

"Las Vegas Senior Lifeline is a non-denominational program of the United Jewish Community/Jewish Federation of Las Vegas, which provides social services to low-income seniors age 60 and over who live within the greater Las Vegas area and need assistance to remain living independently in their own homes. Established in 2003, LVSL has served over 1068 seniors to date delivering a multi-tiered level of services that provides senior citizens the necessary tools and support systems to continue to age in place in their own homes with an increased quality of life. Service components include a senior center; congregate meals, Kosher Meals on Wheels; medical prescription and supplies assistance; transportation; home safety; and home care services. The goal of the Las Vegas Senior Lifeline is to better equip low income, frail older adults to age in place, maintain a high quality of life and save the government and families the cost of unnecessary institutionalization."—Project Administrator Jackie Kassower, Las Vegas Senior Lifeline

Growing Old With Dignity

By Arthur J. Bloberger

"I DON'T CARE HOW MUCH MONEY YOU'VE GOT, WHEN you get sick, it's gone," says Larry Matteucci, a 60-year-old diabetic leukemia survivor, and one of the more than 600 clients of Las Vegas Senior Lifeline (LVSL). "If you get sick between the ages of 55 and 62," he continues, "you might as well



Joan and Larry Matteucci

just take a gun and put it to your head, because it's so difficult to get any help at all."

Depression, anxiety, frustration and any number of other detrimental emotions, on top of weighty financial burdens and life-threatening health-issues, can push anyone to the brink of despair, especially those approaching and residing in the latter stages of life.

Larry's wife, Joan, 62, is struggling with her own onset of Alzheimer's Disease/Dementia, not to mention a stroke she suffered two years ago. "I feel like I'm falling apart," she says. "Today, I'm having a very bad day. I'm very forgetful. You can't necessarily tell by talking to me, because it's not short-term memory that we're talking about — we're talking about things that happened years ago that I can't recall."

In many ways, Joan and Larry are a typical married couple. After 35 years, they each tend to finish one another's sentences and glow with joy when remembering the "good old days." The couple met in the hospital when Joan was a newly-divorced nurse. Turns out they had a lot in common, including the same birthday — November 2.

"They gave me three months to live, if I made it that far," explains Larry. "That was almost a year ago." Joan picks it up there. "The doctors to this day are scratching their heads, saying, 'He shouldn't be alive.' But when he final-

ly came home, he was so shaky." Back to Larry. "Chemo is no picnic. Let me tell you something, I sure didn't plan it this way. I figured I'd be sitting on easy street by now."

Although surviving Cancer is great cause for celebration, there's much more to survival itself, especially when you have no insurance. "I was home on a break from chemo one time and that's when we met Angela," recalls Larry. Angela Budavari is one of the caseworkers of LVSL. "I'm going to say it like it is — there was no B.S. Angela came in and she interviewed us, but there was no runaround. A lot of these agencies, when you call them, they'll say, 'Okay, we'll get back to you.' Then they never do. But when we call Angela, either she or someone else always calls us back. They're great, and they're easy to work with. Angela always has the answers. Or if she doesn't, she'll say, 'Let me find out,' and she'll get back to us."

"And they don't make you feel demeaned in any way," Joan chimes in.

Thanks to Angela and LVSL, the Matteuccis received a shower chair and have had stabilizing bars put in both of their bathrooms. "They also got us a housekeeper," adds Joan. "And she does a great job every other week." The Matteuccis' plight is not at all uncommon, but neither is their gratitude.

"A large majority of the seniors we assist are not shy about how appreciative they are for the assistance they receive," says Angela, "mainly because they were unable to get help from other outfits. One woman said she called more than 17 different places one day and was unable to get assistance from any of them. She is grateful Lifeline exists because she had hit numerous dead ends with other organizations.

"Hearing stories such as hers," Angela proceeds, "makes it painfully obvious that without support from the community — the many generous contributors who donate with no thought of personal gain — Lifeline would cease to exist. To see funds go toward benefits any number of us may one day need ourselves is very uplifting. What's even more encouraging

is that the public is aware Senior Lifeline is out there and we are able to help what could be anyone of their aging grandparents, aunts, uncles or friends whom they consider family."

Disabled since 1993, Georgia Ann Duncan, a sweet and good-natured former photographer, is another LVSL client who has had more than her share of trials and tribulations. Georgia is on nighttime life support — CPAP, a costly necessity for her. "I found myself in a financial situation that, at 67, I never thought I'd be in," says Georgia. "But here I was. What do I do?"

Fortunately, Georgia was referred to LVSL by her primary care physician. "My doctor happened to have a case manager for her patients," recalls Georgia, "and when I called her and said, 'I need help,' she gave me the phone number for LVSL, and I've had a wonderful relationship with them and Anna ever since."

Georgia is referring to her Senior Lifeline caseworker, Annamel Medina. "Anna's wonderful," beams Georgia, "all of the staff at LVSL are."

"Being in this kind of job is both challenging and rewarding," says Annamel. "I have been doing this for quite some time, and the

rewarding part is extending your helping hand to people in badly need of our services. My dedication to this kind of work is simply my way of giving my share to our community and to our senior population in particular. I am proud and happy to be part of LVSL, who in one way or another, has given so much to our community, especially services for our senior citizens. These seniors need our love, care and attention, and our services will help keep them independent and living



Georgia Ann Duncan

safe at home."

But there is a bit of a downside for the caseworkers. "Sadly, sometimes we have to deny services to some who are not eligible due to the restrictions and policies we have to adhere and follow," admits Annamel.

Such was not the case for Georgia, though, who has kept a running list of the services she's received from Senior Lifeline. Like the Matteuccis, she's also had stabilizing bars installed in her bathroom. "Oh, we have somebody that can do that," Anna told her. And that's how it all started. Soon Georgia was having a housekeeper come in once every two weeks, as well.

"I learned Senior Lifeline goes to Walmart every other week with a bus that can pick you up," explains Georgia. "My bells rang. Although I qualify for Food Stamps, the store won't deliver if you make a purchase that way. So they came and picked me up and I went with them. But it was not just taking me there —



Seniors enjoy the LVSL Congregate Meal every Friday.

they had people there that if you needed assistance in shopping, they will walk with you and help you. That's tender loving care that I had not previously seen in Las Vegas in other organizations and situations. And that impressed me quite a bit. Senior Lifeline is also helping me very generously with the co-pays on my medications. I'm living on a very low income, and so paying my co-pays really helps."

From time to time, Senior Lifeline also has vouchers available for qualifying clients. "Anna made me cry when she gave me a voucher for Smith's for \$100," chokes Georgia. "That was a most wonderful gift."

But LVSL doesn't just offer services, they also help seniors find other needed services. "Another thing that I got in the mail from Anna," continues Georgia, "is a referral for Helping Hands of Vegas Valley, which I was really happy to see, because what Lifeline



A nurse from LVSL partner Homebound Healthcare stopped by during a recent Congregate Meal to check the seniors' blood pressure.

transportation to come to LVSL's weekly congregate meal. This way, our clients have a chance to get out of their homes and socialize with their friends. We also participate in additional programs such as the United Way's Project Reach, a program for those who cannot afford to pay their past due NV Energy bill. I enjoy being part of something that helps so many."

LVSL also works in partnership with the Jewish Family Service Agency and Kosher Meals on Wheels to provide both food commodities and nutritious meals prepared for and delivered to seniors.

By now, you may be wondering where LVSL comes up with the money to assist its ever-increasing client list. "Funding for LVSL programs comes from a variety of sources," says LVSL Project Administrator Jackie Kassower, "including federal grants, the Jewish Federation of Las Vegas — which is supported by your generous donations to its 2009 Annual Campaign, and corporate and individual donations."

For which there is plenty of gratitude to go around. "The staff of LVSL and the UJC/JFLV sends thanks to all those who have provided support to the LVSL program over the past years," says Kassower. "These include: the tremendous congressional support of Senator Harry Reid and Congresswoman Shelly Berkley and their impressive records of service to local seniors in need, the JFLV Board of Directors, donors, volunteers, the LVSL Professional Advisory Council, all our vendors, and local organizations that have provided assistance and advice and have been essential in our efforts to coordinate services for seniors.

"I feel a great satisfaction in being part of a program that is providing crucial support to seniors in need of help to enable them to live independently in the community," she continues. "So many of our seniors have no support system at all and have nowhere to turn for help except to LVSL. I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to Angela, Anamel and Nicki for their exceptional efforts, caring and professionalism. Through their efforts, we assist more than 350 clients each year with a variety of services."

Growing old, even at best, is not glamorous. But with the help of Las Vegas Senior Lifeline, it can certainly be bearable, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

And please be on the lookout for information about this year's 2009 Senior Prom, which will not be held. Yes, you read it right. This

year, in lieu of an actual prom, LVSL is asking its potential attendees to stay home and consider a generous donation instead.

Las Vegas Senior Lifeline is located at 2309 Renaissance Drive in the Alice and Harry L. Goldberg Senior Center. For more information, call 933-1191.



The staff of Las Vegas Senior Lifeline — from left, Jackie Kassower, Anamel Medina, Angela Budavari and Nicki Nichols.

does and what they do is different, and when you put them together, it's a good partnership." Helping Hands of Vegas Valley provides transportation to and from medical appointments.

Cell phones for emergencies are also available for LVSL clients, 100 of which were donated by Chuck Newman and ReCellular, but it wasn't on Georgia's list. "Anna called me and said, 'Do you have a cell phone?'" recalls Georgia. "And she was going to bring me one if I needed it, to call 911. But someone else had already given me one, so I didn't need it. Still, the staff of Senior Lifeline are so wonderful and caring."

It takes more than case-workers to get the job done, though. Nicki Nichols has been Senior Lifeline's office manager since April 2006. "It's rewarding to be part of a program that provides services like transportation for seniors to go shopping," says Nicki. "Transportation in Las Vegas for seniors is hard to come by. We provide transportation for people that otherwise would have no way to get to the store to buy their food. Some of our clients are isolated, so we provide



Congregate meals also feature live entertainment. Pictured here, accordion virtuoso Sonny Murphy.

Living Today for a Better Tomorrow

Older Americans Month 2009

MAY IS OLDER AMERICANS MONTH, A GREAT time to bring attention to the issues that affect older adults and create community-wide opportunities to help older Americans improve their quality of life. This year's theme is "Living Today For a Better Tomorrow," and we, as a nation, must work together to give older adults the tools they need to make healthy decisions.

By 2030, one in every five Americans will be age 65 or older. Although the risk of disease increases with advancing age, poor health is not an inevitable consequence of aging. Many illnesses, disabilities and even death associated with chronic disease are preventable.

Nearly 40 percent of deaths in America can be attributed to poor health habits such as lack of physical exercise, poor eating habits and smoking. Older Americans can prevent or control chronic disease by adopting healthy habits such as exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy diet and ceasing tobacco use.

The benefits of regular physical activity include weight control; healthy bones, muscles and joints; arthritis relief; reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression; and more. Exercise does not have to be strenuous and is safe for people of all age groups. In fact, it's healthier to exercise than eliminate it altogether. Older Americans can greatly benefit from a regular exercise routine that includes strength, balance, stretching and endurance exercises.

While it's important for older Americans to have good physical health, it's equally important that they maintain good mental health. Nearly 20 percent of Americans age 55 and older experience depression and anxiety disorders.

Studies have shown that engaging in social activities within the community can greatly improve mental health. In fact, research has demonstrated a strong relationship between volunteering and mental health and that volunteering provides older adults with greater benefits than younger volunteers. Benefits include improved mental and physical health, greater life satisfaction, lower rates of depression and lower mortality rates.

The U.S. Administration on Aging and its National Aging Services Network support a number of successful programs throughout the country that are helping older adults live better today and in the future. One of these programs is Las Vegas Senior Lifeline.

Americans of all ages can celebrate Older Americans Month year 'round. Volunteer for activities in your area; promote community, state, and national efforts to serve older adults; and find ways to enrich the lives of older adults who touch your life. Additionally, actively search out ways you can involve your community's older adults in volunteer efforts, allowing them to share their wisdom and energy. By working together, we can improve the health and well being of our nation's older adults and pave the way for better health as we age. —JK