

# Dementia pilot program coming to Culpeper

*The initiative aims to create a training program for businesses to successfully manage a person with dementia.*

BY Maria Basileo



Local groups and leaders are combining forces in the hopes of creating a more welcoming environment for Culpeper's aging community suffering from dementia.

Planned in partnership with Aging Together, the Piedmont Dementia Education Committee and the Culpeper Chamber of Commerce, the "Dementia-Friendly Culpeper" initiative aims to create a training program for businesses - concentrating on restaurants to begin with - so that if a person with dementia is a customer, staff will know how to handle some of the challenges.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, "dementia is a general term for loss of memory, language, problem-solving and other thinking abilities that are severe enough to interfere with daily life."

Participating restaurants will have

a sticker demonstrating they are dementia friendly which will relieve the stress of caregivers and family members who are taking their person out for socialization.

Businesses interested in training should contact Aging Together for more details.

During an information session on Nov. 14, Dementia Services Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Aging & Rehabilitative Services (VADARS) George Worthington explained to attendees what it means to be a dementia friendly community and how this program will roll out in Culpeper.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, there were 150,000 Virginians with Alzheimer's disease in 2020 and a projected 190,000 in 2025. In

2015, there were 275,000 Virginians experiencing Subjective Cognitive Decline (BRFSS) and 292,000 in 2019.

The initiative will coincide with Dementia Friendly America, a national network of communities seeking to ensure that groups across the country are equipped to support people with dementia and their caregivers.

Aging Together Executive Director Ellen Phipps used examples from experiences she had with her own father, who developed dementia in his later years. One of his favorite activities was eating out at restaurants, however, due to his dementia, he would remove his dentures and place them on the table if he found them to be uncomfortable or spit out his food and put it on his plate.

With training, Phipps said, restaurant staff would be equipped with skills to better aid such a patron. Another challenge facing staff include the "no filter" attitude of some due to the disease, Phipps continued.

She recalled one session attendee explaining how a family member referenced a staff member's weight. If staff understands that there is a disease process, and they understand to not take it personally, they might respond with a kind word or gesture to ensure the person feels welcome -

regardless of challenging behavior.

Some businesses might even go as far as to reduce background noise or adjust the lighting or increase the font size on the menu or on signage, Phipps said. This makes it not only friendly to persons living with dementia but also others who might have trouble seeing or find it hard to concentrate with loud music, etc.

*maria@culpepertimes.com*

## The Culpeper Food Closet Need of the Week

This week the Culpeper Food Closet is in need of condiments like mayonnaise, ketchup mustard and non-refrigerated salad dressing, peanut butter and jelly and canned vegetables. The Food Closet provides food and personal care items for Culpeper families, individuals, and seniors in need of assistance. Website: [ststephensculpeper.net](http://ststephensculpeper.net) | (540) 825-1177 | Email: [culpeperfoodcloset@gmail.com](mailto:culpeperfoodcloset@gmail.com).