

NEIGHBORS CUW welcomes Sage



Submitted photo

CUW's new comfort dog, Sage, right, got a chance to meet students, staff and comfort dog Zoey recently.

MEQUON — Students and faculty at Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon got a chance to meet their second service dog, Sage, this week. The golden retriever will primarily serve the School of Health Professions and will help launch an animal-assisted therapy certificate program this fall, according to CUW Director of University Communications Kali Thiel.

"Eleven Concordia students are already signed up to serve as the dog's handlers — that is, the rotation of 'staff' who will be on hand with the dog during its working hours," Thiel said. "The 11 students — three physical therapy and seven occupational therapy students — make up Concordia's inaugural animal-assisted therapy cohort."

Sage joins Zoey, CUW's first Lutheran Church Charities comfort dog. Zoey interacts with students, faculty, staff and the entire CUW community who may have had trauma in their past or are currently dealing with depression, anxiety or other stresses in their lives.

She has also been deployed to traumatic circumstances around the country, comforting everyone from the survivors of the

Sandy Hook School shooting in Newtown, Conn., to those who lived through the Pulse Night Club shooting in Orlando, Fla.

"Comfort dogs differ from service dogs in that they are trained to address the needs of many people as opposed to a single individual. In addition to her role with the School of Health Professions, the new dog and Zoey will devote their working hours to serving in community and educational settings; deploying to national tragedies; and being at large in the university to serve as a calming presence to students, faculty and staff in passing," Thiel said.

Some 130 donors, including students, employees, alumni and parents, donated nearly \$30,000 to help purchase Sage and pay for her training fees and related care expenses, Thiel said. That was about \$10,000 more than the fundraising goal set last fall. Three anonymous donors pledged matching gifts, one at \$2,500 and the other two at \$7,500.

Like Zoey, the new comfort dog is owned by the university and will work full time, between 35 to 40 hours in an average week.

Neighbors helping neighbors

Interfaith Caregivers of Ozaukee marking 25 years of serving the public

Special to the News Graphic

GRAFTON — Without friends or family nearby, Bob was leading a fairly isolated life in his Grafton apartment.

He had little communication or interaction during the week and felt frustrated at his limited options for getting to medical appointments or going on errands such as grocery shopping. Then he heard about Interfaith Caregivers of Ozaukee County.

Now, with the help and concern of Interfaith Ozaukee's staff and volunteers, Bob has a new outlook.

"I'm not sure that you understand how your organization has changed my life," he told Megan Beine, program manager for Interfaith Ozaukee, who related his story at a recent volunteer appreciation reception. "Things are easier with the help of the volunteers I've worked with. And sometimes the only card I receive at my birthday is from you."

Bob's story is not that unusual.

As Interfaith Ozaukee celebrates its 25th year in 2018, the organization takes pride in helping seniors like Bob remain independent in their own homes. That help continues to be provided by a loyal group of volunteers who live ICO's credo of "neighbors helping neighbors."

"Often we forget how important the little things are," said Maureen Squire, ICO's executive director. "Our volunteers provide conversation and companionship as they transport our senior clients to medical appointments and on essential errands. But what's more important is that they are providing peace of mind for seniors and their families."

Interfaith Ozaukee was one of hundreds of Interfaith organizations around the country started and supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The local beginnings were humble, with just a handful of volunteers working out of church basements. But in the intervening years, the organization grew as the need for services increased.

"A handful of us got together in a church basement in Saukville," said Eleanor Prom, who was one of the original organizers. "We thought there was a significant need and that we



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Photos and an old News Graphic story reflect the 25-year history of Interfaith Caregivers of Ozaukee County.

could make a real difference for the seniors in the community."

Prom, a tax accountant, took on the treasurer's role. "I was the numbers person," she said. "We started with \$100!"

While the organization has grown significantly, its mission has remained the same.

"The main focus was picking up people who couldn't drive on their own and taking them to appointments and to do their shopping," Prom said.

Not long after its inception, Interfaith Ozaukee's base of operations moved to a church further south in the town of Grafton, closer to where the county's population was showing the most growth.

"We were expanding, mainly by word of mouth and by friends telling friends about it," Prom said. "That was before the widespread use of home computers and email. Everything was done by phone."

Interfaith Ozaukee still enjoys loyal support from area congregations and their members, but its budget and funding are much larger.

ICO now partners with 30 community organizations and 50 congregations. In 2017, a significant milestone was reached: 25,000 transports. Its headquarters are now at the Family Enrichment Center in Grafton.

In the past two years, Interfaith Ozaukee has launched a wheelchair-accessible van fleet so that volunteers no longer are required to drive their own cars when transporting clients. ICO also launched the Ozaukee h.e.l.p. Corner, which lends wheelchairs,

walkers and canes to those in need. Dementia training also is offered, incorporating art and music therapy.

Ozaukee County has the highest percentage of seniors out of all counties in southeast Wisconsin. According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 29.7 percent of households in Ozaukee County have a member who is 65 or older and almost 28 percent of seniors in our community live alone. Whereas Ozaukee County's senior population was 13 percent in 2000, that number is expected to almost double, to 25 percent, by 2035.

"While we have grown to play an important role in the community, in many ways I feel as if our work is just beginning," Squire said. "There is plenty more to be done so that seniors can continue to age in place where they feel most comfortable — in their own homes."

She is quick to commend the hard-working volunteers who provide rides, companionship and respite care to Interfaith Ozaukee clients. But the baby boomer generation is a huge one, and the organization has a big challenge ahead to keep up with senior needs as that generation ages.

"I have one overwhelming goal as I look to the next 25 years and it sometimes keeps me awake at night," Squire said. "It's not enough to look back at our success. We need to keep moving ahead and encourage more members of the community to embrace our mission and come forward to serve as volunteers."

For more information on Interfaith Caregivers of Ozaukee County, go to www.interfaithozaukee.org or call 262-376-5362.

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During 2017 we said goodbye to many old friends and comrade Legionnaires. We would like to thank each of you for your service to your country and your dedication to Peter Wollner Post 288 and the American Legion. We will miss you. May you rest in peace.



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