

# Keeping a home livable



**Coping with Alzheimer's** Judy Becker clears the table at home for her husband, Andy, who is in the early to moderate stages of Alzheimer's disease. J. B. Forbes | Post-Dispatch

## Families get tips on helping loved ones with dementia

By Margaret Gillerman  
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Almost three years ago, Andy Becker's memory started slipping. He had trouble finding his direction and wondered whether he should continue driving.

When Becker and his wife received the diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, Judy Becker wanted to learn all she could and what she could do to keep him at their home in Ladue and provide him with the best quality of life there.

She found answers she needed from Memory Care Home Solutions, a not-for-profit orga-

nization that started to work with families last year to improve time at home for people with Alzheimer's and other memory impairments, and for their caregivers.

"For people with Alzheimer's and dementia, staying at home in a familiar place with familiar faces makes therapeutic sense," says executive director and founder Lisa Baron, who was driven to take action through her experience with her mother-in-law's Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's affects about 4.5 million people in the United States and usually develops in people age 65 or older. Although it's the most common

cause of dementia, there are other conditions that may cause a neurological disorder that impairs the ability to think, speak, reason, remember and move.

Through hands-on training classes, home visits and individually tailored care strategies, Memory Care Home Solutions teaches coping strategies. It seeks to reduce stress for the caregivers; transform homes into healthy, safe and comforting places for people with memory loss; promote their independence; improve communication; and reduce emergency room visits.

## Program benefits

**Training sessions.** Caregivers learn what behavior to expect at different stages of Alzheimer's, and how to deal with it.

**In-home consultations.** Caregivers get advice on what changes could be made for the safety or convenience of the patient.

**Follow-up phone calls.** At months 3, 9 and 12, caregivers get an outlet to share concerns.

# Program aids families at home

► Since last fall, the organization has served 240 families. It is doubling the number of caregivers it serves each month.

"It will provide a better environment for the patient and also will save money, because hospitalization and skilled nursing facilities are expensive," says Dr. William Peck, one of the organization's advisors and director of the Center for Health Policy at Washington University.

Baron said the program used a sliding scale fee system and offered financial assistance for its services, which cost about \$50 for a home visit and assessment plus \$50 for a comprehensive written plan of care. The cost for training sessions are similarly priced. Caregiver training is offered in University City, the Creve Coeur area, Hazelwood and Kirkwood with a new location under development in Bellefontaine Neighbors.

At each location, a home-like

apartment or room is remodeled with devices and gadgets that can help make life safer and more comfortable for people with Alzheimer's, dementia or memory impairment. If a family prefers, training may take place inside the home.

For each family, the Memory Care program offers:

- Caregiver training sessions, which address a variety of ways to improve communication and involve loved ones in daily activities. Caregivers also learn what behaviors to expect at various stages of Alzheimer's — such as hiding and hoarding things, wandering or becoming disoriented at night. For example, Becker learned that if her

husband asks a question many times, she should answer each time and not lose patience.

- In-home consultations. Visits are usually made by program director Stefanie Osiek, who

recommends specific changes for safety or convenience to make life easier for the home-bound person. These might include adding assistant devices such as motion-activated faucets, door alarms, shatterproof plates and written reminders. The Beckers put up signs on the cabinets and in the bathroom to remind Andy Becker to shave and use the toothbrush. They bought a higher mattress to make getting out of bed easier and added pillows under the sofa.

- Comprehensive written plans for care.

Follow-up phone calls are made at months 3, 9 and 12 with visits at months one and 6.

"By keeping in touch with the

families, we are able to hear the other issues that arise and direct them to community and health care resources," said Baron, whose organization is funded by various foundations.

"When we got the diagnosis, I wanted to know how to take care of Andy," said Judy Becker. "I'd read about Alzheimer's, but that personal touch is what I

now. Sometimes he won't remember what we did, but he had a good time while we were doing it — and that's fine with me."

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He enjoys what we're doing

