



On the Front Lines

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Jason Rubenfire Special to the *Jewish News*

Documentary sheds light on Alzheimer's and dementia patients and caregivers



Keith Famie

Alzheimer's disease and dementia wreak havoc on the lives of millions of families each year. They strike indiscriminately, no matter who you are or what you've accomplished. And, once a person is symptomatic, there's no turning back.

Local filmmaker Keith Famie takes viewers on a journey to witness *Those on the Front Lines of Alzheimer's & Dementia*, which will premiere at 9 p.m. on Wednesday, June 27th, on WTVS Detroit Public Television (Channel 56).

With the support of the Metro Detroit Jewish community, Famie explores in his new documentary the emotional weight Alzheimer's and dementia place on sufferers and their loved ones. He also endeavors to discover what can be done to help those in need live lives of dignity and fulfillment.

Famie is no stranger to the effect of Alzheimer's or dementia can have on a family. He served as his father's caregiver until his death from Alzheimer's in 2003.

"I am confident the film will take the audience on a journey that everyone can relate to, especially if they have a loved one who was or is facing any type of dementia, and I have experienced the complexities and loneliness of trying to help that person through the stages of losing themselves," Famie says.

The film also focuses on the recent advances in our understanding of cognitive decline. Recently, the treatment and care of patients experiencing cognitive decline has finally begun to progress as we've learned more about what contributes to Alzheimer's and dementia and how the diseases may be slowed, prevented and, perhaps one day, reversed.

"People used to think Alzheimer's was just genetic, but it's clear there are things we can do now in how we live, eat and exercise that can help stave off dementia and related issues," Famie says.

He also stresses the importance of being present, even if your present isn't theirs. "Learn to be where your loved one is. If they're 30 years ago, be with them at that moment; don't try to take them out of it."

THE BROWN PROGRAM



Filming at the Dorothy and Peter Brown Community Adult Day Program.

The Dorothy and Peter Brown Community Adult Day Program, currently led by Debra Yamstein, features prominently within the film – and for good reason. A joint collaboration between Jewish Senior Life and JVS, the Brown program first began 20 years ago when the Jewish community discovered the need for services for older adults, particularly those with dementia and/or Alzheimer's.

Only a few decades ago, older adults experiencing cognitive decline were given extraordinarily poor care, with little to no focus placed on improving their interior lives. With the help of Dorothy and Peter Brown and other members of the Jewish Community and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, the Brown program was established as a then-revolutionary program allowing adults in the area with cognitive decline to experience a variety of social, musical, artistic and cognitive enhancement engagements.

“What the Brown Center means to Southeastern Michigan is really important to families; as opposed to a loved one sitting at home, this program gives them purpose, gives them life,” Famie says.

The program is open to people of all faiths and beliefs, though Jewish older adults have the unique opportunity to remain connected to their Jewish heritage through the program. The program maintains a kosher kitchen, celebrates Shabbat and Jewish holidays, and has even developed a dementia-friendly Kol Nidre Yom Kippur services that later won the Association of Jewish Aging Services “Program of the Year” award.

Famie also highlights some of the groundbreaking medical work being done to prevent and reverse cognitive decline, including research at the Technion Institute of Technology in Israel, where researchers work at the forefront of new discoveries on the immune system and the brain and how the two intersect.

Jewish Caregivers

The film also features several prominent members of the Jewish community with a loved one experiencing cognitive decline. Cathy Deutchman, who has care for her mother, and Annette Stone, who has cared for her husband, are two such individuals. Deutchman, a former educator, is glad she and Famie were able to use the film to educate people about the often misunderstood and stigmatized topic of cognitive decline.



Family photos help remind Allen of people and events in his life.

“I hope that people who view this film begin to see beyond fear, stigma and avoidance and instead take action,” Deutchman says.

Stone, also praising the Documentary’s ability to educate, believes it’s her Jewish roots that helped her be a caregiver for her husband.

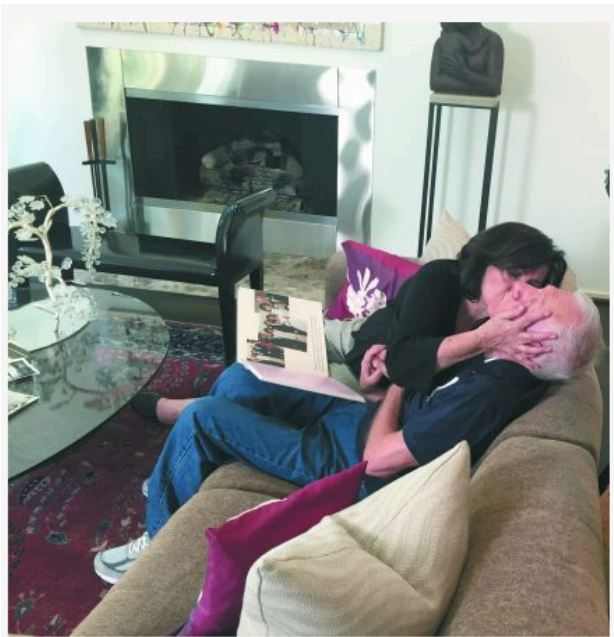
“The main lesson Judaism teaches is take care of your people,” she says.

Famie says, “Cathy and Annette both really allowed us to step into their lives at a difficult time. Because of these two women, everyone who sees this film will have a new knowledge of Alzheimer’s and dementia. Those who experienced it firsthand will praise Annette and Cathy for their bravery to step in front of the camera during such a difficult time.”

Famie has no plans to slow down his production of award-winning documentary films, with his next film similarly featuring *Those on the Front Lines of Cancer*.



Cathy Deutchman of Franklin helps her mother fix her hair; crew members were filming the interaction.



Annette Stone of West Bloomfield gives her husband, Allen, a kiss while looking at a book of photos.

PHOTOS BY VISIONALIST ENTERTAINMENT

Underwriting the film were the D. Dan and Betty Kahn, Artichoke Garlic and the Marvin and Betty Danto Family foundations. Executive producers were Jack and Annette Stone, Jim and Cathy Deutchman, Russel J, Ebeid family, John and Carole Kulhavi, Tom and Sue Rau, Anthony and Mary Schimizzi, Robert Stone and Larry & Andi Wolfe.