

This is personal

Dexter Township resident heads up Alzheimer's Association Chapter

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Liz Longley knows only too well the heartache caused by Alzheimer's disease.

Her own mother suffered from this terrible disease that destroys brain cells, causing problems with memory, thinking and behavior severe enough to affect work, lifelong hobbies or social life.

So it's no surprise Longley spearheads the Alzheimer's Association Michigan Great Lakes Chapter as its president and CEO, in a Scio Township office housing corporate and south-central region staff.

"NOW - not later - is the time for the government to meet its responsibility to help the as many as 5 million Americans suffering from Alzheimer's disease. NOW—not later—is the time to find ways to protect the lives of 78 million baby boomers whose lives will soon be at risk for Alzheimer's disease."

The donor-supported, non-profit voluntary health organization is dedicated to providing supportive programs and services to people with Alzheimer's disease, their family members and care partners.

With offices in Kalamazoo, Lansing and Muskegon, Longley and her chapter serves 23 Michigan counties and an estimated 44,000 individuals with Alzheimer's disease.

That's a daunting number, but Longley and her staff are up to the task. In the past year, staff and volunteers assisted more than 15,000 people through the 24/7 toll-free Helpline, education and training programs, support groups, care consultations, and the national Safe Return program.

Longley was recruited to apply for the position by one of the Chapter's board members who was impressed with Longley's background and the outreach and development work she was doing for Hospice of Michigan's Ann Arbor Region.

"She was also impressed with my personal background and direct caregiver knowledge," Longley says.



Elizabeth Longley, president and CEO of the Alzheimer's Association, Michigan Great Lakes Chapter, addresses over 600 participants at the 2007 Ann Arbor Memory Walk as Memory Walk Honorary Chair Lucy Ann Lance looks on.

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She started as president and CEO in April 2006, and in that role is active in advocacy and policy issues at the local, state and national level. No stranger to advocacy and policy issues, she has spent most of her professional career involved in local and state government work, and also served as an LBJ intern in Washington in 1978 for John Dingell.

"This year, Alzheimer's disease is costing Medicare \$91 billion and Medicaid \$21 billion. By 2015, the two programs will be spending \$210 billion just on people with Alzheimer's disease. The nation cannot afford to wait."

Longley is responsible for the general management of the Area Chapter and for ensuring that it carries out its mission and goals - to eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected, and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health.

"I think my greatest duty is to ensure the Chapter is responding to the needs of anyone who comes to us for help by providing the highest quality education, support and care," she says.

She provides executive leadership in developing and implementing strategic policies, procedures and services; in developing strategic plans for future growth of the Chapter; and in developing the board of directors and board policy decisions.

Among other duties, she helps develop current operating plans and budgets and enhances fund development opportunities, soliciting key donors and developing key relationships.

"President Bush and Congress must take action NOW to stop this disease that today has no cure or effective treatment."

One of those key relationships is with former racecar driver, Howdy Holmes, owner of Chelsea's Jiffy Milling Co., whose own family was touched by Alzheimer's. An upcoming fund-raising event, "Summer Somewhere: Daytona 08" will be held Feb. 22 at Washtenaw Community College.

Longley's mother, who died recently of Alzheimer's, was a resident of Chelsea Retirement Community for 2-1/2 years, in Towsley Village, created for seniors with all stages of Alzheimer's and memory loss. The 70,000-square-foot building includes a "Town Center" connecting four neighborhoods, with a movie theater, 1940's-style café, chapel, library, beauty/barber shop, physician's office, and enclosed outdoor courtyards.

"Mom got the best care in the world," Longley says. "Towsley Village was the first licensed facility to send staff to the Alzheimer's Association's Foundation of Dementia Care program, funded by the Chelsea Community Foundation.† The training was evidenced in the care given to my mother by Towsley's nursing aides."

Longley and her husband Terry have roots that go deep in the local community. Terry's family has owned a cottage on Four Mile Lake for over 80 years, and his great-grandparents had a cottage on Pleasant Lake.

"Terry and I owned property on Four Mile Lake and we were beginning our building plans, and I wanted to become involved in the community that I was going to live in," Longley says. "We completed construction on our house in 2000 with the help of the Chelsea Lumber building program."

The couple has always taken a very active role in community volunteering.

Longley became involved in the Chelsea Center for the Arts as a volunteer consultant in 1997. † Joining the CCA board in 1998, she served as chair of the Yule Tree Gala for several years and was also chair of the board. She worked on fund-raising projects and strategic planning.

"Congress is now working with the President on a compromise to fund health, education and other programs. There should be no compromise on our nation's commitment to medical research."

Her husband serves as a trustee of Faith Lutheran Church on North Territorial Road in Dexter.

In her spare time, Longley loves gardening at her Dexter Township home, entertaining, and playing with the family's three rescued Labrador Retrievers.

"I love country living," she says "We're avid participants in community supported agriculture and shop regularly at the Dexter and Chelsea Farmer's Markets, Ruhlig's and Lesser farms and we are regular visitor to the Zabinski's Blueberry farm in Dexter."