

Central Jersey FOCUS
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Courier News

A weekly look at the people, events and institutions that shape the news in Central Jersey.

Adult center planning to expand for aging needs

By PETER N. SPENCER Staff Writer

BRIDGEWATER - As a supervising nurse at Somerset Medical Center in Somerville, Terry Hatch spent more than 32 years caring for thousands of people. But when Alzheimer's disease began to take hold of her mind six years ago, it was Hatch who needed care.

Luckily, her husband, Steve Hatch, who had to retire early to take on the full-time responsibility of his wife's well-being, has had the help of the Adult Day Center of Somerset County.

The Bridgewater-based center provides an alternative to long-term "institutionalization" by providing daytime care for senior citizens and handicapped people in a group setting. Steve Hatch, Executive Director Jeff Macaulay and members of the Adult Day Center's fund-raising campaign visited the Courier News last week to discuss their philosophy of care, the current state of elder care in New Jersey and plans to build a new, state-of-the-art facility near Commerce Bank Ballpark to help accommodate the needs of Somerset County's aging population.

Macaulay said he founded the center in 1976 in the basement of a church in Bound Brook to give people such as Terry Hatch an "opportunity to live out their lives with dignity" in a social and therapeutic environment, and to ease the burden of caregivers such as Steve Hatch.

"I think we have an obligation as a society to help him care for her the way that he wants to. ... It's all just common sense," Macaulay said. A year after it was started, the center moved into the PeopleCare Center in Bridgewater, a former school converted to a home for a number of social service agencies. The private, nonprofit adult day-care organization provides care for up to 60 people per day, six days a week, from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Members of the organization spend their days in programs offering crafts, card games, conversation, lunch, events held with the children's day-care center, and other forms of socialization. The center has 20 staff members and provides transportation, medical services such as podiatry and speech, occupational and physical therapy, an on-site nurse, a case worker, an activities coordinator and a dietician.

And all of it is just a fraction of the cost of other long-term care alternatives. Clients of

the Adult Day Center pay from \$15 to \$40 per day, depending on how much they can afford. If they visit the maximum five days per week, that's \$13,000 per year, compared with the average cost of a nursing home, which is more than \$70,000 per year, or assisted living, which can cost more than \$36,000 per year, according to Adult Day Center statistics.

About 20 percent of the center's \$1 million budget comes from Somerset County United Way funding, and the rest is pieced together from local, state, federal and private funding, Macaulay said. But because of a growing demand for elder care in Somerset County, the Adult Day Center has a waiting list that can reach up to 75 people at a time and stretch for nine months, officials said. Experts say that demand, along with the senior-citizen population, will boom in the next decade.

According to the most recent census data, Somerset County has more than 46,000 people age 60 and older - about 15 percent of the county's current population. Based on Department of Labor projections, by 2012 the number of residents 60 and older is expected to jump to more than 73,000, or 20 percent of the county population. Dale Florio, chairman of the Adult Day Center's fund-raising campaign, hopes the expansion and relocation of the Adult Day Center to a new 15,000-square-foot facility on an 18.6-acre lot on East Main Street will significantly decrease the waiting list, help meet the future needs of local seniors and provide an innovative model for senior care statewide.

The new Adult Day Center campus will replicate a "town square" setting, complete with storefronts and an open courtyard, and double the capacity of the current center. It will have additional services with a caregiver resource center, theater, kitchen, library and music room.

"It will give the family a place to flourish. I've never seen anything like it before," Florio said.

Through private donations, the fund-raising campaign has raised about 40 percent of the projected \$2 million Adult Day Center officials will need to complete the new center construction. The official public portion of the campaign will begin June 11 with a "Celebrity Doodle Auction" at the Westgate Corporate Center in Liberty Corner. Hand-drawn and signed doodles created by the likes of Alec Baldwin, Glenn Close, David Hyde Pierce and Regis Philbin will be sold at the cocktail and hors d'oeuvres event, fund-raising counsel Jayna Tutino said.

AT A GLANCE

Current Adult Day Center:

Rented space in the PeopleCare Center
120 FINDERNE AVE., BRIDGEWATER

- Size: 7,000 square feet
- Rooms: Four classrooms, shared cafeteria
- Capacity: Up to 60 members per day, 90-95 members per week
- Employees: 16 full time, 4 part time

- Number of programs/activity areas: 3
- Annual budget: \$1 million Proposed Adult Day Center:
- To be built next to red parking lot of Commerce Bank Ballpark
- East Main Street, Bridgewater
- Size: 15,000 square feet
- Rooms: 12, plus open-air atrium; includes caregiver resource center, theater, home kitchen and game room
- Capacity: Up to 100 members per day, 175 per week
- Employees: 22 full time, 3 part time
- Programs/activity areas: More than 7, including a caregiver resource center, theater, home kitchen and a game room
- Number of programs/activity areas: 7
- Annual budget: \$1.75 million

To support the Adult Day Center of Somerset County, or for more information, call (908) 725-0068 or e-mail info@adultdaycenter.org.

COURIER NEWS PHOTO BY JACK HOWARD

Terry Hatch is a client at the Adult Day Center and is taken care of by her husband, Steve.