

The Westfield News

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Memory Café, Virtual Training Experience Helps Community Understand Dementia

September 15, 2016 Lori Szepelak

WESTFIELD-Beth Cardillo, M.Ed., LSW, and her staff at Armbrook Village on North Road are encouraging community members to join the “dementia friendly movement.”

“We are proud of partnering with the City of Westfield to take on the challenge of becoming dementia friendly,” said Cardillo, adding Westfield was the first city on the East Coast to receive the designation. Cardillo serves as executive director at Armbrook Village.

On Friday, Alice Bonner, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, secretary of the Executive Office of Elder Affairs for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, will visit the Westfield Senior Center from 9 to 10 a.m. to recognize the key leaders who have been instrumental in this effort. As part of her remarks, Bonner will discuss the acceleration of the

Dementia Friendly Massachusetts Initiative to activate dementia-friendly communities at the local level across the state.

The public is invited to attend Friday’s festivities which also includes a “2 for \$2 Pancake Breakfast” hosted by the Westfield Council on Aging.

As Cardillo sees more patients with Alzheimer’s in their early 50’s in her role at Armbrook Village, she notes the urgency of educating area residents on understanding what dementia is and how it differs from common perceptions.

“Becoming dementia friendly starts with education,” she said.

One of Cardillo’s signature programs – the Dementia Experience – was created in conjunction with Senior Living Residences (SLR) of Boston which professionally manages Armbrook Village.



Beth Cardillo, M.Ed., LSW, executive director at Armbrook Village in Westfield, has launched a Memory Café which is open to the public.

Senior Living Residences envisions towns and cities where residents are educated about dementia, organizations, business owners and municipal employees are trained on how to assist customers with memory loss, and people with dementia can feel safer and remain independent for as long as possible, according to Cardillo, adding that SLR has created a public education campaign titled *Dementia Friendly Massachusetts*.

“To help create a ‘Dementia Friendly Westfield’ we offer free interactive dementia awareness training and our *Dementia Experience* to community groups, businesses and other organizations in the Greater Westfield area,” said Cardillo.

Cardillo explained that the training seminar typically lasts two hours is geared toward customer-facing staff and the public.

“An understanding of the impact of dementia and how to support those living with it can make a huge difference,” said Cardillo.



Props are used during the Dementia Experience which is offered through Armbrook Village in Westfield.,

Seminar topics include recognizing dementia, experiencing the challenges a person living with dementia, their family and caregivers may face, and the stigma of dementia and how to combat it. Additionally, Cardillo and her staff provide positive and appropriate communication tips for working with people with dementia, as well as practical tools and techniques to support people with dementia.

The *Dementia Experience* training is geared toward elder care professionals, first responders, family members and caregivers and is divided into four stations – cooking, getting dressed, filling one’s medication box and managing finances.

“This training uses sensory modifications and role-playing activities to depict very real situations that a person living with mild cognitive impairment or dementia would face,” said Cardillo. Cardillo is so passionate about these training programs that for larger groups or businesses she can provide on-site training.

“With more than 120,000 people in Massachusetts living with dementia, and with one in four individuals undiagnosed, every one of us can help,” said Cardillo.

Cardillo and Julie Waniewski, director of community relations, have worked with a variety of groups to date including the Westfield Fire Department, Greater Westfield Chamber of Commerce, Westfield Council on Aging, City Hall employees and nursing students at Westfield State University.

“People have some of the same reactions after the training,” said Cardillo. “People understand the need to be more patient and slow their pace down when talking to someone with dementia.”

Tina Gorman, executive director of the Westfield Council on Aging, echoed those sentiments.

“Actually living the dementia challenge through the Dementia Experience was invaluable for the Council on Aging staff,” said Gorman. “The training was a true eye-opening experience and will be invaluable for family members, volunteers who work with older adults, and anyone involved in customer service.”

The latest partnership that Cardillo has forged in conjunction with the Dementia Friendly Westfield initiative is with Gorman to bring the Memory Café concept to Westfield.

“Westfield’s Memory Café welcomes those living with memory loss or dementia and their care partners, family, and friends, on the second Wednesday of every month from 2 to 3:15 p.m. at Armbrook Village,” said Cardillo. “Our Memory Café provides a safe and supportive gathering place for friends with varying levels of memory loss to relax and enjoy conversation with their care partners and family over refreshments and entertainment.”

Cardillo added that the Memory Café is not a support group and there is no pre-registration required.

“Since we opened the café during the summer, Tina has been invaluable in publicizing the Memory Café and we have had entertainment ranging from Sarah the Fiddler to Noah Lis, a pianist and vocalist who appeared on the television show *The Voice*.”

In October, guitarist and vocalist Lisa Pernice will be performing at the Memory Café.

In the coming months, Cardillo expects “fun, judgement-free” activities to continue including games, art projects, and food-related themes including ice cream socials.

“Once a month a caregiver can take their loved one to the Memory Café and also enjoy the outing too,” said Cardillo. “The Memory Café is one of the ways to give back to the community which is important to us.”

Cardillo added that The Compass Memory Support Neighborhood at Armbrook Village hosts Hearts, Hugs & Hope, an Alzheimer’s Association Support Group, on the last Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. Light refreshments are served and an RSVP to (413) 568-0000 is requested. Occasional special guest speakers are featured at the gatherings.

For more information about the training programs or the Memory Café, call (413) 568-0000 or email