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20 years of caring

By Julie Huss
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DERRY — It's all about caring. Barbara King knows this firsthand.

The 81-year-old woman waited on a rainy night at her Island Pond home until volunteer Paul Simmons arrived for his weekly visit and King's grocery order.

As she waited for her friend to enter, she made sure no one sat in his special seat at the kitchen table.

For clients, like King, and volunteers involved with Community Caregivers of Greater Derry, it's a partnership forged with friendship, support and respect.

Community Caregivers celebrates 20 years in 2008, offering elderly and people with disabilities a chance to remain independent in their homes with a volunteer network in place to help with shopping, transportation, light chores or simply a friendly visit.

This means a lot to the people Caregivers serves in this area.

"Paul is one of the nicest people," King said. "I've met his wife and kids, and they are just as wonderful as he is."

For six years, Simmons has come to spend time on Friday nights with King, a Caregivers client for about 17 years. In addition to Simmons, King gets help from other Caregivers volunteers with



JAN SEIGER/Staff photo

Community Caregivers of Greater Derry find little room in their loaner's closet that is packed with equipment.

cleaning, mail pickup and other simple tasks the woman often finds difficult to handle.

For Simmons, it was a chance to do something important for others that brought him to Caregivers and to King's doorstep. He said he first heard of a need

for volunteers at his church and decided he wanted to help.

"It was God-ordained and Caregivers brought us together," Simmons said as he sat with King last Friday night.

"Did you get my little cheese things?" King asked as Simmons

emptied the plastic grocery bags. "No, but I got you popcorn," he said.

King said she and Simmons have formed a strong bond, not just because he brings her weekly grocery items, but because they share much more — often a favorite Bible verse or song — and King looks forward to his visits.

"They've helped Barbara a lot," Simmons said about Caregivers' mission.

"And he's my eyes, my arms and my ears," King said. "We have the greatest conversations and we talk about the darnedest things."

It's all about mutual respect and helping others, both agreed — the main premise of Caregivers' two-decade mission.

The organization started out small, through the vision of community members and churches that wanted to begin a volunteer group to help others stay independent in their homes.

Now 20 years and going strong, Caregivers services several hundred clients with almost 20,000 volunteer hours logged in the past year.

In total, more than 1,000 volunteers have logged in over 103,915 hours, helping about 1,300 clients in the past two decades.

Caregivers also offers a "loaner's closet" at its space in Derry's Masonic lodge on East Broadway, packed full of walkers, canes and

other supplies available to be loaned free of charge to anyone who needs help.

Cindee Tanuma, executive director and volunteer coordinator, said Simmons is the perfect example of a volunteer, working a full-time job, raising a family, but wanting to do a bit more to help those in need.

Tanuma said there is always a need for new volunteers to pitch in and become involved with Caregivers.

Right now, help is needed with light chores for clients on a waiting list to receive help.

Volunteers are of all ages, backgrounds and work settings and are often recruited through churches, family and friends, or other sources.

Tanuma said Caregivers plans special events to say thank you to its supporters, clients and volunteers as the 20-year celebration continues.

"We want to say thank you," she said. "We want to thank everyone that's ever volunteered or given to us."

King said she couldn't make it without her volunteers.

"I've met some great people and a lot of them I keep in touch with," she said.

To learn more about Community Caregivers of Greater Derry or to find out about volunteering, call 432-0877 or visit the organization online at www.comcaregivers.org.