

# Help for what's ahead

## Families with Alzheimer's patients lean on groups' support

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The impact of Alzheimer's disease is generating discussion in Trenton with the recent release of a state task force report that attempts to shine more light on the struggles faced by couples such as Al and Fran Davis of Fair Lawn.

The husband and wife are both 93, and she has largely taken care of him on her own since he was diagnosed with the disease eight years ago. They value their independence. But the decision they made long ago to remain living in their home has become a source of worry.

Fran Davis is ruminating on the "what ifs." What if her husband starts to need more care than she can provide or that they can afford? What if her health fails or she has to stop driving?

"At this point, it's a little scary because you don't know what's going to happen," Fran Davis said recently. "Right now, I still drive and my health is good. But I don't know what's ahead."

Helping caregivers navigate the long, curve-filled road of Alzheimer's remains a front-and-center goal of local advocates as they try to reshape their family support efforts in New Jersey.

Last December, the northern New Jersey chapter of the Alzheimer's Association split off into its own organization, called Alzheimer's New Jersey. The split occurred because local leaders wanted to ensure money raised locally by the chapter would be spent in New Jersey.

After the defection, the Alzheimer's Association decided to begin a new northern New Jersey chapter, opening an office in Totowa in March and organizing four fundraising walks throughout

the state in locations near where Alzheimer's New Jersey already had walks planned.

Hundreds of North Jersey residents are expected today at a Walk to End Alzheimer's fundraiser organized by the North Jersey chapter of the national group today at

Overpeck Park in Ridgefield Park.

Next weekend – Sunday, Oct. 30 – thousands more will participate in the Walk to Fight Alzheimer's, the event leaders of Alzheimer's New Jersey are planning at Bergen Community College in Paramus.

Kenneth Zaentz, president of Alzheimer's New Jersey, said some of the group's supporters were confused by the two sets of walks. "There were people who thought they had signed up for a walk with us who had actually signed up for a walk with them," Zaentz said. "There was some annoyance at that."

With the two organizations essentially competing for fundraising dollars, Alzheimer's New Jersey finished its most recent fiscal year in July with revenue of about \$2.9 million, down from the \$3.5 million raised the year before when the organization was still part of the national group.

But now that Alzheimer's New Jersey is its own separate entity, it can devote 100 percent of its revenues to programs in New Jersey, rather than having to give 40 percent of it to a parent organization.

That meant the group was able to increase to \$415,000, from \$300,000 spent the year before, on a respite program in which recipients are given grants to pay for caregiving breaks.

Fran Davis received \$1,000 to offset the costs of enrolling her husband in a day program.

Since Al Davis began attending that program twice a week almost a year ago, the couple's load has lightened a bit. Al Davis is thrilled at being able to get out of the house and give his wife some time to exercise, volunteer and visit museums. For now, they can afford to continue on their own paying the

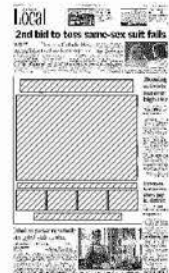
\$150-a-day cost, Fran Davis said.

Advocates say the demand for more affordable assistance programs and community services remains high, which is why Alzheimer's New Jersey has embarked on a strategic planning mission to determine what new programs or advocacy efforts are needed in the future, Zaentz said.

At the same time, the national Alzheimer's Association intends beef up its northern New Jersey presence, but the president of that chapter, Wendy Campbell, said she doesn't see the two groups as being in competition.

Instead, Campbell sees the new state task force report, which outlines the challenges faced by the families of the estimated 170,000 New Jerseyans with the disease, as a way for all advocacy efforts in the state to better hone their missions to the needs of the people they serve.

"There's plenty of work to go around, and a lot of ways to work together," Campbell said. "We have not in any way served the last family of need of support."





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FRAN DAVIS



VIOREL FLORESCU/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fran Davis cares for her husband, Al, who is benefiting from a respite program funded by Alzheimer's New Jersey.



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Fran Davis has been taking care of her husband, Al, since he received his diagnosis eight years ago. Both are 93 now.