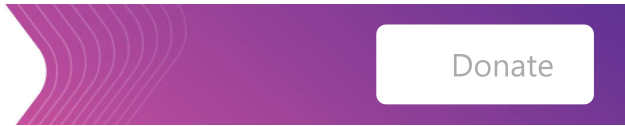




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# Colorful 'Brains in Bloom' event helps people with dementia and their caregivers

91.7 WVXU | By [Becca Costello](#)

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Becca Costello / WVXU

A Brains in Bloom event on June 28, 2023.

Jere and Judy Schuler are regulars at events like this week's Brains in Bloom, a free floral arranging class from the [Giving Voice Foundation](#) (GVF).

They're among the 126,000 people in the Tri-State area living with dementia or caring for someone with dementia.

Jere's symptoms started about five years ago. Last year they got the official diagnosis: Alzheimer's disease.

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"As weird as it might sound, I've been a lot happier," Jere says. "I know I have it and there's nothing I can do about it, and so I'm trying to make the best of it."

Pointing to Judy beside him, Jere adds "And thank God I've got her."

The couple goes to [Creative Connections](#) every week, another program from the Giving Voice Foundation. There, they split up so Judy can join a support group for caregivers.

"It's just an amazing opportunity for me to be with others that are dealing with the disease and some of the issues and struggles, while [Jere] is with occupational therapists and music therapists and singing and dancing and exercising," Judy said. "It's just been a real, real joy for all of us to do that."



*Giving Voice Foundation / Provided*

Jere (left) and Judy (center) Schuler put together vases of fresh flowers at the Brains in Bloom event on June 28, 2023.

Activities like this are full of laughter — and socializing is an important benefit — but there's a lot more going on here.

"It looks like just a fun little, 'let's put some flowers in a vase,' but there's actually a lot of science behind it," says Kristin Cooley, program director for GVF.

Cooley says programs are designed to stimulate the mind and body at the same time. She points to research that shows doing two things simultaneously creates new neural pathways.

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"With the floral arranging, it really is kind of tapping into the five senses. So the visual, the different colors of the flowers ... basil and mint so that we're tapping into [scent]," she said.

Like all Giving Voice Foundation events, this floral arranging class is free. The fresh-cut flowers, vases, and other supplies were donated by Druffel Gardens, a nonprofit garden in Walnut Hills. Dan Druffel is retired after 48 years as a landscape contractor.

"Typically, annually, we plant about 4,300 annuals and also vegetables," Druffel said. "Last year, we gave out 2,900 vases of flowers, and this past year, as well, we gave 1,400 pounds of produce to La Soup's food kitchen."



*Giving Voice Foundation / Provided*

Dan Druffel (center) chats with participants at the Brains in Bloom event on June 28, 2023.

Like everyone else here, Druffel likes to socialize and stay busy in his retirement. He says the garden is a passion project.

"It's a tough world we live in and I think flowers make a big difference to a lot of people," he said.

Shirley and Rudy Rice were among dozens of people enjoying Druffel's flowers at the Brains in Bloom event. Rudy was diagnosed with dementia in 2017. The couple moved to Cincinnati from the Cleveland area a couple years later.

"We raised vegetables and always had flower gardens too," Shirley said. "So I thought

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other people, which we need to do."

Rudy, an avid Cleveland Browns fan, was a little less enthusiastic at the beginning.

"It's not my thing," he explained, saying he loves flowers, but, "I like other people to get them for me."

By the end, though, even Rudy had a huge smile on his face.



*Giving Voice Foundation / Provided*

Rudy (seated left) and Shirley (center) Rice at the Brains in Bloom event on June 28, 2023.

Jere and Judy Schuler say they retired early once they got Jere's diagnosis. Even though Judy worked in nursing, she says she had no clue how to find resources. Luckily, there seems to be a lot available.

"But you do have to be a go-getter," Judy says. "You've got to go out there, and you've got to find it. You've got to sign up for it and you've got to keep watching for it."

Jere says he likes all of it — the music, games, and dancing — even if he was a little skeptical of floral arranging at first.

"I've never thought about doing this sort of thing, but I've really had a lot of fun with it," he said. "It's a routine that I've really very much enjoyed. I love being around people; it makes me comfortable. It makes me accept all this."

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This is the first year for Brains in Bloom. GVF offers Creative Connections twice a week, occasional Dancing to Remember and Music in Motion events, plus journaling classes and other support groups for caregivers.

Other local resources include the [Greater Cincinnati Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association](#); [Dementia Inclusive Cincinnati](#) (working to make Cincinnati the most elder and dementia inclusive city in America); [Memory Cafe](#); [Cincinnati Area Senior Services](#); [Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio](#).

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