

Nonprofit Group Beats the Buses for Funds And Finds Many Friends

They have been known to wear tuxedos to a ballpark. They sit in the sun in front of state police barracks hoping to collect used wheelchairs from donors. They travel to Haiti and South Africa to learn the needs of the disabled in third world countries. They go to conferences on the needs of the elderly and poll the residents of nursing homes and their families to see what they need to feel more at home. They wash cars, sell baked goods, hold a Harvest Fair and a golf tournament. They meet with foundations and corporate giving leaders to ask for money.

They are The Newport Foundation Incorporated and they do all this to accomplish their mission and to raise money to take care of the needs of the elderly and the disabled. The Newport Foundation Incorporated was founded in 1995 to serve the elderly with senior living communities that cover the continuum of the aging process from independent living to personal care to nursing home care.

Through a variety of models that include programs and services covering health care, social services, recreation, and education, the elderly and disabled can live with dignity and comfort in settings appropriate to their age and health.

Bickford Health Care Center is the cornerstone of the philosophic movement spearhead by The Newport Foundation Incorporated. There the elderly residents in their care live comfortably and securely in an environments filled with dignity and activity. They invite friends and family, children and pets to be with their residents and fill their days with activities in and out of the facility. “We go beyond traditional models of healthcare and are far removed from the concept of “warehousing” our elderly residents,” said Paul Bobbitt, president of The Newport Foundation Incorporated. “We provide dignity, activity, companionship, self esteem, and a sense of being needed to the people in our care,” he added.

Currently, The Newport Foundation Incorporated operates two nursing homes, Bickford Health Care Center in Windsor Locks, Connecticut and Mountainview Health Care Center in Montgomery, Massachusetts and operates Chariots of Hope, a nonprofit organization that collects unused wheelchairs, repairs them and donates them to the

needy. Between the nursing homes and Chariots of Hope, The Newport Foundation believes it is bringing much needed options to people who traditionally have none.

It is in the two nursing homes that the concept of “more than healthcare” for the elderly takes shape. “We constantly hear from our residents and their families and our communities about what our residents want and need and what works,” said Bobbitt. Some things that work very well in the nursing homes are the gardens, plants and pets. The Courtyard at Bickford, a gift of the former Dexter Foundation, is a beautiful courtyard with fruit trees, rose bushes, and flowerbeds tended to by the residents. It hosts picnic tables, a fountain donated by a family in honor of their loved one. Residents lounge there on nice days and are entertained with barbecues and ice cream parties. Families and friends gather there to visit. It is a focal point in all seasons, decorated with lights during Christmas, snowmen in winter, and decorative eggs for Easter, complete with the resident Bickford bunny, and witches and goblins for Halloween. Besides the rabbit, the Courtyard is enjoyed by a cat, a dog, and birds attracted by the feeding stations.

At Mountainview Health Care Center, the gardens take on a more Zen-like quality and there are more gardening options for the residents along the rambling slopes of the Berkshire Hills. The setting is spacious and serene with views of the Berkshire Mountains and a pond.

“While the gardens are a highlight of our facilities, they are only a small part of what we do for our residents,” said Michele Carney, Chief Operating Operator of The Newport Foundation Incorporated and administrator of Bickford Health Care Center. “The real core of what we do is seen in the caring and sensitivity to the lifestyle needs of our residents. Because they leave their home to come to live with us is no reason to leave behind a lifetime of pleasures. We try to replace the comforts of home within our healthcare setting paying particular attention to the little things that make a house a home.”

Residents at both facilities bring their memorabilia with them. Home style and ethnic meals are served. Activities are planned both away from the facilities as well as in them. The residents form friendships and expand their interests from computer technology to crafts and, of course, gardening. All this is done with the guidance of the

skilled medical staff and the numerous trained volunteers who take part in many of the programs for the residents.

One might ask how collecting wheelchairs fits into the Newport scenario? “It is a step removed in one way,” said Bobbitt, “but philosophically we feel providing wheelchairs to the needy and giving them freedom of mobility is just another theme on dignity and self esteem. The people who receive the wheelchairs from Chariots of Hope often cannot move about without them. “The chair we delivered to a 12-year-old girl, Anna, in South Africa, allowed her to leave her bed for the first time in her life.” “This is gratification of the highest level,” commented Carney. “It is why we do what we do.”

The Newport Foundation Incorporated and its operating centers are governed by three different volunteer boards. It is further inspired by an advisory council comprised of community and business leaders who provide inspiration, contacts, and expertise. Over 100 other volunteers service the organization in a variety of ways which include, but are not limited to, collecting wheelchairs, acting as readers and companions to residents, working on fundraising events and activities. Others contribute in kind services that include shrubs, garden equipment, copying, or other services. Recently, Lowe’s Department Stores gave a grant to Chariots of Hope to establish their wheelchair repair department.

A recent fundraiser at New Britain Stadium, home of the Rock Cats drew 250 people and raised over \$20,000 with a wine tasting and auction. “We have a golf tournament at the June 24th at Longmeadow Country Club,” said Bobbitt. We hope to raise another \$7,000.

Our time is all about fundraising events, meetings with corporate sponsors, grants to foundations, and appreciation luncheons for volunteers. “We go where we have to go to get our message across,” Bobbitt added, “and to do what we can to raise money and enlist volunteers.” The programs that set The Newport Foundation apart from other senior living facilities and programs for the disabled are rooted in supportive options that give people freedom, encouragement, and a chance to express themselves within the context of their limitations. “It might be a nursing home or a wheelchair,” but it represents a reality for someone, and we are here to give that reality dignity,” Bobbitt added.

Future plans for the organization include other elderly living models and expansion into more third world countries with wheelchair distribution.

The Newport Foundation Incorporated is a 501(c)(3) corporation and accepts private contributions, bequests, and other charitable donations.

To learn more about The Newport Foundation Incorporated, visit them on the web at www.newportfoundaiton.org or contact Michele Carney or Paul Bobbitt at 860-623-4351.