

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION – WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!

As we begin a new year, the Alzheimer's Association welcomes Tori Rohrer, Regional Manager for the NW Regional Office of the Alzheimer's Association, Farmington, NM.

Tori has been instrumental in the planning and staging of successful training sessions with the San Juan County Sheriff's Department, a variety of caregiver programs, fundraising events for the Alzheimer's Association in Gallup and most recently, the Farmington Walk to End Alzheimer's. Aside from her knowledge of the disease and the organization, Alzheimer's is very personal to her as it extends to losing a family member to the disease last year.

We want you to get to know Tori, to contact her to talk, and to gather information on the types of "no cost" services available in the Four Corners to families and loved ones afflicted with Alzheimer's. Additionally, we want to offer you an update on the status of Alzheimer's and tap into her expertise through this interview on the state office's perspective, programs and services, and event planning in the Four Corners.

Neil: Tori, welcome aboard. The Four Corners has already seen some of your talents and success in last year's Walk to End Alzheimer's. Let's start by sharing with the public an old fact: we are ageing. In fact, seventy million baby boomers were born between 1946 and 1964 and are over the age of 65 as reported by the World Population Projects. We are being impacted by Heart Disease, Dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Diabetes, Cancer and Arthritis. The most common impacting the elderly right now is Alzheimer's. Can you give us an update on where we stand with the disease? Is there any news on a cure? How is it impacting the Four Corners?

Rohrer: The Alzheimer's Association tracks these statistics by state, and we can tell you that there are currently **43,000** New Mexicans living with the disease. There are also **108,000** New Mexicans who serve as unpaid family caregivers for them. We don't have exact numbers for the Four Corners area, but the statewide numbers are in themselves alarming.

There is no cure for the disease. However, the FDA recently approved a treatment, Aduhelm. While not a cure, it is the first new treatment approved for Alzheimer's since 2003 and is the first therapy that targets the fundamental pathophysiology of the disease. We believe this development is just the beginning — both for this category of treatment and other types of treatments for Alzheimer's on the horizon.

Unfortunately, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services recent draft decision on coverage of treatments targeting amyloid for Alzheimer's, like Aduhelm, essentially blocks coverage of an entire class of potential future treatments. We see denying people living with Alzheimer's access to FDA approved treatments as discrimination. Medicare covers breakthrough treatments for cancer, heart disease, diabetes - why would they choose not to cover these treatments for people living with Alzheimer's? So, we are calling on CMS to change this draft decision

In the meantime, Alzheimer's disease continues to take a devastating toll on families everywhere. More than six million Americans are living with the disease. It is still the sixth leading cause of death and kills more than breast cancer and prostate cancer combined.

Neil: Covid has taken a toll on most nonprofits with regards to in-person programs, classes, services, event planning and fundraising. Many nonprofits are still closed with staff taking

advantage of a virtual venue to move their cause forward. How is the Alzheimer's Association getting the word out regarding access to programs and services, to offer classes, etc.?

Rohrer: Adaptation was key. Our agility in making the adaptations and innovations necessary when the initial wave of lockdowns came in Spring 2020, and continuing through today, has allowed us to serve and engage effectively and with considerable success. Whether the interaction was virtual, hybrid or in-person (as was the case of most of our NM Walks), we were proud to provide quality engagement throughout the state of New Mexico.

On a general outreach level, we have had to modify and learn a new way of getting our info out to the public and residents. We are currently limited to hosting our programs and support groups virtually. We are hoping that will change soon. Our constituents' health and safety are our top priority. We have really taken advantage of social media and other digital platforms during this time. We share all our programs and support group schedules on our Facebook page. Our Facebook page name is Alzheimer's Association: New Mexico Chapter. Also, I am always available by phone to answer any questions our residents may have. The NW Region Office number is 505. 278.7927.

Neil: Let's talk about events and fundraising. Nonprofits have had to reinvent themselves to tackle a new normal. How will 2022 be any different than 2020 and 2021 for the Alzheimer's Association? Also, as with any nonprofits, Covid has taken a toll on the staging of events, fundraising dollars, and possibly less volunteer participation. How has Covid impacted the Alzheimer's Association throughout the state, the Four Corners, and the Walk to End Alzheimer's?

Rohrer: Everyone felt the impact that first year. Twenty-twenty did bring less participation across the board with our Walk to End Alzheimer's events throughout New Mexico. Those Walks were all held as "walk in your neighborhood" events with virtual components. However, 2021 was a strong year of comebacks. Most of our Walks were held in-person this time following safety guidelines. For the 2021 Farmington Walk, we raised an impressive \$24,400 dollars with over 150 participants! We had a great turn-out and it was such a fun-filled event. We couldn't have done it without the help of our community.

Neil: Farmington experience new fundraising events with the collaboration of the Lauter Haus Brewery, Denny's Restaurant, Pocketstone Bakery & Café, and Fuddruckers. Not only did they look exciting, but they appeared to be "outside of the box" events. What can you tell us about those events and without disclosing too much information, where do we go this year with these fundraising opportunities?

Rohrer: It was wonderful to see such amazing businesses get involved with our Walk to End Alzheimer's event and create great fundraisers! The Lauter Haus hosted a cornhole tournament, Pocketstone Bakery donated 100% of profits from specific cookie sales, and both Fuddruckers and Denny's offered "dine and donate" events! We can't wait to partner with these companies again and others to continue to grow the event. We have great ideas we can't wait to share with everyone when the time is right.

Neil: What of volunteer participation? We know the Alzheimer's Association has taken many steps to make the Walk to End Alzheimer's a safe event with its participants and volunteers. As the walk takes a year of planning, when will it take place this year, are you fully staffed with

volunteers, or could you use more? If so, how does someone go about volunteering to help plan and stage the Walk to End Alzheimer's? How do they register to help?

Rohrer: First, I have to say that our work is simply not possible without the help and support of our amazing volunteers. These dedicated people make a meaningful impact on this community, and we appreciate everything they do for us, the cause, and the families who are impacted by dementia.

That said, there is some exciting news about the Walk in our region. Since Farmington, Aztec, Bloomfield, and Kirtland are tight knit, the Association has decided to modify the name of the area walk to be more inclusive to the surrounding communities. It is now the San Juan County Walk to End Alzheimer's! This is exciting news! The Walk is set for Saturday, September 24th, 2022, in Aztec, NM at Minium Park. We are looking forward to this event and the new location. We are always in need of volunteers to help us plan the event, so we invite anyone living in the Four Corners to call us to help with the planning and staging of the Walk. Anyone interested in learning more about joining the walk planning committee or being a volunteer, the day of the walk is welcome to contact me at 505.278.7927. We are hoping to have our first walk committee meeting in the next few weeks.

There are amazing programs also available online for those interested in learning more about ways to help their family, member, or friend living with Alzheimer's. You can call me at 505.278.7927 to discuss opportunities to assist you with this disease.

Vangie Garza Neil serves on the Outreach & Communications Committee for the State of New Mexico's Alzheimer's Association. She is a nine-year volunteer of the organization, and she and her husband, Leonard Neil, have been the emcees for the NW Regional Walk to End Alzheimer's for the past eight years.