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How to make new friends after 50

The early years of midlife are a hectic time for many people. Around the time many people reach their late 30s and early 40s, they're balancing the responsibilities of a career and a family. But as people enter their 50s, some of those responsibilities tend to be less significant, leaving more time for recreational pursuits.

Hobbies and other pursuits outside of work are often more fun when enjoyed with friends. People over 50 undoubtedly recognize that it's not always so easy to make new friends, even though it's undeniably beneficial to have supportive relationships into your golden years. A 2017 study from researchers at Michigan State University found that valuing friendships was a stronger predictor of health and happiness among older adults than valuing family.

Making friends after 50 might not be as simple as it was during your school days, but these strategies can help men and women in midlife build new friendships.

Identify your interests

Those older than 59 who

have spent the last couple of decades building a career and raising a family can give some serious thought to their interests outside of work or passions they hope to pursue now that they have more time to commit to such pursuits.

The more interested you are in a given activity, the more likely you are to stick with it. And the longer you stick with something, the more likely you are to meet like-minded individuals (i.e., future friends) willing to make similar commitments.

Utilize social media

In years past, men and women older than 50 may not have had any readily available tools to reach out and connect with new people. Social media has made it much easier to build such connections. Even the most obscure passions likely have a social media group of locals devoted to them, and these groups can be great ways to meet new people.

A local runner's club may have its own social media accounts, and local governments and community groups often

share information about sports leagues and other groups via social media.

Go on group outings

Communities often sponsor group outings to museums, the theater, sporting events, and other day trips. Signing up for a bus trip to a local museum presents a great opportunity to meet people who share your interests, providing the potential to build lasting friendships built on a foundation of shared interests.

Broaden your horizons

Just because you're in your 50s doesn't mean your friends have to be. Don't hesitate to invite younger or older acquaintances and colleagues over for dinner or on weekend excursions. Friends come in all shapes, sizes and ages, so you could be missing out if you're not willing to extend a hand in friendship to people of different ages and backgrounds.

(METRO CREATIVE)

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above: Making friends after 50 can be challenging. However, various strategies can help men and women older than 50 connect with new people.

STOCK PHOTO *Living Senior*

Social media – It’s not just for kids anymore

Perhaps due to the popularity of social media among a generation of young people who grew up with it, platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are often associated with people born in the 21st century. However, a 2018 study from the Pew Institute found that 65 percent of adults between the ages of 50 and 64 used Facebook and 68 percent used YouTube.

Social media is often on the receiving end of negative attention, but it’s also a potentially valuable tool that can help men and women older than 50 stay connected with their communities. That’s not always so easy for adults who no longer have children at home. And as its name suggests, social media can help users connect with others who share their interests. Such connections also can be hard to make for adults over 50.

Adults older than 50 may be more comfortable with social media now than they were a decade ago, but it’s still a good idea to brush up on basic security measures that can help men and women protect their privacy as they utilize platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Aim for quality

Aim for quality, not quantity, when building social media networks. Avoid



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accepting friend requests from individuals you don’t know. Cyber criminals often gain access to victims via social media, so limit your social media network to people you know and trust.

Protect personal information

No social media user has the right to access your personal information, including your address, date of birth or other data unique to you. Avoid interacting with anyone who requests personal information, employing the function to block such users

from connecting with you when possible.

It’s also important to keep information about travel plans private. For example, sharing details of an upcoming vacation can serve notice to potential criminals that no one will be in your house, making it a potential target for burglars.

Turn off location information

The technology behind social media is impressive and even makes it possible to determine where users are when they tweet or post to other platforms. But many users, especially those concerned about their privacy, don’t want to share location information with anyone, much less strangers.

Turn off location information and routinely double check to make sure it’s still turned off.

Discuss privacy concerns

Discuss others’ privacy concerns before posting to social media. Social media isn’t for everyone, and some people may not want photos of themselves or their children posted to platforms like Facebook or Instagram.

Prior to posting pictures or information about other people, confirm that they’re OK with you doing so.

(METRO CREATIVE)





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Get connected

How to organize a social club

The early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic taught the world many lessons, not the least of which was how easy it can be to take socializing for granted. Lockdown was a big part of life during the early days of the pandemic, as people were forced to stay home from work and school and remain largely isolated, even from their own friends and family members.

The sense of isolation that many people developed during those early days of the pandemic likely didn't come as a surprise to medical researchers, particularly those who have studied the effects of isolation on aging populations. The National Institute on Aging indicates that social isolation and loneliness are linked to depression as well as a host of other negative health outcomes, including high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, and

cognitive decline.

Social clubs can be a great way for adults over 50 to avoid isolation and loneliness. Such clubs can provide opportunities to connect with individuals who share similar interests, laying the foundation for new friendships that can be hard to develop in midlife.

Perhaps the best thing about social clubs is that anyone can start one. These tips can help individuals older than 50 start social clubs that appeal to locals who are on the lookout for new ways to meet new people.

Consider local hobbies

Think of a hobby unique to your location. One of the best ways to attract other locals is to find a hobby that caters to residents in your area.

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Did you know?

Socialization in midlife can have a profound impact on individuals as they approach their golden years. A 2019 study led by researchers at University College London found that being more socially active in your 50s and 60s predicts a lower risk of developing dementia later in life.

The study used data from a previous study that tracked more than 10,000 participants between 1985 and 2013. Participants in the study completed cognitive testing from 1997 onwards. Researchers found that someone who saw friends almost daily at age 60 was 12% less likely to develop dementia than someone who only saw one or two friends every month.

Strong associations between social contact at age 50 and subsequent dementia were also uncovered. The study supports the idea that remaining socially active in one's 50s and 60s can benefit long-term cognitive health. (METRO CREATIVE)

Starting a social club can be a great way for individuals older than 50 to meet new people and explore new or existing passions.

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Behavioral health tips for older adults

Older adults experiencing a behavioral health issue such as anxiety or depression may be embarrassed and think they simply need to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps,” but helping them seek help can empower them to live their best lives, according to experts.

“Everyone is different, but there are tools for better health, including therapy, medication and self-care,” said Dr. Lindsay Evans-Mitchell, medical director for behavioral health for Cigna Medicare Advantage.

Behavioral health disorders affect one in five adults older than 55. Older men have the highest suicide rate of any age group or gender. Among men who are 75 and older, the suicide rate is 40.2 per 100,000 – almost triple the overall rate.

The most common behavioral health disorder in older adults is dementia, and its incidence is growing as the Baby Boomer generation ages. Experts project that more than 9 million Americans 65 years or older will have dementia by 2030. Anxiety

disorders and mood disorders are also common among older people.

Dealing with a behavioral health issue? These self-care tips can help:

Find a provider

“Cognitive disorders, such as dementia and mood disorders, often look the same,” Evans-Mitchell said. “Only a trained professional can make an accurate diagnosis.” For help finding a provider, reach out to your primary care physician or health plan, such as Medicare or Medicare Advantage. Also consider virtual therapy. It’s easy to schedule and offers the convenience of seeing a therapist without leaving home.

Nurture yourself

Good nutrition feeds the body and mind. If you have questions about nutrition for older adults, consult your physician or a registered dietitian. Additionally, drink water throughout the day. “Dehydration can worsen cognitive issues,” Evans-Mitchell said.

Sleep Well

Like all adults, older people need seven to nine hours of sleep nightly. Evans-Mitchell noted that older people’s tendency to go to bed early, wake up early, and nap throughout the day can disrupt healthy sleep cycles and limit rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, potentially contributing to behavioral health issues

Exercise

Even moderate exercise can improve mental and physical health. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans describes benefits such as improvements in brain health, better cognitive function, and reduced risk of anxiety and mood disorders. People who exercise also tend to sleep better. Having trouble getting started? Some Medicare Advantage plans include a fitness benefit, which can pay for a gym membership or provide at-home fitness tools.

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Dementia is the most common behavioral health disorder in older adults, and its incidence is growing as the Baby Boomer generation ages. Experts project that more than 9 million Americans 65 years or older will have dementia by 2030.

SOCIAL CLUB • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

For example, lake-area residents may want to start a local fishing club, while city dwellers may draw more interest starting a club focused on local museums or restaurants. Wisconsin is known for its beer; a brewing club might be the ticket.

Take all comers

Individuals older than 50 may aspire to meet people in situations similar to their own, but they should still allow anyone interested in their club to join. Adults in the early stages of midlife (i.e., their thirties and forties) are often too busy with their personal and professional lives to make much time for social clubs, so it's likely that those interested will be 50 or older. But accepting all who are interested can increase the chances of starting a diverse and engaging group.

Spread the word

Meetup.com has been facilitating connections for two decades, making it a great place to start a group for people with shared interests. In addition to utilizing a service like Meetup, founders can spread the word through their social media apps and create fliers to post on public boards at local community centers and libraries.

Meet in public

Find a public place to get together. It's best to avoid hosting club events and meetings at a private residence, including your own. Instead, prior to starting the club, look around for meeting places, which can include local churches, libraries or community centers.

Ask about reserving spaces for meetings and look for places that are accessible for all people, including those with mobility issues.

(METRO CREATIVE)

HEALTH TIPS • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Head outside

Being outside has numerous benefits, including vitamin D absorption needed for cognitive health. Additionally, research has shown that chemicals released from trees can stimulate brain functions. Don't forget the sunscreen though, as skin cancer is most common in people older than 65.

Buddy up

Papa, available through some Cigna Medicare Advantage plans, connects older adults and their families with "Papa Pals" for companionship and support. "Papa Pals" can provide transportation, help with everyday tasks – or simply be a friend, doing activities like watching movies or playing games.

Parent a pet

Caring for pets generates positive emotions and can reduce anxiety. Just petting a dog has been shown to lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol, and pets provide a bond that can elevate two feel-good brain chemicals: oxytocin and dopamine. Dogs also encourage people to exercise outdoors.

"Behavioral health issues can be complex and confusing to navigate, but taking positive actions can be empowering," Evans-Mitchell said. "It's never too late to make a new start."

(STATEPOINT)



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Why it pays for seniors to maintain good credit



The benefits of maintaining good credit include looking more reliable in the eyes of prospective employers and securing lower mortgage interest rates when buying a home. Those rewards can benefit anyone, but they're especially enticing to young people. But what about seniors? Do individuals stand to benefit significantly from maintaining good credit into their golden years?

According to the credit reporting agency Experian, senior citizens tend to have the best credit scores of any consumer demographic. That could be a byproduct of years of financial discipline, and there are many benefits to maintaining that discipline into retirement.

Home buying, borrowing

Buying a home is often considered a big financial step forward for young people, but that doesn't mean aging men and women are completely out of the real estate market. In its 2020 "State of the Nation's Housing" report, the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University reported that the share of homeowners age 65 and older with housing debt doubled to

42% between 1989 and 2019.

In addition, 27% of homeowners age 80 and over were carrying mortgage debt in 2019. Maintaining strong credit after retirement can help homeowners who still have mortgage debt get better terms if they choose to refinance their mortgages.

Even seniors who have paid off their mortgages can benefit from maintaining good credit if they decide to downsize to a smaller home but cannot afford to simply buy the new home outright.

Rewards

Retirement is often associated with travel, recreation and leisure. Such pursuits can be more affordable when seniors utilize rewards-based credit cards that help them finance vacations, weekend getaways and other expenses associated with traveling. Seniors who maintain strong credit ratings into their golden years may have more access to the best travel-based rewards cards than those whose credit scores dip in retirement.

Unforeseen expenses

No one knows what's around the

corner, but savvy seniors recognize the importance of planning for the unknown. The COVID-19 pandemic seemingly came out of nowhere, and among its many ripple effects was the sudden job loss experienced by seniors.

The JCHS report found that 21% of homeowners age 65 and over had reported loss of employment income related to the pandemic. Unforeseen medical expenses also can compromise seniors' financial freedom.

Maintaining a strong credit rating into older adulthood can help seniors navigate such financial uncertainty more smoothly. Such a strategy can help seniors secure low-interest loans or credit cards that can help them pay down sudden, unforeseen expenses without getting into significant debt.

(METRO CREATIVE)

The importance of a strong credit rating is often emphasized to young people. However, a strong credit rating can be equally beneficial for seniors.

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Getting rid of old meds

How to safely dispose of medications and other household drugs

Did you know that in 2019 up to 200 pharmaceuticals were detected in the surface water, ground water and drinking water in the United States, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development? Conventional wastewater treatment plants are neither designed nor equipped to fully remove pharmaceuticals, which is how these substances end up in ground and surface water.

What can you do to dispose of medications properly and help prevent these potent chemicals from polluting the environment?

While 61% of Americans are concerned about flushed painkillers polluting drinking water and public waterways, one out of four admit to flushing leftover prescriptions down the drain, and another 25% reported

throwing unused medications in the trash, according to a study by Stericycle.

If you are concerned about the environment, you can be part of the solution by taking advantage of new ways to safely dispose of unused medications.

Here are practical do's and don'ts to follow when discarding old medications or other household drugs:

DO – Regularly clean out your medicine cabinet. Are there unused medications you no longer need? Expired over-the-counter medications or prescriptions? Make it a habit to regularly inventory your medications and remove expired, unwanted and unneeded ones for disposal.

DONT – Hold on to prescriptions you are no longer advised to take by your doctor. The Stericycle study found that Americans keep unused prescriptions either for

future use (30%), because they fear their illness reoccurring (32%) or because they don't know how to dispose of them (nearly 15%). However, keeping unused medications in your home can be unsafe and increases risks for accidental ingestion or potential substance misuse.

DO – Use one of these safe disposal methods for discarding unused medications in your home:

- Use the Detera Drug Deactivation and Disposal System, a safe medication disposal pouch that can be used at home. It is the safest, most effective choice used to destroy and properly dispose of unused, unwanted and expired over-the-counter and prescription medications. It permanently deactivates drugs in many forms including pills, patches, liquids, films and creams –

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

The next Drug Take Back Day in Wisconsin is scheduled for October 2022. To find a site near you, go to www.dhs.wisconsin.gov and search "Drug Take Back."

STOCK PHOTO Living Senior

New Beginnings

– and honoring the past

By **Jennifer Eisenbart**

STAFF WRITER

Theresa Stalzer served in many different roles around the area.

In fact, when she died in October of 2021, Stalzer's obituary started with: "It was no coincidence that she was sometimes called 'the other' Mother Theresa."

Stalzer spent more than 50 years of her life helping others, working as a social worker for Walworth County's Department of Social Services, as well as a child protective services worker for the Department of Health and Human Services.

Once she retired from there, Stalzer spent eight years volunteering for New Beginnings APFV, an organization that helps victims of domestic and sexual violence in Walworth County.

According to her obituary, Stalzer worked her last on-call shift the day before she died.

Stalzer's influence in the New Beginnings program was recently recognized, as the organization dedicated its children's waiting room to Stalzer March 25. More than 40 people showed up to honor the late advocate.

The plaque at the entrance to the room includes Stalzer's picture, and reads as follows:

"In memory of Theresa Stalzer, a dedicated servant to survivors and friend to many. Theresa's 40-year career in human services impacted hundreds of lives who are better for knowing her."

A daughter's view

Tiffany Jaske, Stalzer's daughter, describes her simply as "a character."

She considers the origins of her name a typical example.

"I always thought I was named after Breakfast at Tiffany's or the jewelry store," Jaske explained. "She's like, 'nope.' I was named after a client."

Jaske has many stories like that – stories that show how Stalzer bridged her work life and home life in subtle ways. Many of the stories Jaske heard for the first time after her mother died.

"The sad but funny part of her dying? I learned more about her work," Jaske said. "I always knew she was involved in the community. Ever since I was born, that's all that had driven her – Walworth County."

"It wasn't until her death that I saw the magnitude of what she had done," she added.

As Jaske explained, it appeared her

mom wanted it that way – a separation of her work for health and human services and New Beginnings, a way to keep her work away from home.

"She was just my mom to me. And she was probably much more than that to people that I probably know," Jaske said. "I applauded her. I never once saw it as a child."

That being said, Jaske said she was very aware of what Walworth County meant to her mom. Having been a lifelong resident of the area, Stalzer was known to everyone – and knew everyone, it seemed.

"I swear she knew everybody in the community. I couldn't set foot with her in Elkhorn without someone stopping her or her stopping somebody," Jaske said. She added that the joke was, "if you ran into my mother at the grocery store, you weren't leaving the grocery store for two hours. That was my mother."

Stalzer was also known for speaking her mind, "whether you wanted to hear it or not," Jaske explained.

For Jaske, though, it was her mom's funeral that opened her eyes to everything Stalzer had done.

"At one point at her funeral, the line was out the door," Jaske explained. She knew her mother as an advocate for children – and later in her life, as an advocate for seniors – but listening to others speak gave her a new perspective.

"I didn't realize how connected and what a difference (she'd made)," Jaske said. "More than one law enforcement officer came up to me to say, 'your mom really impacted my career.'"

A good part of that impact was made after Stalzer retired from Walworth County. Jaske said her mother loved to have her fingers on the pulse of the community – and working with New Beginnings gave her another opportunity to do so.



Theresa Stalzer

"I think when she retired, she missed that,"

Jaske explained. "I

think it was her calling."

Jaske attended the room dedication in March, saying it gave her a new perspective on her own life.

"I realize I need to give more and step up my game to ever achieve something like that," she said.

She was touched that they dedicated the children's room in honor of her mom.

"Children always spoke to her. I think that was her calling – the safety of children in Walworth County," Jaske said.

Jaske recognized both her mother – and the woman her mother was.

"(She was) such a people person," Jaske added. "You could leave my mother alone in a room with strangers and she'd come away with new best friends."

A loving remembrance

Theresa's obituary from Haase-Lockwood was written by Heidi Lloyd, who was the director of New Beginnings from 2012-2020.

"I hired her," Lloyd, who is now retired, said of Stalzer. "I'm the one who convinced her to come out of retirement."

Lloyd said Jaske asked her to gather all the dates of her mother's work.

"Being a journalist, I thought I could make this into a feature obituary," Lloyd said. "It was just cathartic to me, to be able to express my admiration. It was my tribute to her."

When she gave it to Jaske, the response was overwhelming.

"She was like, 'oh my God, I can't believe this.' It was a wonderful gift we were able to share with the world."

The obituary follows, with Lloyd's permission:

"It was no coincidence that she was sometimes called "the other" Mother Theresa. With over 50 years in the business of helping others, Theresa (Voelkel) (Hanson) Stalzer still loved being in the trenches. The longtime advocate for abused children and adults died unexpectedly at home Friday, Oct. 15, at age 75.

She was proud of being raised in Elkhorn, where her parents operated Al and Bud's Market, a downtown grocery store. She graduated from Elkhorn High School in 1964. In recent years she still got together nearly every month for dinner with classmates.

She never left the city she loved, except for the years she studied at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, earning a bachelor's degree in sociology.

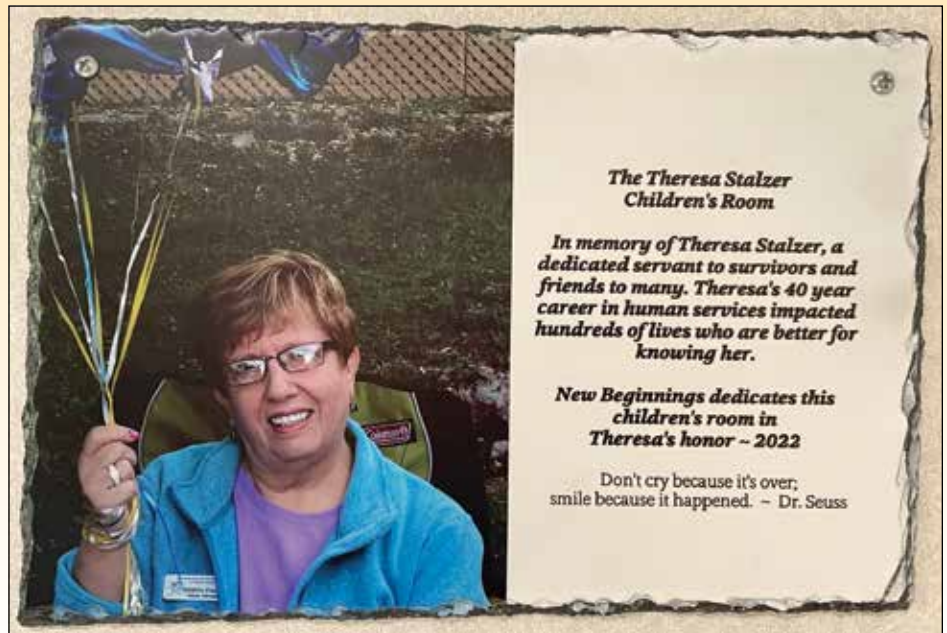
She interned as a social worker at Walworth County's Department of Social Services and was hired full-time shortly after graduation. She was a child protective services (CPS) worker with the Department of Health and Human Services for about 40 years.

"Theresa was an expert in the court system in educating jury pools on sexual abuse," said Paula Hocking, who worked alongside Theresa at CPS for more than 20 years and is now with Children's Wisconsin. "Her heart and soul were always to make lives better for the children of Walworth County, and she did do that. She believed everybody could have a good life. It was her mission to make Walworth County a better place."

John Bigler, former assistant director of the Department of Health and Human Services and a high school schoolmate, admired Theresa. "She was just somebody whose dedication and identity were wrapped up in what she did as a professional – helping people," he said.

Theresa was coaxed out of retirement in 2013 as a volunteer for New Beginnings APFV, an organization that helps victims of domestic and sexual violence countywide.

She soon joined the staff and resurrected a program to provide specially trained 24-



hour volunteer advocates at the hospital for victims of rape and other sexual crimes. She worked her last on-call shift the day before she died.

"She was my go-to, especially with the bad of the bad cases," said Cathy Duchow-Cross, coordinator of the sexual assault nurse examiner and forensic programs at Aurora Health Care's hospitals in Elkhorn and Burlington. "I'd say, 'Hey Little Buddy, I need your help with this one.' I knew with her, the victim would be well taken care of. No matter what time of the night, if I asked if she was sleeping, she would always say 'no.'"

Clients gravitated toward Theresa and her supportive, comforting words. Her role as a

fill-in mom or grandma during times of crisis earned her the nicknames of "St. Theresa" and "Mother Theresa" from some clients.

At work, Theresa was "an institution," said Carmen Garces, a counselor at New Beginnings APFV. "She was part of so many wonderful things in Elkhorn. She took brilliant photos with her phone. She was fun. She volunteered, she traveled with friends. She had a remarkable memory. She was not going to go home and be a crinkly old lady with nothing to do."

Theresa was known for her perfect manicures and having every hair in place. She

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

from top: This is the plaque now at the entrance to the children's room at New Beginnings APFV in Elkhorn, summing up the life and the attitude of the woman it is named for – Theresa Stalzer; More than 40 people gathered at New Beginnings APFV March 25 to honor the memory of Stalzer, who died last October. The children's room is now named after her. She was a long-time advocate in the area.

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Some local police stations also have drug take back boxes available for residents.

DONT – Flush medications down the toilet, put them down the drain or throw them in the trash. While some sources may advise flushing pills or mixing meds with coffee grounds or kitty litter to make them unappealing to potential poachers, these methods do not render active chemicals inert and allow harmful ingredients to make their way into the water and soil after being discarded.

"It's up to all of us – hospitals, clinics, families and individuals to ensure that we're preventing medications from polluting our environment," said Nancy Devine, chief operating officer at Verde Environmental Technologies Inc. "The good news is, it's not hard to do the right thing to keep hazardous substances from harming the planet."

For more information about how to dispose of household medications and prescription drugs safely, visit DeterraSystem.com.

(BPT)

frequently dressed and accessorized in shades of purple for domestic violence awareness or teal for sexual assault awareness. She created her own jewelry and greeting cards, sharing her elaborate, homemade treasures with family and friends.

She was a founding member of the Walworth County Alliance for Children, which started in 1989 as a Children's Court Advisory Board to provide community education and awareness on child maltreatment and to advocate for just punishments for perpetrators.

She was the first to video record a child victim interview, which helped with courtroom proceedings.

The group evolved into the Tree House Child and Family Center in Elkhorn, including the building that houses the Walworth County Child Advocacy Center for Children's Wisconsin. Theresa still served on the Tree House general board of directors, one of only a couple original members with continuous service.

For New Beginnings APFV, Theresa was active in the public effort to rally support to build a domestic violence shelter for Walworth County survivors.

As she advanced in age, her work life turned more toward elder victims. She frequently spoke to groups about how to stay safe from predators, both physical and financial. She was a former board member of Walworth County Crime Stoppers, the Walworth County Housing Authority, and neighborhood watch groups. She co- led with Advocate Araceli Wence a support group for Hispanic teens at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Elkhorn.

"Honestly, what didn't she do? What committee was she not part of?" said Garces, adding that a co-worker had gotten Theresa to hit the dance floor on Oct. 2 at the agency's barn dance fundraiser. Theresa had put in extra hours to help coordinate and staff the silent auction.

"He (Advocate Will Helling) pulled her out on the dance floor and she boogied," said Garces. "That's the Theresa we all want to remember."

Looking back now, Lloyd said it was her "pleasure and honor" to write the obituary.

"She was a great friend. She was a fabulous worker. She was a tireless advocate," Lloyd explained.

"She is missed. She is missed, every day."

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