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## Martins Run resident plans a defeat-dementia run



Like many optimists, Ethel Hamburger, 82, is blessed with naivete and a certain blissful ignorance about the odds. She is not so grandiose as to frame a formal philosophy of life. Rather, she speaks about her motivation simply.

"When you see a problem, you do something about it. I feel that's what life is all about."

That was her practice during the many years she was a teacher, in Michigan, Illinois, the Washington, D.C., suburbs and, most recently, Cheltenham.

"I didn't teach a subject," Hamburger says. "I taught children."

During the early '70s, when Hamburger and her husband had a rural retreat in West Virginia, she saw a boy who lived on a neighboring farm reading a book.

"He's read that book nine times," the boy's mother said. "It's the only one he has."

The nearest library was on the other side of the mountain, too far away. In other words, Hamburger saw a problem.

"I saw someone who wanted to read and couldn't get to a library," Hamburger says. "Anyone who wants to read should be able to."

Hamburger went home and began seeking book donations. By the time she was done, she'd collected more than 12,000 books, more than enough not only for the boy, and his school, but also for the creation of a library in the nearby town of Arkansaw. She even organized a raffle to raise money for bookshelves, and she prevailed upon Jay Rockefeller, now one of West Virginia's two U.S. senators, to attend the dedication.

Three years ago, Hamburger and her husband, Irvin, a retired engineer who worked at the Pentagon, moved to Martins Run, a senior living community near Media.

One day, Hamburger saw a fellow resident returning with a big bouquet and a broad smile. "I just celebrated my 100th birthday," she told Hamburger.

Hamburger pondered that. "Living to 100 is an accomplishment. People over 100 deserve special recognition."

So Hamburger organized a luncheon for the dozen centenarians then residing at Martins Run. The men wore boutonnières; the women, corsages. They received letters of congratulations from the White House and state officials. Hamburger composed a poem for the occasion and saluted these enduring elders with a champagne toast.

"Every person I meet I try to make feel good about themselves," Hamburger says. "One of the basic needs of human beings is to be loved and acknowledged."

Last fall, Hamburger became aware of another need at Martins Run - a dementia unit. About 30 of the community's 300 residents suffer from some form of dementia, which often manifests in inappropriate behavior - verbal outbursts, panic-stricken bouts of confusion, public disrobing.

A dementia unit would provide a compassionate environment where such residents could receive separate care and enjoy special activities.

Hamburger decided once again to do something about it. The result: the Martins RUN Intergenerational 5K to Defeat Dementia.

"A run is a good medium to get people to participate," says Hamburger. One of her four children - her son, Mitchell, 52 - is an avid runner who has completed several marathons. She remembers cheering him on in the Marine Corps Marathon, "a family thing" that produced precious memories.

The Martins RUN is designed to include people of all ages. Besides the 5K, there will be a one-mile "fun walk," three children's races, and a short "stroll" for those with canes, walkers, and limited mobility. Abundant food and drink will be available, as well as music supplied by Hamburger's grandson, Jordan Solender, a professional DJ.

Since winter, Hamburger has been busy spreading the word. She has contacted local schools, colleges and universities, churches and synagogues. An appeal for donations to those on her holiday greeting list brought in \$1,735, and she has encouraged friends and neighbors to do likewise.

"She's an arm twister," says director of development Marge Farbman. "She doesn't let anybody off the hook."

Adds Martins Run chief executive officer Linda Sterthous: "There is no stopping her, no refusing her requests. When she gets a passion for a cause like this one, she becomes 'she who must be obeyed!'"

Hamburger expects at least 500 runners and walkers for the event on Sunday, Oct. 3, at Ridley Creek State Park. A dementia unit at Martins Run will cost an estimated \$6 million. So far, Hamburger has raised \$13,000. She hopes more sponsors will materialize, that more runners will register and collect pledges.

"More is coming," she says confidently. "I have no idea what I'm doing. I never tried this before. But I know if I keep working at it, some good will come of it.

"It's like the library in West Virginia. I just started to help one youngster. Then the whole community got involved, and everybody profited."

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