

# Sun Lifestyle

## Alzheimer's Families Receive Respite

By Lee Kolb  
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Eight years ago, J.T. Crouch underwent "a change of personality," as Cloe, his wife of 48 years, describes it.

At first it was little things, "little flare ups" of irrationality that seemed out of character but easily attributable to benign causes.

Then J.T. started getting angry and experiencing hallucinations. Befuddled doctors called it "organic brain syndrome." His intellectual capacities waned. The 64-year-old housepainter underwent test after test.

CAT scans showed J.T. Crouch's brain tissue slowly eroding. Doctors made one diagnosis after another, until finally deciding Crouch's degenerating condition was Alzheimer's disease.

**FIRST DESCRIBED** by the German physician Alois Alzheimer in 1907, Alzheimer's disease remains an enigma to modern medicine, with no known cause or cure.

But families of the afflicted know Alzheimer's as an insidious malady that before their eyes reduces their loved one to a helpless shadow of his former self.

"I watch him die every day," said Mrs. Crouch. "There's nothing you can do for him, just make him comfortable."

Like many families with Alzheimer's patients the Crouches have opted to care for their loved one at home, where the familiar environment provides comfort absent in nursing homes.

**ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE** leaves its victims unable to eat or otherwise move about on their own. Caring for them is a "36-hour" duty that puts tremendous

financial and emotional strains on the families of the afflicted. To properly care for their patient, family members must often surrender their jobs, their friends, their lives.

"That's what's so hard about Alzheimer's," says Janice Coye, Director of Patient and Family Services for the Atlanta Area Chapter of the Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association. "The victims lose their personhood. With cancer and other diseases, the person is still there to talk and laugh and say goodbye, but with Alzheimer's patients you lose that relationship."

**BUT NOW**, Alzheimer's 'caregivers' in Clayton and three other metro counties can get assistance in the form of specially trained respite care workers who spend several hours weekly helping families care for Alzheimer's patients in their homes.

The In-Home Respite Care Program is an offshoot of the Atlanta Chapter. "We trained our first group of Clayton workers in June 1987," said Coye. Presently two Clayton workers participate in the program.

Respite care began after the results of a task force on Alzheimer's disease, piloted by the Georgia Office of Aging, were compiled. Many people needed services, said Coye.

**RESPITE CARE'S** annual \$94,000 budget provides worker salaries, program supplies and subsidizes the cost of care. The program receives additional funds through provisions of the Title III Older Americans Act, Coye said.

About 21 respite care workers are active metro-wide.

The care workers' training is tailored specifically to the needs of

Alzheimer's patients and generally to those of older people. "The 60-hour training program teaches them what to expect from old people and how to give them personal care," said Coye.

Workers begin with "hands-on" experience in the day care centers operated by the Atlanta Chapter. The Chapter operates one center in Clayton County, located on Battle Creek Road in Jonesboro.

**COYE SAID** the workers were "a mix" of people, ranging in age from the late 20s to 70. They are also "people with other sources of income" who wish to do something meaningful. Coye, a social worker by training, said a medical background was useful for this work.

Respite workers work 25-30-hour weeks, and the training "is all their own time," said Coye. They are paid according to the intensity of care needed by a patient.

This is determined by an assessment of the patient's situation made by the case managers after receiving an application from a family. The case workers determine the level of independence of the patient and structure a routine for him.

"**WE DON'T REALLY** collect cost," said Coye. "We want to make care available to everyone." Fees are based on a sliding scale and families pay what they can comfortably afford."

Frances Cottingham, 60, is a respite care worker in Clayton.

Two evenings weekly and sometimes for three or four hours on selected days she looks after J.T., enabling Mrs. Crouch and her daughter, Janice Warsi, to have some time off.

Warsi's responsibilities at home



*Respite for the Caregivers*

Frances Cottingham, left, attends to Alzheimer's patient J.T. Crouch at his home in Riverdale. At right is Crouch's wife, Cloe.

allow her only two days a week to work. She is a registered nurse at Clayton General Hospital. But, it would not be possible for her to work even those two days were it not for Cottingham's help.

"Two or three people are needed to care for an Alzheimer's patient," said Warsi. "And nursing homes are short of help. Better care is given by a family. J.T. has done as well as he has for so long

because of a family environment."

**MRS. CROUCH**, who is by her husband's side "virtually all the time" uses her precious few hours respite to go shopping. Warsi deals with the stress by taking an art class. "I also have my cats," she said.

"But even when we go out, we've still got our minds on him," said Mrs. Crouch.

Cottingham, whose own mother died of Alzheimer's disease, understands the strains placed upon a patient's family. "What we're doing is giving relief to the caregivers," she said. "It makes me unhappy knowing there is no hope of the patient recovering. But you can't delude yourself into thinking tomorrow will be any better. That doesn't mean it hurts any less, but if you don't accept reality, it will destroy you also."