

## How We Walk For Care In Citrus County, Florida

by *Debbie Selsavage,*  
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In 2015, my partner Ed Youngblood and I created Coping with Dementia, LLC. Our company provides free training for family care partners based on the philosophy and skills of the Positive Approach® to Care, including the techniques of Hand-under-Hand®. Over the past five years, more than 5,000 people have attended our ABC of Dementia workshops to learn a better way to care for their loved ones at home.

We are big believers in Teepa's slogan, "Until there's a Cure, there's Care," and we use it in all of our educational and promotional literature. I confess that sometimes we modify it to say, "Until there's a Cure, there's only Care!"

Our belief in this idea became a key organizing principle when, in 2017, we decided to create an Alzheimers walk in Citrus County, Florida. As you know, Alzheimers walks are famous for raising enormous amounts of money for research for a cure. This is well and good, and we honor these efforts, but we thought we would prefer our fund-raising to go to care.

We wanted our walk to be conspicuously different from the many events that raise money for a cure. Many of these are loud and festive, almost like tailgate parties. They also have a *franchise* quality. A walk for a cure in Philadelphia looks pretty much like a walk for a cure in Phoenix. Again, we are not criticizing; we only wanted ours to be different.

As our venue for a different kind of walk, we chose the small town of Floral City, a quiet village in a region replete with wetlands, lakes, green pastures, and forests. With its many beautiful historical homes, Floral City typifies the term *Old Florida*.

Floral City's signature feature is its famous Avenue of Oaks, a mile of huge ancient oak trees that overhang the street like the arches of a green, natural cathedral. Many of these trees were planted in the 19th Century!



Floral City has a nonprofit organization called the Floral City Heritage Council (FCHC), which is quite proud and protective of the town's historical features. Ed and I are both members of the FCHC, so we went to it for support when we decided to organize an Alzheimers walk. We were met with open arms and enthusiasm, which we believe has accounted for much of the success of our event.

Citrus County Walk Aware for Alzheimer's was born in October, 2017. It offers its participants two walking options: one down the gorgeous Avenue of Oaks, and the other on the Withlacoochee State Trail, which is one of the most famous walking and bicycle trails in the nation.

Not only did we want our walk to strike a different mood to raise funds for care; we also wanted it to include features related to some of the principles and techniques of compassionate care, such as music therapy and nostalgia therapy.

We are especially proud of our musical feature because it involves a brave man named Earl who has lived with an Alzheimers diagnosis for more than eight years! Sometimes, Earl can find it difficult to create a single sentence, but with a guitar in his hand, he can sing two verses of a hymn flawlessly! Earl has opened our event with his acapella rendition of *America the Beautiful*, which brings tears to many eyes.



For our nod to nostalgia therapy, members of the FCHC turn out in 19<sup>th</sup> Century costumes to welcome our walkers and explain the various features of their wonderful town. We also include along the Avenue of Oaks, an exhibit of nostalgic cars provided by a local club called the Geezers.

In addition, walkers are encouraged to visit the Floral City Heritage Museum and the Floral City Library, which presents educational exhibits about care partner resources throughout Citrus County.

Now three years old, Citrus County Walk Aware for Alzheimer’s has raised more than \$81,000! By keeping our expenses low, we have donated just under \$75,000 (91.9 cents from every dollar raised) to the Alzheimer’s Family Organization, a regional nonprofit that provides support and services for care partners in eight west-central Florida counties. We are proud that our little walk is not just different, but different for a reason; and that reason is to remind everyone that until there’s a Cure, there’s only Care!



*Debbie Selsavage is a PAC Certified Independent Trainer. Both she and Ed Youngblood are PAC Certified Independent Consultants and Certified Dementia Practitioners. In 2017, Debbie won a Citrus County Health Care Hero Award in the category of Public Outreach.*

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