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WARTBURG'S PUPPETRY PROGRAM HELPS ALZHEIMER'S & DEMENTIA PATIENTS

Led by local college teacher, program stimulates brains, enhances fine motor skills and provides fun

MOUNT VERNON, N.Y. – FEB. 10 – The Wartburg, a leading provider of senior care services in Westchester County, is finding that improvisational therapy with puppets helps those suffering from Alzheimer's disease and related dementia.

Wartburg recently launched its Mnemonic Theatre Project, a weekly program that encourages playfulness and theatrics for participants in the organization's Assisted Living Memory Care Facility and Adult Day Services program as part of its award-winning internationally-recognized Creative Aging and Lifelong Learning Program. Participants recently presented a puppet performance, similar to an improvisational Muppets show, for family and friends, with great success.

Led by Sarah Lawrence College puppetry teacher Josh Rice, who holds a master's degree in theater, Wartburg's program helps residents stimulate their brain while having fun. Participants use their dexterity and fine motor skills to first make their puppet, rely on creativity to develop a name and personality, and communicate a storyline for their characters. Rice has seen participants create whimsical fairy puppets telling a Peter Pan-like story, as well as more realistic figures, including a character named Robert who travels to Ireland. Another puppet brought out a woman's singing talents when she broke out into an aria from her earlier opera career, according to Rice.

"What I love about puppets is that they require you to be present to make it animated," said Rice. "A puppet allows them to be free with their imagination and to engage. The theater concept creates community because it's collaborative and interactive. People laugh and work together, helping each other make choices about their puppets."

Initiated last fall, the puppetry program is now in its third session. Rice meets with residents and Adult Day Services participants twice a week for six weeks, but other programs have run for 12 and 20 weeks. Puppetry is part of Wartburg's Creative Aging and Lifelong Learning Program created in 2009 to offer hands-on creative activities such as painting, quilting, singing, poetry, creative writing and computer technology.

"Our Creative Aging Initiative promotes greater emotional health, social engagement and lifelong learning for older adults through a wide range of arts-based programs to develop the creative capacity of older adult-learners," said David Gentner, CEO and President. "We're happy to now add puppetry to our arts disciplines, including choral arts, creative writing, painting, quilting, technology, African drumming, ceramics, oral history and much more."

ABOUT

Wartburg is an award-winning provider of comprehensive senior services, including independent living, assisted living, Alzheimer's/dementia care, skilled nursing, rehabilitation, adult day services and hospice care. www.wartburg.org. Its 34-acre campus in Mount Vernon serves seniors and their families in southern Westchester and the northern Bronx, and now the tri-state area. Wartburg's nursing home has been recognized by *U. S. News & World Report* as one of the "Best Nursing Homes in New York State for the fourth straight consecutive year, in 2014. Over the past few years, Wartburg has launched an ambitious building expansion program, including the Friedrichs Residence, providing affordable housing for seniors with 61 independent living apartments, and a rehabilitation and adult day services center of excellence both opened in 2013.

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