



Jody Warner / H-P Staff

Betty Cullison (second from right), 80, her daughter Mary Smith (second from left) and granddaughter Lori Volstorf (right) speak with Janel Groth, PACE of Southwest Michigan center manager.

PACE takes pressure off families

Senior citizen day center has ceremony to cut the ribbon

By JOHN MATUSZAK
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ST. JOSEPH — Betty Cullison, 80, of Three Oaks has a pretty blunt reason why she'd rather stay in her own home than move to a nursing home.

"So nobody can bother me," Cullison explained with a slight grin.

But Cullison is experiencing the early stages of dementia and needs help with housework and making it to doctors' ap-

pointments. Her daughter, Mary Smith, 59, of New Troy and her granddaughter, Lori Volstorf, 38, and the mother of three school-age children living in Three Oaks have been teaming to provide the needed care while working and taking care of other family obligations.

It was while seeking information at the Area Agency on Aging about becoming a caregiver for her grandmother that Volstorf learned about PACE, the Program for All-inclusive Care for the Elderly.

"This is going to be a blessing for us," Volstorf said of the program that opened this month and had its official rib-

bon cutting in St. Joseph Tuesday.

PACE is the centerpiece of a \$6.4 million renovation and reorganization project at the agency's site at 2900 Lakeview Ave.

These renovations will make Southwest Michigan "a better place to live, to retire and to stay," said Lynn Kellogg, executive director of the Region IV Area Agency on Aging and chair of PACE of Southwest Michigan.

PACE provides in-home services and day care, including social activities, and medical care and therapy for seniors and those with disabilities over the age of 55.

It is designed to help clients stay in their own homes as long as possible, explained Janel Groth, the PACE center manager.

"We're an extension of the family," Groth said.

Volstorf said they had been looking into other options to help her grandmother, who has lived alone since her husband died six years ago.

They didn't want to put her in a nursing home, and assisted living facilities were too expensive.

PACE, targeted to people who are covered by Medicare and who are also eligible for

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Medicaid, is a good fit for them.

"We can get her out of the house, and she can socialize with other adults," said Volstorf, a legal assistant with Whirlpool Corp. "We didn't want to put her in a nursing home. We want to keep her happy."

The PACE van will even pick her up and bring her home. Being in her home in the evening will allow Cullison to keep in touch with neighbors and visit the senior club where she plays cards and bingo.

The PACE staff plan activities around the interests of the participants.

"I'll bet you'll be the leader of the square-dancing group," Volstorf tells her grandmother.

Smith, Cullison's daughter, is the supervisor of the records department at Cook Nuclear Plant. She pointed out that her mother is physically strong (she grew up on a farm in Buchanan milking cows by hand), and the PACE people will help her maintain that strength to prevent falls and other injuries.

During their initial visit Volstorf was impressed that the staff took an interest in the needs of the entire family.

Caregivers need support,

as well, said Christine Vanlandingham, the Area Agency on Aging's fund and product development office. "We take a whole family approach. (Caregiving) is a labor of love, but it is labor."

With many of Cullison's immediate daily needs taken care of, her daughter and granddaughter will have more time to enjoy their visits, Vanlandingham said.

The renovations involved converting a former gymnasium into a two-story wing for PACE. The agency also has expanded space for its resource library, SeniorNet technology classes, Senior Volunteer programs, and the Disability Network of Southwest Michigan. It now has several conference rooms available for public use.

Cullison, who starts at PACE Oct. 1, is among the first five clients to sign up for the program that will have a capacity for 200 participants.

Volstorf said she keeps thinking of the line from "Field of Dreams" that says "Build it and they will come," and has already started talking about PACE to friends.

"There will be a ton of people coming here," Volstorf predicted.

People interested in PACE should call the Info-Line for Aging and Disability at 800-654-2810.

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