

Citizen-Times
Tuesday, November 6, 2007
By Barbara Hootman
Black Mountain News

CANDLELIGHT REFLECTIONS

Event Honors Alzheimer's patients' caregivers

Black Mountain Neuro-Medical Treatment Center is well aware of the sacrifices made by care givers of people with Alzheimer's disease. On Thursday, the center, formally the Black Mountain Center, will participate in a statewide event to honor these caregivers. And every day of the year, the center offers a respite care program to give caregivers temporary relief from the burdens of caring for loved ones who need constant supervision.

The Thursday event, called Candlelight Reflections, was initiated by the N.C. Family Caregiver Support Program and the state's Alzheimer's Support Network to honor and support family caregivers of people living with debilitation conditions, including Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. At locations across the state, candlelight ceremonies recognize their sacrifices.

Black Mountain Neuro-Medical Treatment Center will serve as a host site for eastern Buncombe County. The event, which begins at 6 p.m., is open to the public.

Candlelight Reflections brings together Alzheimer's families, friends and supporters.

"Caregivers are such special people who deserve all the honor that we can give them," said Kirsten Mitchell, admission coordinator for the center.

The respite care program is another way to honor those caregivers. "I think (respite care) is as important or more so than our residential program, Mitchell said. "At any given time we serve from 50 –1 100 respite families. Some use our service short term and some longer terms, depending on their needs."

A personalized and personal service, the respite program at Black Mountain Neuro-Medical Treatment Center was created to help relieve caregiver stress by offering professional care at the center on a temporary basis. Caregivers can take loved ones who need care to the center for brief periods and have time to recharge their batteries and attend other concerns.

"The respite program is a safety net for our caregivers," Mitchell said. "There are few requirements for use. The patient has to be medically stable, be pivotal and be able to bear weight. Each patient receives 24-hour supervision." Respite care requires a minimum stay of two nights at the center and may be used for up to 30 days a year per patient.

Aaron Harden uses the respite service. It allows him to continue to take care of his wife, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, at home the rest of the time, while he also participates occasionally in local craft shows, where he sells bonsai trees. He has been part of the craft show circuit for 12 years.

"I've used the respite service about five times with Dorothy, and it is great," he said. "The service relieves me of caregiving responsibilities for a few days. It allows me to go to close-by craft shows and continue to sell my bonsai trees. Dorothy used to go with me to the shows, but her focus isn't long enough for her to enjoy them anymore. I go to just one-day events, where I used to go for two to three days."

The center's caregivers have also won over Harden's wife. "Dorothy likes those who work at the respite care and never doesn't want to go," Harden said. "She considers them family. The respite care frees my mind. It is the only place that I would recommend. The Lord gives me the strength to do this.

Barbara Bryant works for the Blue Ridge Park Service and takes care of her mother, who has early Alzheimer's disease.

"I began to use the respite service at Black Mountain Neuro-Medical Treatment Center in 2005, and it is a lifesaver for me," she said. "My mother loves to go there, and I find the whole staff to be very professional and personable. I leave my mother with no concerns."

The service is as important to Bryant as it is to her mother, she said. "The respite service has allowed me to continue to work, occasionally be out of town, and continue to keep my mother in my home. It provides me with a needed rest break. It helps me be a better caregiver.

"Mother sees a visit to the respite care as a visit to her second home," Bryant said. "It is a minivacation for her. She enjoys the staff and the other clientele. ... Also, the service has given me a deeper appreciation and widened my perspective of the different stages of life that we go through."

The candlelight Reflections event on Thursday will begin with hors d'oeuvres at 6 p.m. The remembrance ceremony starts at 6:30 p.m.

For additional information on the event call Gail West, assistant director, at 669-3112,. For information about respite care, call Kirsten Mitchell at 669-3379.