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Dementia-friendly Dining in Central Florida

by Dr. Dennis Dulniak,
Founder of Central Florida Dementia-friendly Dining

Dementia-friendly dining restaurants are food service establishments that provide friendly, safe, and enjoyable places where families and friends may bring their loved ones who are living with Alzheimers and other forms of dementia. Sharing a meal out of the house reduces isolation, increases social contact, encourages opportunities for engagement and communication, provides stimulation, and creates memories that are shared among families and friends. These quality of life experiences make our community more dementia-friendly. Compassion, understanding, shared caregiving, and a more relaxed and enjoyable meal is a joy for all!

Dementia-friendly dining in Central Florida was started by Dennis Dulniak, care partner for his wife Nancy. Nancy was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimers in 2015 and placed in a local memory care community in January of 2019. The Dulniaks' visited The Meatball Stoppe restaurant in East Orlando for several years, and the owners knew that Nancy was living with Alzheimers. Dennis teamed up with Toni Gitles, Certified Caregiving Consultant and Educator with Heart Light Enterprises, and Edith Gendron, Chief of Operations with the Alzheimer's and Dementia Resource Center, to help provide personnel training, scheduling, and publicizing for The Meatball Stoppe.

In January 2020, Orlando's first dementia-friendly dining restaurant opened in the *La Familia* room at The Meatball Stoppe to families with loved ones living with Alzheimers and dementia. Owners and chefs Isabella and Jeff Morgia personally have known the difficulties faced by care partners and families who struggle with the challenges of dementia.

We have had three family members who have suffered and/or are currently suffering through this terrible disease of Alzheimers, so we personally know firsthand how this condition impacts the patients and their families.

Though the personal visits to share in good times, great food, and outstanding service was recently halted by the COVID-19 ban on table service in restaurants, The Meatball Stoppe continues to provide all of their Italian menu items for take-out. The Morgias's compassion is evident through their continued effort with loving take-out service and a strong desire and hope to soon resume their weekly Thursday dementia-friendly dining from 11 am to 6 pm.

Dennis and his team anticipate opening similar programs with other restaurants in Central Florida once the COVID-19 pandemic subsides and people are permitted to resume dining out. Social isolation caused by dementia is exacerbated by the recent COVID-19 virus, social distancing, and stay-at-home advisories. Once restrictions are removed, having additional dining outlets in the community is essential for new opportunities to

create fond memories and quality dining experiences for care partners, families, and their loved ones.

For more information, visit www.CentralFloridaDementia-friendlyDining.com, email cfldfd01@gmail.com, or search online in your area.

Dr. Dulniak retired as University Registrar from UCF after a 40-year career in higher education. His academic credentials include a doctorate from Montana State University, master's degree from the University of Dayton and a bachelor's degree from SUNY Fredonia.

Nancy, wife of 46 years, for whom he has been her care partner since diagnosis with early onset Alzheimers in 2015, now resides in a local memory care community. His dedication to service and community with a focus on Alzheimers, dementia, and Lions Clubs International continues to inspire as he shares many talents through his advocacy, leadership, ongoing love, and commitment.