

# Green House project will become a reality

When the opportunity to write for Center Stage came up, so many things came to mind.

I could write about my granddad who cowboy'd on the cattle drives from Texas to Wyoming and the struggles he encountered.

I could tell how my family cared for mom at our home in Story and found her sense of humor such a joy, or how my sister, Sandi, and I worked to keep mom healthy and living in our homes for four years.

At the end of a week's stay in the hospital in Cheyenne, she passed away only 48 hours after the doctor said she would be admitted to a nursing home indefinitely.

We will never know if her fear of moving there had anything to do with her passing. We can only hope that it didn't.

Those thoughts are looking backward, so I decided to explain the incredible hope and determination of Green House® Living for Sheridan volunteers for this worthwhile project.

We have vision and friends who see it too. A vision is defined as that which is almost out of reach, something to move toward and to someday realize with great celebration.

That's where we are. We are on a vision quest! At last, elders in need of care will be home in a small, sunny facility surrounded by a small number of caregivers and friends enjoying life to their full potential.

That is the vision. Here are a few things to ponder.

One of the many blessings of the project is the e-mails and calls we receive nationwide from those who believe lives shouldn't be boring, lonely and helpless for elders whose only failing is aging and it's compli-

cations. If everyone who contacted us with encouragement for the Green House project could write a check, we would be funded!

Former President Lyndon Johnson wrote, "We treat our elderly like animals, we put them in cages." That's rough rhetoric.

He was describing the great movement in the '60s toward building nursing homes, centered on a medical, not a social model, two to a room, shared bathroom, minimal if any privacy.

Nursing homes across the nation are doing the best they can with what they have available. Unfortunately, many times they are restricted by the building's design, old institutional habits, culture and environment.

In our vision of the skilled nursing home industry's future, we see sweeping changes where elders are provided a more inviting environment and at no more cost than a traditional nursing home today.

With no preconceived notions, Green House caregivers (certified nurse assistants with a gift for learning new ways) receive over 100 more hours of training for excellence in this new world. Nurses will focus on elders' individual health, free from the administration responsibilities of managing the operations.

A question we often get is about cost. Green House homes accept Medicaid and



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Medicare as well as private pay and private insurance.

No matter how the facility is reimbursed, the cost to live in a Green House home is the same, or in some cases, somewhat less than in a traditional nursing home.

Continued positive outcomes from 42 Green House homes nation-

wide provide volunteers incentives to change the culture and do away with tradition.

Despite these tough economic times, we have the determination to move forward because at some point, those buildings from the '60s are going to have to be renovated or torn down and rebuilt.

Why not use the privacy and small, homelike environment used in the Green House model? Why not rebuild with a new culture of more person-centered direct care?

Here's the deal ... we are going to build this with a lot of help from our friends. Everyone knows the Sheridan Senior Center isn't your ordinary place for seniors to gather. This place is extraordinary.

It's special because of the devoted and helpful staff. It's special too, because the board and staff are great supporters of the Green House project. They are volunteers.

The Sheridan Senior Center is an unofficial, unpaid partner in moving the vision forward.

Carmen, Riva, Shelly, Nancy and too many others to mention assist us with scheduling already over-scheduled meeting rooms, providing staff support, information distribution, meeting minutes and other great things that would not be possible without their help.

In fact, many people wonder if Green House Living for Sheridan is an "offshoot" of the Senior Center. The answer is, "No, we are on our own."

We have enjoyed support from our many generous donor friends, great help in bringing Green House founder Dr. Thomas to Sheridan from our friends at AARP of Wyoming, and of course the city of Sheridan, Sheridan College and the county commissioners. We've got friends!

We're pretty bare-bones as nonprofits go, but without the constant support and encouragement of volunteers and the Sheridan community, we would never have gotten this far.

Did I say we were also looking for a miracle? Raising another \$3.3 million in this crazy financial environment will take one.

But you know ... we'll get there with a little help from our friends.

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*Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.*