

Remembering those who may forget



By Tony Pearson

A flower acts as a symbol of the Alzheimer's Association of Canada. Appropriately enough, it is the forget-me-not. So for six straight years, the Alzheimer's Society, working with the Bancroft and Area Association of Realtors, has staged a Bancroft "walk for memories," not only to raise funds for local programs, but to ensure that those with dementia are not forgotten.

There is good news and bad news with respect to Alzheimer's and other dementias. The bad news is that as our society ages, dementias will become more prevalent. Currently, about three quarters of a million Canadians are affected.

Within the next decade and a half, that number is expected to grow to two million. And for every person afflicted, more are affected, as family and friends step into the role of caregiver. In all, nearly 500 millions hours of volunteer care are contributed every year.

The good news is that more help is available than ever before.

There is now medical assistance, in the form of pharmaceuticals, that can slow the onset of the disease. And there are local programs to help.

The local branch of the Alzheimer's Society has an extensive library of resources - not just pamphlets or manuals or videos, but people and support groups who can offer the resource of personal experience.

Other organizations are also pitching in to help. For example, the Ontario Provincial Police are working with the Alzheimer's Society on the development of "Project Lifesaver."

This addresses a very specific danger: 60 per cent of people with dementia will wander away from home at least once. Half of those who are not found within 24 hours are at risk of serious injury or even death.

Project Lifesaver works to get individuals in danger equipped with a tracking wristband, which alerts a search and rescue teams and directs them to the area of its signal.

A number of other Bancroft groups and businesses pitch in to help the Alzheimer's Society.

Gold sponsors include Leveque Brothers, Foodland, Bancroft IDA and Shoppers pharmacies, York River Chiropractic, Royal Lepage, Bird's Creek Farm Supply, the Teddy Bear Restaurant, and the Fulfords. Other major sponsors are Vance Motors, Century 21, Re-Max, Car Quest, McMichael Jewellers, Bowes & Cocks, North Hastings Family Pharmacy, Kelly Homes, and the Public School Elementary Teachers, as well as Tait Homes, Pappy Auto Service, The Auto Clinic and Alice's Pantry.

As the society's slogan states, such groups "were there for those who are still here."

In all, this year's walk raised more than \$26,000 for programs and resources, with contributions still coming in - another great outcome of Alzheimer's Awareness Month.