is an off-site senior center — in the basement of Sacred Heart Cathedral's rectory — open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

June Dunn now attends the program one day a week. During the rest of the week she receives care from a home-health aide and her daughter. Home & Heart clients like Dunn enjoy crafts, exercises and sing-alongs as well as field trips and social events, according to Mary E. Mc-

Carthy, St. Ann's director of adult day services.

"I like everything we do, and the exercises are wonderful," June Dunn said.

Her participation in Home & Heart has enabled her daughter to gain some free time for herself.

"I think it's an excellent program," Mick Dunn said. "My mother (is) around people her own age. It's good for her and good for me."

Making the program a win-win proposition for older adults and their caregivers was the purpose in starting Home & Heart, according to McCarthy. The program has been so successful at Sacred Heart that St. Ann's may consider working with other parishes interested in hosting a senior day program, she said.

She noted that Home & Heart originated in the parallel desires of St. Ann's and the diocese to help those who must regularly care for older adults, but find themselves overwhelmed by their duties. In the early '90s, St. Ann's Home was pondering how it could reach out to the elderly and their caregivers in the community, she said.

At the same time, McCarthy was on a diocesan committee examining elderly care issues for the 1993 Diocesan Synod. Committee members who represented Sacred Heart suggested using their rectory for an elderly day center, McCarthy said. Home & Heart opened in October 1995.

Home and Heart is geared toward older



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Flossie Johnson works on her Fourth of July boutonniere craft project at St. Ann's Home & Heart July 3.

adults and adults with disabilities who need continual supervision but not intensive care, McCarthy said. Most of the program's participants — up to 15 a day — suffer from some sort of memory loss or a physical ailment, but are nonetheless able to take part in numerous activities, she said.

It costs \$37.50 per day to attend the program, McCarthy said, and "scholarship" money is available for low-income clients.

She added that the program is a low-cost alternative to professional care in a client's own home or in a nursing home. For example, she said, a home nurse may charge as much as \$16 an hour.

Currently, 45 clients attend Home & Heart, she said, adding that most are there three days a week. About two-thirds of the participants are Catholics, she said, pointing out that many of them attend the daily noon Mass at Sacred Heart, and some are in a prayer group.

June Dunn, for one, appreciates that aspect of the program.

"I enjoy going to Mass," she said. "I wasn't even going until I came here."

McCarthy emphasized, however, that the program is open to all older adults and adults with disabilities regardless of their faith, and that a number of participants prefer to take part in other activities when the Catholic clients go to Mass.

Home & Heart's site coordinator, Debra C. Bitetti, said the clients' caregivers often feel a bit reluctant at first to leave their loved ones at the center. But the clients tend to bond well with one another, she said, a phenomenon that can allay the worry — and even the guilt — that some caregivers experience.

"After they do leave their parent or other family member, (the caregivers) can see that this person is able to be happy," she said. "This gives caregivers the break that they need. A lot of times, this may be the only break that they get."

To learn more about Home & Heart, call 716/254-7760.

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"In the past year and a half, Harry has made many friends attending Home & Heart. He looks forward to his time 'out' chatting with friends and taking part in the recreational activities. The caring, compassionate staff make him feel at home and really understand his own individual needs."

Who can benefit from Home & Heart?

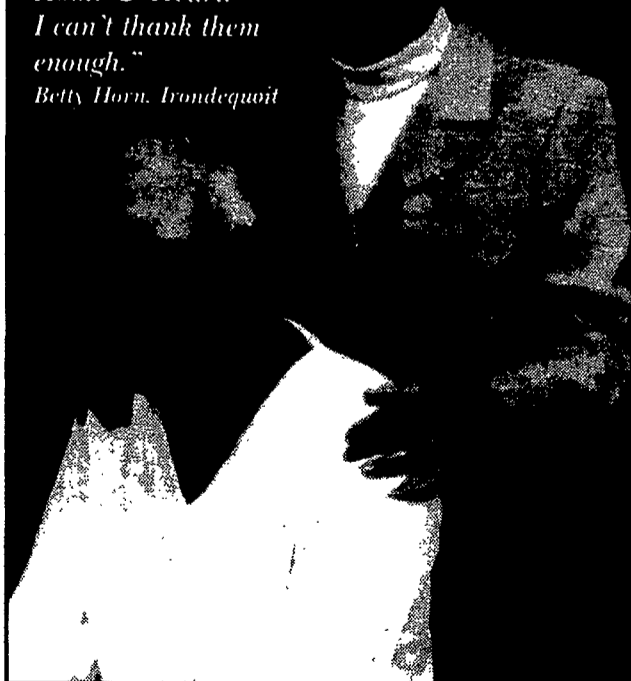
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Harry & Betty Horn

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