

Greenhouse Living for Sheridan — Ray Clark's dream

My late husband, the Rev. Ray Clark, was instrumental in bringing the concept of The Greenhouse long-term care alternative to Sheridan.

Ray spent his lifetime in Sheridan spearheading new ideas and projects that made living, especially for elders, safer and more enjoyable.

About six years ago Ray's friend Dale Bell was visiting in Sheridan.

Dale is a producer of films especially for PBS. He had been working on films

Silver Threads

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that targeted issues for seniors, especially as they reached the last stage of life.

He talked with excitement about a new concept in nursing home care that he had seen in Tupelo, Miss. It was called The Greenhouse and utilized the philosophy and ideas of noted gerontologist Dr. Bill Thomas.

This was an alternative to and improvement on the traditional medical model of long-term care. Dale spoke with enthusiasm of a homelike environment with plants, a central kitchen and hearth, private rooms, flexible schedules and self-governing staff.

Ray had lots of experience with traditional nursing homes. Until the week before his death, he continued to visit the sick and infirm in the hospital and in our Sheridan nursing homes.

Ray always spoke highly of the care and dedicated staff he encountered in the nursing homes. Still he felt uncomfortable and sad that the end of lives had to be lived out in an institutional setting.

After Dale's visit, Ray began talking to Carmen Rideout at the Senior Center about this new

idea. The ideas just mushroomed as he and Carmen "dreamed" about bringing such a project to Sheridan.

As Ray talked, it was obvious that others in the community had been hearing about The Greenhouse concept and were also beginning to "dream" that Sheridan could support such a concept.

Not one to just talk, Ray became a part of the original group that gathered to make plans for a feasibility study for the project.

Doug Osborn took the idea to the state Legislature, and representatives from all over the state became interested enough to award Sheridan a start-up grant. Currently, a nonprofit board is working to make this idea a reality.

Local developer Don Roberts has donated land, and donations have begun to come in from people in the community who want to share in the project.

It was Ray's dream that if the end of life couldn't be lived out at home, it should be in as close to a home environment as possible.

He had been involved in so many capital campaigns for improvements in Sheridan he was sure that the financial resources and human capital were here to support this alternative to traditional care.

This was the next project on his agenda, but God had other plans and decided to call him home.

I am involved on the Task Force of Greenhouse Living for Sheridan to help in carrying out Ray's last dream for the community.

Silver Threads is a weekly column written by people involved with the Sheridan Senior Center.