

Making connections at Memory Cafes

Waukesha County libraries offer program for people living with dementia

When I asked participants why they attend the monthly memory cafes put on by the Library Memory Project, most of the responses I heard were about the people. The welcoming atmosphere. Meeting new friends. The ability to connect with others.

"We like meeting other people who are in a similar situation and getting to see them on a monthly basis," said one person.

"I like to come because we get to see a lot of our

friends. It's just a nice get-together," said another.

Over 5 million Americans are living with dementia and that number is expected to double by 2060. Besides physical and mental changes, dementia and Alzheimer's disease often lead to social isolation for those with memory loss



Fuller

and their caregivers as friendships fall away. Local libraries in southeast Wisconsin are addressing the social needs of those living with dementia with monthly memory café and dementia education programs through the Library Memory Project.

Founded in 2015 as a collaboration between four public libraries in Waukesha County, the Library Memory Project has grown to include 16 libraries in three counties, hosting four memory cafes per month. The memory cafes offer attendees a fun, social opportunity in familiar, safe spaces — libraries. Each café has a theme with activities, crafts, and time to socialize.

Recent café programs have included flower arranging, an ice cream social, a presentation on the Apollo 11 moon landing, and tea tasting. Professionals from local Aging & Disability Resource Centers, as well as the Alzheimer's Association of Southeastern Wisconsin, attend each café to connect with attendees and offer resources. As the program has grown, many libraries, such as the Menomonee Falls Public Library and Pauline Haass Public Library in Sussex, have gone through Dementia Friendly Business Training through the Waukesha County Aging and Disability Resource Center.

This September, the Library Memory Project is offering their first Family Day event, an afternoon outing on Sept. 29 for those living with dementia and their family members of

all ages. Held at Retzer Nature Center in Town of Genesee, Family Day will feature a planetarium show, live animals, and refreshments. It is free to attend, though attendees must register by Sept. 20.

"We decided to host a Family Day event because we wanted to offer an opportunity for families who are going through the journey of memory loss to come together through a fun, shared experience," says Angela Meyers, inclusive services coordinator at the Bridges Library System, which facilitates the Library Memory Project.

As one caregiver said about attending the memory cafes with her husband, "It's nice to walk in and see someone you know so you don't feel alone. And they make you feel welcome."

If you or a loved one is living with memory loss, you are welcome to join us at any of the monthly memory cafes or at the Family Day event.

You can find more information about the Library Memory Project and upcoming memory cafes at librarymemoryproject.org.

Below are the details for our upcoming Family Day event:

When: Sunday, Sept. 29 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Where: Retzer Nature Center, S14-W28167 Madison St., Town of Genesee

RSVP: Call Bridges Library System at 262-896-8080 or online at bridgeslibrarysystem.org/events/familyday

(Jill Fuller is the coordinator of marketing & communications for the Bridges Library System.)

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