

Marweg and Steinfeldt seek to make Angel's Touch feel like home

By Jeanette Gerke
For the Wrightstown Spirit

In the midst of the gloomy stories about the economy, it's refreshing to hear an uplifting one. Heartwarming stories occur frequently at Angel's Touch Assisted Living where people are helping people live better lives. Owners Sheila Steinfeldt and Julie Marweg are motivated by a love for the elderly and disabled. Both worked as nurses for over 20 years each and are now bringing their practical experience to Angel's Touch, a community based residential facility located in Ledgeview, just south of downtown De Pere. "We love the elderly," said Steinfeldt. "Long term nursing care is all that we have ever done, and we do it from the heart."

A daycare center and an elementary school that are adjacent to Angel's Touch plan activities for their students to interact with the residents. Cora Backhaus, a pre-kindergarten teacher at Kinder-Care, 1553 Arcadian Lane, visited Angel's Touch with her four- and

five-year old students in December. The children had crafted lap blankets and were excited about giving them as presents to the elderly residents. "One little girl saw a lady sitting alone on a couch. She went over to her and carefully covered her with the blanket. Nobody asked her to do that," said Backhaus.

Heritage School students also mix with the residents as they sing, play bingo together, and make cards. "It's such a beautiful thing. Old people love children, and the children love interacting with them. It's noisy and loud. It's fabulous!" said Marweg.

Angel's Touch consists of four buildings accommodating several client groups—the frail elderly that need physical and medical help, memory care patients who have early to end stage dementia, and young adults with traumatic brain injury. "Many of our elderly are high acuity diabetic patients who need a lot of medication management," Steinfeldt said. "We are in touch with the doctors fre-



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Resident Dave Patz has his blood pressure checked by Angel's Touch owner and nurse, Julie Marweg.

quently, and they trust us when we make suggestions on medication."

Each building has 20 beds to facilitate an intimate, quiet, and homelike environment. Steinfeldt feels that "if you get any bigger than that, you lose that intimacy and get more institutionalized."

The rooms — Steinfeldt calls them "apartments" — have private bathrooms and showers. They invite their residents to decorate their rooms with their personal furnishings to create a home-like atmosphere. "They need familiar-

ity, especially our memory care patients. That same favorite picture that's been above the bed for the last 50 years is now here. It's important that they have their things so they feel comfortable," Steinfeldt said.

This level of comfort and security is important to both the resident and family members since many are dealing with complex health conditions. "To be successful we work really hard to make residents feel at home in a warm and loving environment," said Steinfeldt. "The state has minimum stan-

dards, but we hold our staff to high standards above and beyond what the state requires. Everyone gets top quality care."

Because of a steady waiting list, Angel's Touch is expanding with a new building that is under construction near the intersection of Dickinson Road (Highway G) and Monroe Rd. (Highway GV) in De Pere. The new building, opening in June, will accommodate elderly residents with memory care needs. Angel's Touch employs 70 staff members with an additional 15 to be hired when the new building is completed. "We are blessed by the good Lord. We have a waiting list of well over 40 people who want to live here. We're full. People don't move out. The only time we have an empty room is if someone dies, so we don't have a high turnover in residents," Steinfeldt said.

Steinfeldt and Marweg assert that there is some confusion in the general public about the difference between a nursing home and an assisted living facility, and misconceptions about getting care for an elderly parent as health declines. In the 1990s, assisted living meant residents were rather independent, providing just community meals and general services. Now, assisted living means total care for residents who are usually wheelchair-bound.

According to Steinfeldt, most people's perception of elderly care is that when their health slips, "you take them to a nursing home or hospital and they pass away there. That does not have to happen." Steinfeldt has heard many heartbreaking stories of an elderly parent who has had a stroke, heart attack, or other major health event and are moved from facility to facility, which is hard on the patient and the family. Instead, an assisted living facility adjusts their level of care. "They can live here at home and die here at their home," Steinfeldt said. "We will take care of them until their last breath. They don't need to be moved to another facility."

Choosing the least expensive elderly care can pose problems later. Some of these facilities are not set up for more intricate care and the resident is asked to move. "You have a 30-day notice. The resident is not wanted, they're hurt and offended. Now they have to move again," Steinfeldt said, "We will



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Owners Julie Marweg and Sheila Steinfeldt are both professional nurses who operate Angel's Touch Assisted Living in De Pere.