

• Interfaith Network of Care celebrating 15th anniversary

 by [Gene Racz](#) on Mar 21st [Comment](#) | [Email](#)



East Brunswick resident Madelyn Brodhead (right) gets help from Interfaith Network of Care volunteer Jean Wetzel (left) as Wetzel will be driving Brodhead to her weekly physical therapy session in Spotswood. (MARK R. SULLIVAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

EAST BRUNSWICK - It's a chilly weekday morning and Madelyn Brodhead, an elderly resident of East Brunswick, has a 10:30 a.m. physical therapy appointment scheduled across town.

Her vision is impaired, she no longer can drive, and she has difficulty making her way down to her own curb from her home tucked away deep on a suburban street..

It's a perfect opportunity for Interfaith Network of Care Inc. to help.

The Milltown-based nonprofit organization has about 150 volunteers serving about 600 care receivers throughout Middlesex County.

Longtime volunteer Jean Wetzel showed up and gave Madelyn a ride.

“My goodness, it's just wonderful, Jean's been taking me once a week to physical therapy for a month now ... I really appreciate it," said Brodhead who found out about the service when reading her church bulletin at the Immaculate Conception Church in Spotswood.

“I reached out to them, I called,” said Brodhead.

Wetzel, also a retired East Brunswick resident, is a 13-year volunteer for Interfaith where she helps as a driver and caregiver.

“I enjoy helping people, it makes me feel good,” said Wetzel.

On Sunday April 3, Interfaith will celebrate its 15th anniversary with a brunch from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Pines Manor in Edison.

“We're really here to help people living with chronic health conditions, so they can live more independently in their home,” said Susan Dowling, Executive Director of Interfaith. “We train volunteers to provide things like medical trips. We do a respite program ... Tuesdays and Fridays ... for people with dementia, strokes etc. It gives their loved ones a break. We also do friendly visiting. We have people who go by once a week and visit with somebody ... they may play scrabble, shoot the breeze about old Army stories, whatever it might be.”

Interfaith started in March of 1996 with a start-up grant from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Since then, it has grown from eight churches to 22 serving 13 county municipalities.

“We are always open to more and diverse faiths, probably about 70 percent of the volunteers come from faith congregations, and they financially support us as well,” said Dowling.

The annual budget of the 501(c)(3) charity organization is about \$180,000, and has three part-time employees working with Dowling, the only full-timer on staff. Funding for Interfaith comes mostly from grants, donations from congregations, care receivers and volunteers.

The group has set up an office in the basement of St. Paul's United Church of Christ whose pastor ... The Rev. Richard Hayes Weyer ... is a member of the board. He'll be honored at the upcoming event at the Pines along with several Interfaith volunteers.

“When Sue called me years ago and said 'We're basically homeless' the very first thing that came to me was what Jesus said ... that 'Whatever you do to the least of us you do for me,'” said Weyer. “I see the INC as working with, all too often, the elderly, the homebound, those who kind of slipped through the cracks.

“It's all about the church serving the community.”

Interfaith serves people over the age of 18 with any health issue including disabilities such as brain injuries, cancer, Lou Gehrig's disease. Interfaith officials assess the needs the care receiver before Curtis Brooks, the transportation coordinator, matches appropriate an appropriate volunteer to help.

About 70 percent of the care recipients are senior citizens living in senior housing.

“It's neighbor helping neighbor,” said Dowling. “We try to keep people local in their service, and many of the volunteers are retirees. The average age of our volunteer is probably 77, and we can always use more.”

Dowling holds Masters in Social Work from Rutgers University and has trained every volunteer since the inception of the program. prior to working at Interfaith, she spent five years working for Catholic Charities where she trained people in elder care.

“To me, I like working with people who want to help people,” Dowling said. “It's great to go to work with people every day and do something with people who want to make the world a better place.

“And those congregations that join us, this becomes an extra ministry that they have.”

Tickets for the April 3 ""Grand Brunch" at the Pines Manor are \$40 each. Contact Interfaith at 732-247-1655 or visit the organizations web site at <http://www.interfaithnetworkofcare.org> for further information.

The deadline to purchase tickets is March 25.