

South Senior



Shore News

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Recognizing "World Alzheimer's Day"

A Dementia Friendly Massachusetts

By Robert Larkin

MILTON - Imagine if your mother, in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, became disoriented while out doing errands and made her way, scared and visibly agitated to a nearby bank, convenience store or town hall. How would you want those employees, customers and passersby to respond to her? With more than 120,000 individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias in Massachusetts alone, the time for a better understanding of dementia is now.

People with progressive memory loss related to Alzheimer's, Parkinson's or other diseases most often know that they are slipping and are very likely terrified by it. They may feel embarrassed and angry when they exhibit confusion in public places. The social stigma of dementia causes shame and isolation, yet maintaining social connections is a crucial element in helping people cope with their memory loss.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we all knew how to better assist and communicate with people with dementia? This is why Senior Living Residences (SLR) has launched Dementia Friendly Massachusetts, a public education initiative intended to combat the social stigma and misconceptions that accompany cognitive impairments by arming communities, organizations and businesses across the state with the tools to educate members and employees.

The Dementia Friendly Movement is a small but growing worldwide initiative. At SLR we are doing our part to spread the cause. We launched our Dementia Friendly program in early 2014 by partnering with the City of Westfield, MA to make it the first Dementia Friendly City on the east coast of the United States. Since then the program has grown by leaps and bounds, spreading across the entire state with organizations, community officials and first responders embracing the mission.

We believe that becoming dementia friendly starts with education. SLR is fortunate to have experts in Alzheimer's disease and memory loss all across the Commonwealth, and with more than 25 years of experience and a trusted reputation for providing research-based assisted living and Alzheimer's care, we are in a position to share our expertise on this issue.

Over the past two years, we have developed a robust and interactive Dementia Awareness training, which can be customized for key industries including caregivers, first responders and realtors. We've also constructed a CEU program for nurses and social workers and created several excellent fact sheets that can be downloaded for free from our website, DementiaFriendlyMass.org. Our team leaders have conducted hundreds of trainings across the state, many for police officers, firefighters, hospital workers, VNA nurses, nursing home staff and of course, for our own employees.

In honor of this year's World Alzheimer's Day, being held on September 21st, we are asking you to help us spread Dementia Friendly Massachusetts. While our Boston and South Shore area communities including Standish Village, Compass on the Bay, Neville Place and Cornerstone at Canton are actively advancing Dementia Friendly Massachusetts in their communities, we cannot do it alone. We have recently created a Train-the-Trainer Program to take this initiative to the next level by equipping local organizations and businesses with the tools they need to conduct dementia training on their own. To help create additional awareness we are issuing decals to businesses and organizations who go through the dementia awareness training. Look for these decals throughout your communities. It's my hope that they will be a beacon of public support, compassion and hope for those living in our midst with dementia.

Our seniors built our communities. They have given of their time, talent and treasure to volunteer for our nonprofit organizations and



causes, to work in our businesses, and to serve on our community boards. I personally feel a great debt of gratitude for our seniors, and I know so many others who share my view. We owe it to our older residents to help them feel welcome, safe and connected to their communities. This is what Dementia Friendly Massachusetts is all about - neighbors taking the time to learn about what dementia is and how to better support and communicate with those we know personally or come into contact with at our local stores, churches, businesses and municipal offices. Let's work together to create more "dementia friendly" communities to support those living with Alzheimer's and other cognitive impairments, helping them maintain their community connections and their quality of life.

Please visit www.DementiaFriendlyMass.org for more information or join the discussion on Twitter at [#DementiaFriendlyMass](https://twitter.com/DementiaFriendlyMass).



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For 25 years, Senior Living Residences has been providing Massachusetts seniors with assisted living options and research-based Alzheimer's treatment programming.

The company currently manages 12 assisted living communities across Massachusetts including Standish Village, Compass on the Bay and the newly opened Cornerstone at Canton. Robert Larkin is president and owner. For more information on Senior Living Residences, you may visit www.SeniorLivingResidences.com.