

## Windows in time: 4th Annual Columbia County Alzheimer's Walk coming up

By Jen McCoy Daily Register | Posted: Tuesday, August 31, 2010 10:45 pm  
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JoAnne Genrich gets a photograph taken with her mother, Alice Bue, on Tuesday at AmericanWay Assisted Living, in Portage. Genrich is the Honorary Family Chairperson for the 4th Annual Alzheimer's Walk. Her mother has vascular dementia and Genrich visits her seven days a week as a friend, daughter and advocate. Jen McCoy/Daily Register

There are little, spontaneous windows in time when JoAnne Genrich can see the mother she had before dementia.

"She said, 'I used to do this for you' ... And I said, 'I had a good teacher,'" said Genrich, who makes her home in Portage. "When she says, 'Oh, that's JoAnne,' you hold onto those moments. They're small, little windows."

Genrich, 61, is the Honorary Family Chairwoman for the 4th Annual Columbia County Alzheimer's Walk in Portage. Her mother, Alice Bue, 89, resides at AmericanWay Assisted Living in Portage for specialized care of memory loss or dementia. She was diagnosed with vascular dementia about six years ago and Genrich visits her each day.

"She gets it and she's so exemplary in so many ways," said Carol Olson, an outreach specialist for Columbia and Sauk Counties in the Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin.

Genrich's role as an advocate, daughter, friend and a caretaker made her a natural choice because she walks the walk of memory loss every day.

"I feel for her (my mom). What you kind of go through is like a good-bye all the time. Last November, she knew all of us, me and my older sister and younger brother. But, by Christmas she didn't, she thought I was her sister," said Genrich, who will speak at the Alzheimer's Walk about the vital role family plays for people with memory loss.

The walk will begin at 1 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 12, at Riverside Park in Portage. Participants will walk the Wisconsin River Levee in honor, memory or gratitude of someone affected by the disease. They can form a team to raise money for the Alliance, or do it as a personal endeavor. Donations are encouraged, but not required to participate. People who contribute \$50 will receive an event T-shirt and at \$130 will get a T-shirt and a metal travel mug. Trophies are awarded to the largest team and also the team and individuals who raise the most money for the walk. Anyone who contributes \$10 or more can have a name added to the 2010 Forget-Me-Not commemorative painting by local artist Janet Wiegel. The names will be read aloud during the ceremony.

Last year, 323 people walked, including 24 teams, and raised about \$22,000 for the cause. Olson said her goal for this walk is the same, including the awareness.

"One of the things we're working on is to reduce the stigma, just like it used to be there for people with cancer or HIV, so we're helping to dispel the myths. It's definitely not contagious and it's difficult when people abandon their friends or loved ones when they're needed the most," Olson said.

The most frequent question Olson fields is the difference between dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Dementia is a medical term used to describe a set of symptoms causing a decline in cognitive function severe enough to affect daily living. Symptoms are typically caused by a disease, or condition. The most common symptoms of dementia include short-term memory loss, difficulty performing familiar tasks, poor or decreased judgment and personality changes, according to [www.alzwise.org](http://www.alzwise.org).

Dementia isn't a normal part of the aging process, and the most common irreversible cause of it is Alzheimer's disease, which affects 1/8 of people who are 65 or older and half of people who are 85 or older.

"Imagine if your normal processing slowed down and it seems like everyone's moving in double time and you can't keep up," Olson said.

There's currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease or a way to pinpoint why, when or if someone will get it. Currently, there are more than 116,000 families in Wisconsin and the numbers are growing as the baby boom generation ages and because people are living longer.

"There's Alzheimer's and dementia in my family and my husband's family, so I expect to have it, or be caring for someone who has it," Olson said.

Genrich's grandmother died of dementia and her aunt is now showing signs, too. Years ago, Bue told her children not to change their lifestyles as she aged, Genrich said.

"She just said, 'I'm not going to live with any of you kids because you have your own lives and live them.' (But) I always knew I would look out for her somehow," she said. The pair eat dinner together each night at AmericanWay in Portage.

The Alzheimer's Alliance is a non-profit organization that offers free information, referrals, care consultations, speakers, support groups, a toll-free Helpline, early-stage programs and family caregiver/professional training.

Although Genrich and Bue's roles have reversed, sometimes she still needs her mother.

"I was cooking something and I wanted to call Mom and ask her about a recipe, but I can't anymore," Genrich said, wiping away tears.

For more information about the walk, contact Carol Olson, outreach specialist for Columbia and Sauk Counties, at 742-9055, or visit [www.alzwisc.org](http://www.alzwisc.org).

### **If You Go**

**What:** The 4th Annual Columbia County Alzheimer's Walk

**When:** 1 to 4 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 12

**Where:** In Portage at Riverside Park, located on E. Wisconsin St., and the Wisconsin River levee

**Why:** To raise awareness and funds to combat Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia. Also a time to honor those living with the disease and people who assist them.

**How:** All money raised supports the local programs and services of the Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin.

**Who:** People of all ages are welcome to participate as individuals or part of a walking team. There's free face painting, music, food and door prizes.

**Cost:** Donations are encouraged, but not required to participate. People who contribute \$50 will receive an event T-shirt and at \$130 will get a T-shirt and a metal travel mug. Trophies are awarded to the largest team and also the team, family and individuals with that raised the most money for the walk.

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