



by Tom Coombe
Echo editor

Pull into the parking lot. Punch the code. Open the door and walk through the dining area. Take a left down the hallway to my grandma Dolly's door.

For about four months last year, it became a regular and familiar drill.

And it was my first and lasting experience with Ely's Carefree Living.

Often armed with a strawberry shake for 95-year-old Dolly and sometimes bringing a sundae for her sister-in-law and my great aunt Marcella, stops at the southern-most building in the community's assisted living complex were part of my routine.

Hollee and the kids would make weekend visits, but during the week I had the responsibility - and now I remember it as a privilege - to spend some quality time as my grandma reached the end of her time with us.

It also was an opportunity to get a first hand look at Carefree and meet its residents and staff. Other than an occasional photo opportunity for the Echo, I wasn't all that familiar with the facility and my understanding was largely limited to anecdotal offerings and what I learned when writing news reports about its start-up in town. That changed quickly in 2019.

Dolly's time there was brief - just over four months with a 10-day hospital stay in the middle - but it was fulfilling and in many ways rewarding.

Make no mistake about it, the stubborn Slovenian wanted nothing less than to live out her days at her cherished, beautiful home with the impeccable yard on top of the hill at Eighth and Conan, and she missed that only by four months.

She begrudgingly adjusted and soon began looking out for and worrying about a whole different group of people - her newfound friends at Carefree.

Some she knew from days gone by in Ely, dating as far back as her time in school in the 1930s or her work at Zup's the following decade. Others, particularly some of the guys, were former customers of my grandpa, who operated a barber shop out of his home until only months before he was passing.

Marcella, who would leave us earlier this year, provided a daily link with family and a devoted companion.

Down the hall was the Reverend Al, who often joined the ladies for dinner and dazzled them with his wit. I remembered Al largely from his days watching his Omerza grandsons play baseball and basketball, but thanks to last year I'll now always remember him as the "The Preacher of Carefree."

Meal time at Carefree is an event. It was clear early on that some residents of Dolly's building were creatures of habit, and many sat in their familiar chairs, day after day.

They mingled, some stuck around to watch TV or a movie, while especially on weekends it was common to see family members joining them for visits.

Those were especially heartwarming days.

As a parent, I've learned how much it means to miss your kids and how often one takes pride in them.

At Carefree, it was evident that those feelings don't evaporate once you reach your 80s or 90s. If anything, they grow stronger and visits by family members usually produced smiles, made that day's

maladies at least temporarily subside and were obvious moments of brightness for those who resided in Dolly's building.

It was also soon clear what makes Carefree hum - the efforts of a too often unappreciated staff.

There are reasons why our elderly arrive at Carefree and for most it's a final stop, not a temporary respite.

Time, age, illness or just the wearing down of once reliable body parts make its residents heavily reliant on a dedicated staff.

Some need help with what might be thought of as the simplest of tasks. Others are less dependent but all rely on the assistance, and the companionship, of those who work at Carefree.

They push wheel chairs, help residents in and out of bed. They give baths, aid with showers and changing and meals. And perhaps most of all, they listen and provide comfort when familiar faces are nowhere to be found. Their pay doesn't come close to matching the value they provide.

Dolly waxed poetically about a favorite nurse who wrapped her ailing legs just right. She worried incessantly about overworked staff who logged double-shift after double-shift. "When do they have time to rest? This isn't an easy job," Dolly told me on more than one occasion.

As she reached the final two weeks of her life, Dolly had trouble sleeping at night and one June evening she told me all about her many hours of conversation the evening before with a midnight shift aide - as they talked about everything from family and history to departed relatives and impending funeral plans.

Dolly's last 48 hours remain a blur but

memories are crystal clear in the time after she passed. So many staff members and fellow residents consoled us. Their words and hugs genuine. It was as if they lost a family member, and in many ways they did.

It was only fitting that one of Dolly's last wishes was that the staff and residents at Carefree "get a good meal" and our family arranged just that a couple days after she passed. Chicken, mashed potatoes, potica. It was quite obvious Dolly thought of her Carefree friends as family as well.

A little over a year later, Carefree has been on my mind a lot. First came the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and wonder about how residents could possibly adjust to restrictions that kept biological family members outside for months. I don't know what we, or my grandma, would have done had COVID arrived a year earlier.

Thank goodness for the caring staff who have had to provide even more care, compassion and comfort since March.

More recently came rumors and anecdotes, and later confirmation, that the virus had come to the facility, with sad news this week that residents had passed away.

A drive by Carefree Wednesday brought back memories and sadness, and genuine concern for what's occurring and yet to occur behind those walls.

Life has carried on since Dolly's passing, as she would unquestionably have wished, and little would be served by bringing the community to a halt because of an outbreak at Carefree.

Yet that shouldn't stop any of us from keeping the Carefree family close to our thoughts. And our hearts.

County's distribution of CARES Act funds for small businesses moving to Phase Two

St. Louis County is preparing to transition to the next phase in the distribution of CARES Act funds to assist small businesses.

There were 21 Ely businesses that received funding in Phase 1 through St. Louis County.

St. Louis County has allocated \$6 million in federal CARES Act funds specifically to help small businesses throughout the county.

There was \$500,000 given out in Phase 1.

The Phase 2 funding application period began Monday, Sept. 14 at 8 a.m. and continues through Monday,

Sept. 28. Phase 2 Small Business Relief Grants focus on providing emergency grant assistance of up to \$50,000 to businesses and non-profits with 100 or fewer employees.

Phase 2 funds can be used for COVID-related expenses, such as PPE, cleaning supplies, signage and safety barriers; as well as for expenses incurred during or as a result of business interruption due to a mandated Minnesota Governor Executive Order shutdown or COVID-19 related business closing.

These funds can be used to cover up to 50% of costs for rent, mortgage,

and utilities. Also eligible are irrecoverable expenses incurred in the loss of business, such as contracts, events, bookings and cancellations, and similar expenses incurred during or as a result of business interruption.

This includes payroll not covered by the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) or other funding programs.

Full program guidelines can be found online at stlouiscountymn.gov/cares.

Businesses that already applied and received a grant through Phase I may also apply for Phase 2 if they submit new or unreimbursed expenses.

Ely business owners can call city for help

The city of Ely has monies available to local business owners who have been hit by the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Please contact if there's anything the city can do or if a business needs assistance, please contact us. We're trying to tailor our grant program around their specific needs," said Ely operations director Harold Langowski.

The city has set aside \$90,000 to help local businesses through a yet-to-be-determined grant program.

In an ad this week, the city posted, "The Ely Economic Development Authority needs your help in determining what additional assistance is needed for small businesses due to COVID-19. Please provide input to the Ely Clerk's Office by September 25, 2020 to be included in the discussion at the next Ely Economic Development Authority. Funds are still available to provide assistance."

Ely Police Report for September 1-15, 2020

Arrests/Citations:

- Attempt to Locate- Officers were contacted about a vehicle that was being used by a family member that did not have permission. The vehicle was returned later. Individual was issued a citation for Driving After Revocation..

Officers contacted the owner and the vehicle was moved.

- Check Welfare- Officers were contacted to check on an individual that has not been contacted in several days. Officers located the individual that moved.
- Medical- Officers assisted the Ely ambulance with a medical.
- Disturbance- Officers located an individual that was yelling in the street. Officers determined that the individual was yelling for his dog that was enjoying some freedom.

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- Drug Incident- Officers were contacted about a bag that was found containing illegal drugs. Illegal drugs were taken into custody and will be destroyed.
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Domestic Assault.

- Theft- Officers were contacted by an individual that had items stolen while they were at work. This case is pending investigation.
- Disturbance- Officers were contacted about an individual that was yelled at by a vehicle as it drove past. Officers were unable to locate the vehicle.
- Information- Officers were contacted about vehicles driving down a closed road. Officers did not locate any vehicles and made sure the signs were visible.
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- Theft- Officers were contacted by an individual that had items stolen while they were at work. This case is pending investigation.
- Disturbance- Officers were contacted about an individual that was yelled at by a vehicle as it drove past. Officers were unable to locate the vehicle.
- Information- Officers were contacted about vehicles driving down a closed road. Officers did not locate any vehicles and made sure the signs were visible.
- Attempt to Locate- Officers were contacted about a vehicle that was being used by a family member that did not have permission. The vehicle was returned later.
- Medical- Officers assisted the Ely Ambulance.
- Neighbor Trouble- Officers were contacted about neighbors that were having an argument. Officers mediated the situation.
- Public Assist- Officers were contacted to assist with an exchange of property between two individuals.
- Disturbance- Officers contacted an individual that was causing property damage near a local business and threatening an officer. This case is pending charging consideration from the Attorney.
- Disturbance- Officers were contacted about somebody trying to enter a residence. Officers determined that it was a miscommunication between family members.
- Security Alarm- Officers assisted a

- Theft- Officers were contacted by an individual that had items stolen while they were at work. This case is pending investigation.