

Learning about Alzheimer's care

Sen. William Proxmire attended both Yale and Harvard, and went on to build the Democratic party in Wisconsin. He won his first election in 1957 – following three losses for governor – and the rest is history. Unfortunately, it is a history Sen. Proxmire could no longer recall prior to his death in 2005. After 32 years as a United States senator, a record-breaking tenure matched by only 24 other members in the history of the country, Proxmire was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

Currently there are 4.5 million Americans with Alzheimer's disease and that number is expected to be 16 million by 2050. Despite the loss of high-profile personalities like Proxmire and President Ronald Reagan to the disease, Alzheimer's is still a condition spoken about in hushed tones. The reticence of the community to talk about this memory impairing disorder is fueling a quiet epidemic that could eventually lead to annual health care costs of \$375 billion.

But the future does not need to be forgotten. The Copper Ridge Institute (TCRI), based in Carroll County, Md., is in the forefront of scientific research in this area, particularly research related to improved early detection and treatment of those with Alzheimer's disease. What makes TCRI unique is that it takes the cumulative scientific

knowledge garnered from its research and that of others and applies it to the creation of educational and training programs for physicians and non-physician health care providers who are working daily on the frontlines of this disease. This link between research and training puts the most up-to-date information into the hands of those who work with persons suffering from these disorders – including spouses, adult children, nurses, doctors and assisted living staff – and contributes greatly to improving the quality of care to patients.

TCRI's newest initiative is Alzcast.org. The Web site is a one-stop shop for information about Alzheimer's disease. Using podcast technology and other online programs, Alzcast.org provides information to physicians, nurses, health care professionals and, most impor-

tantly, caregivers who are trying to manage the care of a loved one who suffers with Alzheimer's.

Downloadable programs cover such topics as how to care for a loved one with Alzheimer's while juggling the demands of work, the stages of the disease, the best practices for handling Alzheimer's as it progresses, and new therapies for treating patients with Alzheimer's disease.

In addition, Alzcast.org offers an Alzheimer's "clearinghouse" for obtaining a wide variety of Alzheimer's-related educational materials. There is also search technology that enables the rapid retrieval of materials based on an individual's interest and background.

"A diagnosis of Alzheimer's is a devastating blow to an individual and his or her family, but persons with this disease and their caregivers can often maintain dignity and quality of life longer with proper care and therapies," explains Dr. Alva S. Baker, executive director at TCRI. "That is why it is essential to effectively disseminate accurate information about the disease to people on the frontlines. Alzcast.org's unique approach to making information available in concise, easy-to-listen-to and easy-to-assimilate podcasts and other e-learning programs will be of immense value to everyone involved in any way with caring for persons with Alzheimer's disease."

TCRI's community involvement has long manifested itself in the form of classroom-style and individual continuing education classes on how to properly care for those with Alzheimer's. Fred Bierwirth, CEO of Morningside House Assisted Living Group, explains that his organization was searching for the best practices in dementia care to pass on to their staff. "At the end of our search, the only program we

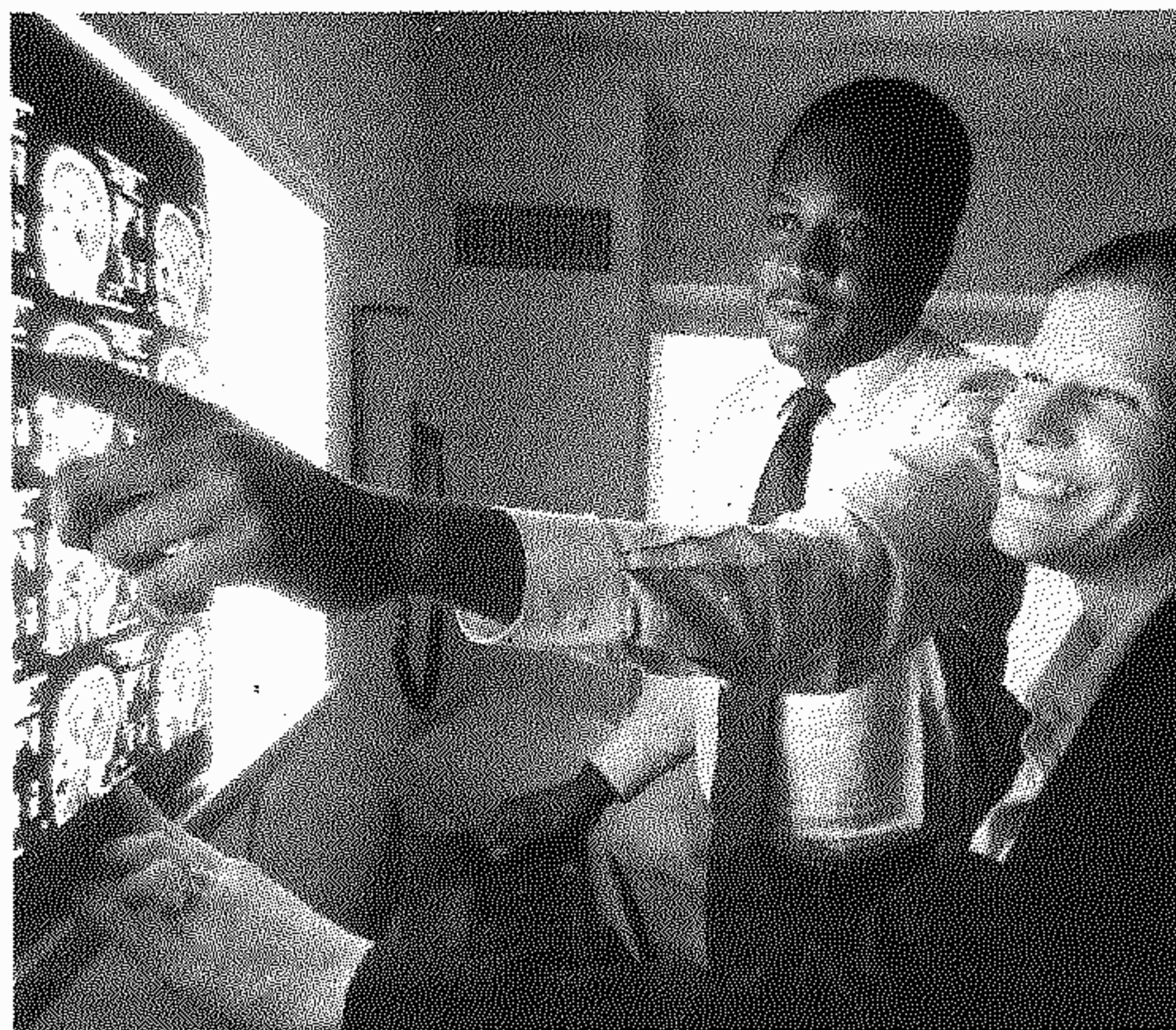


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While there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, Copper Ridge will concentrate on improving care and quality of life.

found that was based 100 percent on internally conducted and consistent research was the model of care developed by The Copper Ridge Institute affiliated with the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine," he recalls. "We found the depth of thought and work that went into it truly impressive. As a result, Morningside House has adopted that model as our own."

For those who cannot, like Morningside, easily access TCRI's educational programs, TCRI created a groundbreaking, interactive training module on CD-ROM. This program puts the education and training model of TCRI into the hands of health care practitioners anywhere in the country or around the world. Since 1994, TCRI has trained more than 6,000 professionals from the United States and other countries.

While Alzheimer's disease is present everywhere in the world, TCRI is still concerned for those right outside its doors, and none are more important than those citizens without adequate access to health care and information. Thanks to a recent grant from The Leonard and Helen R. Stulman Charitable Foundation, TCRI launched an educational outreach initiative in Baltimore City. The program will be run by Sherri Pfisterer, an RN and nurse educator, and will raise the standard of dementia care and enhance the quality of life for this

underserved population.

"By taking on the role of the community nurse educator for the underserved of Baltimore City, I get to be a part of helping the Institute achieve its goal of community education about Alzheimer's by meeting people in their churches, senior centers and at home or wherever service is needed," says Pfisterer. "I am passionate about finding the most effective ways of stimulating and sustaining education within these communities in order to provide better care and treatment for the city's underserved suffering from Alzheimer's disease and other memory impairing disorders."

Each day, researchers work to find a cure for Alzheimer's disease. Until that day comes, millions of Americans and many citizens here in Maryland require highly specialized care and treatment, resources they can find through the many community-based initiatives of TCRI. When Proxmire was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease he came to TCRI and its affiliate care facility Copper Ridge. His wife, Ellen, has since become an activist for TCRI and Alzheimer's, working to secure funds for research into care issues for those struggling with the illness. "I rely on the doctors who say there's no cure on the horizon," she explains. "So the efforts aimed at improving care for those with the illness are paramount today." •



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Proper care and therapy enable Alzheimer's disease patients to maintain dignity and quality of life longer.