

Raising funds to fight memory's enemy

By **KENNETH R. CERINI**

Leading the movement for supporting and furthering research funding for Alzheimer's is the Alzheimer's Association Long Island Chapter. As one of the first regions to have 100 percent support from local legislators join the Alzheimer's Disease Task Force in Washington, D.C., Long Island and AALI are leading the campaign for the government and community to get involved in helping to find a cure and improve the quality of life for those with and affected by the disease.

"About 5.4 million individuals throughout the United States have Alzheimer's, and approximately 60,000 of those individuals live on Long Island," said Mary Ann Malack-Ragona, executive director of AALI. "There are 77 million baby boomers in this country, and one in eight is at risk for getting Alzheimer's disease. Therefore, it is imperative to get both government and communities on board with helping to find a cure."

What is the vision for AALI? Our vision has just recently come to fruition. Part of our long-term plan was to open a Long Island Alzheimer's Disease Resource Center with adult day care for our early-onset and early-stage clients. Over the course of the next month or so, we will close on our new 9,000-square-foot building in Bay Shore.

What programs does AALI offer to the community? We offer care and consultation; a 24-hour contact center, so that the family is never alone; a crisis management and suicide prevention center; education components that train professional caregivers; we offer support groups throughout Nassau and Suffolk counties; and our MedicAlert+SafeReturn Program, which helps return people to their homes safely, as 67 percent of people with this disease will wander from home.

What is something that people don't know about AALI? AALI gets confused with other organizations – the



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Alzheimer's Association has been in existence on Long Island since 1983, and the national chapter has been in existence since 1979. The largest difference between AALI and other organizations is that our mission is focused on funding research to find a cure, which is our primary function at a national level. We have a public policy office in D.C. and we work with the 77 chapters across the country to accomplish this goal.

What has been a large success for AALI? Our largest success has been working with our national organization to pass the National Alzheimer's Disease Project Act, which was recently signed into law by President Barack

Obama. NAPA will coordinate all of the agencies that come in contact with someone diagnosed with Alzheimer's under the Division of Health and Human Services. This will help to create a council that will analyze this data, and ultimately put \$2 billion into research for a cure. A person with this disease costs the medical system three times more than any other illness, including heart disease, HIV, etc.

What is AALI's message to the community? Alzheimer's is a disease that can last for up to 20 years and it is no longer a disease of the elderly. AALI is currently servicing 60 families with young-onset Alzheimer's (individuals diagnosed under the age of 65), with the youngest being 45 years old. We must find a cure for this disease sooner rather than later. AALI is looking for advocates to speak up and help find the cure for the disease that touches thousands of Long Islanders every year. To become an advocate, please register at http://www.alzz.org/join_the_cause_advocacy.asp.

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Long Island Chapter

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Website <http://alz.org/longisland/>

Founded 1983

Paid staff 9

Annual budget \$1 million

Fundraised budget \$1 million

Program service percentage 80 percent

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