



*Wilma Buescher, resident. Puppies being trained as seeing-eye dogs for the blind visited Mill Creek and brought big smiles to all residents.*

# Mill Creek Alzheimer's Special Care Center

## A Home-Made Environment

BY PENNY ZIMMERMAN-WILLS

AT MILL CREEK ALZHEIMER'S Special Care Center, it's all about the comfort of home. The facility, which is specifically designed to provide care for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and memory loss, resembles a large house more than a long-term care facility; it's decorated with warm antiques and cherished family heirlooms.

But don't let the elegant and inviting

atmosphere be misleading. Around-the-clock care and attention is provided to each resident on an individualized basis. Programs are designed to build on their strengths.

### Welcome home

One step inside the facility, located at 3319 Ginger Creek Dr. in Springfield,

and it's immediately apparent that the goal is to provide a home-like environment. One resident plays his harmonica in the lobby, while another has her hair done for an upcoming family wedding in the beauty shop. The warm atmosphere is further achieved through antique furniture, cabinets displaying vintage china, comfortable leather

PHOTO BY PENNY ZIMMERMAN-WILLS



Top: Lisa Wernsing, Administrator and Amanda Drenman, Health Services Director reviewing paperwork at the front nurses station.

Right: Hazel Thompson, resident, and Elvis Himselvis. Elvis entertained the residents for Valentine's Day in the front dining room.



chairs and built-in cabinetry housing televisions and books.

"We're just like a big family," says Lisa Wernsing, administrator. "We give Alzheimer's patients a place to go where there is staff who can relate and deal with them. We give them dignity and respect and the best life possible."

Residents are encouraged to function at their highest level and activities are structured to maintain each resident's skills and abilities. Music, singing, baking and craft projects are not only fun activities, but designed to enhance the residents' lives. Exercise programs and pet visits also are an important part of the daily routine.

The facility, which opened February 2006, features a sunroom, a beauty salon, a dining room overlooking a pond and other amenities. Currently, 30 residents live at the 66-bed facility.

The facility also has many features designed with its residents in mind—such as motion-detector lights in each room and closet shelves (which are easier for residents to arrange their clothes on than hanging rods).

### Staff training

A distinctive program offered at the facility takes a holistic approach

to care for individuals struggling with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. Staff members are required to complete a "Meaningful Moments" course, where they acquire the necessary skills to meet the diverse needs of these special residents. The staff focuses on psychological, social and spiritual needs that include connection to family, life roles, coping with loss, special care needs, non-verbal communication, confusing and difficult behaviors, loneliness and depression, meaningful activities and successful moments.

The program strongly emphasizes activities. The success of each meaningful moment is determined by the resident's sense of well-being. A biography board hangs outside each resident's room, which weaves the tale of their life story, with photos, childhood memories, education, work history,

# Alzheimer's Disease Rates Rise

The greatest risk factor for Alzheimer's is increasing age.

Someone develops Alzheimer's every 72 seconds, according to a new Alzheimer's Association report.

More than 5 million people in the United States live with Alzheimer's—a 10 percent increase from the previous prevalence nationwide estimate of 4.5 million.

Alzheimer's is now the seventh leading cause of death in the country and fifth leading cause of death for those over 65.

As the prevalence of Alzheimer's grows, so does the cost to the nation. The direct and indirect costs of Alzheimer's and other dementias amount to more than \$148 billion annually.

Without a cure or effective treatments to delay the onset or progression of the disease, the prevalence could soar to 7.7 million people with the disease by 2030—more than the population of 140 of the 236 United Nations countries.

Source: Alzheimer's Association



*Residents of Mill Creek have fun with a parachute and ball in the Lakeview Room. This activity gives the residents exercise as well as helping improve their hand/eye coordination.*



*Dennis Smith, maintenance director and Louise Giordano, resident. Dennis is always making the ladies smile.*



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hobbies and other information designed to spark conversation.

Personalized services include activities, such as exercise; visits with pets and children; holiday parties; music and supervised outings; meals; laundry and housekeeping services; a beauty and barber shop; and enhanced care support, including pharmaceutical services, continence care, nutritional support and diabetic management.

Plans this summer call for an outing to New Salem State Park in Petersburg. Residents enjoy trips to the bowling alley, the zoo, area farms, city museums and picnics. Warm weather cook outs, large holiday meals shared with family members, dessert parties, baseball parties and visiting musicians are routine.

“It’s a great place to work,” says Wernsing, who has been licensed since 1984 and also has managed skilled nursing facilities. She predicts that more similar facilities will be opening in the future, because of increased demand. “There is a definite need,” she says.

Mill Creek is owned by JEA Senior Living, a privately owned and operated management and development company based in Vancouver, Washington. Currently, JEA Senior Living owns and/or operates 18 facilities in six states, including Illinois.

Jerry Erwin, founder of JEA Senior Living, has developed, owned and managed nursing homes, retirement facilities, assisted living and Alzheimer’s special care centers for more than 35 years. In 1986, Erwin and his partners decided to sell their nursing homes and focus solely on retirement and assisted living. He also started his own management company, Jerry Erwin Associates. From 1986 to 1990, he focused on retirement and assisted living until his own mother’s struggle with Alzheimer’s made him realize the need for quality Alzheimer’s care. ■

**About the author**

*Penny Zimmerman-Wills is director of communications for Illinois Health Care Association. She has been a writer, editor and public relations professional for more than 20 years.*