

Caring for Cancer



Family holds gatherings for patients in treatment

By Beth Sexton
Staff Correspondent

While having a few friends over for dinner might send many hostesses into a tailspin, Margaret Frisbee sets place settings for close to 50 — and she does it every other Monday night. Margaret and her husband, Bill, along with a small group of volunteers, set up, cook and clean up for a dinner party for prostate cancer patients held twice a month at their Conyers home.

This week, the Frisbees served grilled pork loin, sweet potato casserole, macaroni salad, peas and a birthday cake to a house full of new and old friends who gather to support each other through a difficult time. For many, these inspirational gatherings offer a way to find, strengthen or even reconnect with their faith.

“Cancer makes you get your priorities straight,” Margaret Frisbee said.

Early in 1998, while Bill Frisbee was undergoing treatment for prostate cancer at the Radiotherapy Clinics of Georgia (RCOG), the couple saw a need for prayer and fellowship among his fellow patients. They began offering a dinner at their home for the men and their wives, most who were from out of town and just staying in Conyers during their treatment period.

“We never dreamed it would continue,” said Margaret Frisbee of their dinner party events, which have been held now for nine years.

But the dinners did continue and, as more and more people started to come, the Frisbees realized they had a ministry growing, which they eventually named Reflection Ministries. It has indeed become a full-time ministry for Bill Frisbee, a pastor ordained in the Presbyterian Church of America, and Margaret Frisbee, who has led church choirs for decades.

“It is really hard to tell people what we do,” said Margaret Frisbee. “It’s an experience. We have a very plain little house, but people tell us when they walk through the door, they feel something different. It has to be God’s love.”

The Frisbees host an ever-changing group at their special dinner parties. With its main clinic in Decatur, RCOG has other clinics around the metro area, including one in Conyers where Bill Frisbee received treatments. People come from around the world to get cancer treatments at the RCOG clinics; treatment typically lasts for 10 weeks. Since starting their dinner gatherings, the Frisbees said they have had guests from all 50 states and from 13 countries.

The cancer patients attend dinner at the Frisbees while they are in town for the treatments and, after they return home, many of the guests stay in contact with the Frisbees through e-mails, letters, phone calls and the Reflection Ministries newsletter. It has grown into a huge job for the Conyers couple, who do a lot of telephoning, e-mailing and writing to these new friends, including 110 patients who have signed up to be on the prayer chain.

Margaret Frisbee said she and her husband chose the name they did for the ministry because, "We're not the source of light, but a reflection of God's love as shown through Jesus Christ."

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer, other than skin cancers, in American men, according to the American Cancer Society. The ACS estimates that during this year, 218,890 new cases of prostate cancer will be diagnosed in the U.S., and about one out of six men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime.

ACS statistics also reveal that prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in American men, behind only lung cancer, and that 27,500 men in the U.S. will die of prostate cancer this year.

RCOG founder Dr. Frank Critz has treated more than 8,000 men with prostate cancer during the past 25 years.

"He believes in treating the whole person, not just the cancer," said Margaret Frisbee, adding that RCOG offers a full program of nutrition, lectures and other support for patients, such as the fellowship time the Frisbees encourage. "(Our dinners) are a whole lot of fun. It's amazing. We firmly believe that laughter has a whole lot to do with healing."

In addition to fellowship, music is a huge part of the dinners. Recent entertainment included a jazz clarinet player, a gospel pianist and singer, a bluegrass band, musicians playing fiddles and kazoos and a mariachi band.

Residents of Rockdale since 1991 and members of Grace Presbyterian Church in McDonough, the Frisbees operate their Reflections Ministry under the umbrella of Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship. Parents of three children and the grandparents of nine, the Frisbees used to enlist the help of their family, but now that family members have moved away, they rely on volunteers. While Reflection Ministries receives some help from a handful of area churches, donations are always sought for the nonprofit organization. Margaret Frisbee said she and her husband and their small band of volunteers could use some help in the kitchen, as well as with setting up for the big dinner events.

"We're all getting old and decrepit," she said with a laugh. "The volunteers and the patients are basically in their 60s, and they just love it when young people are around."

To volunteer or donate items, call the Frisbees at 770-760-9676 or e-mail Bill@TheFrisbees.us or Margaret@TheFrisbees.us. For more information, visit www.reflectionministries.com.

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