

# Reaching memories: Journaling a first step

By Shannon McCarthy

Printing — it's the story of her life.

Now, Kim Jackson is using her family business and her passion for volunteering to help others tell their stories.

Jackson, who has owned Off the Press printing with husband Paul for more than two decades, is helping clients at Leeza's Place in Joliet reach long-lost memories — and provide a keepsake for their families.

Since becoming an advocate at Leeza's Place, Jackson has written and self-published her first book, "Journaling: The footprints of Your Life ..."

She uses the book as a tool to help clients — some of whom suffer from Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia — unlock their memories.

But the book, like Leeza's Place, is for everyone, Jackson insists.

Founded by Leeza Gibbons, Leeza's Place has locations throughout the country.

It was established as a resource for caregivers whose loved ones are battling Alzheimer's or other memory disorders.

"Leeza's Place is something we're trying to get known in the community," Jackson said.

Jackson was eager to help when she received a call from the Alzheimer's Caregivers Association about printing booklets for its annual support group gala.

"They contacted us and wanted us to donate books to the gala," Jackson said.

That call turned into an hour-and-a-half conversation as Jackson learned more about the organization and Leeza's Place.

It was at the gala that Jackson met Kathy Miller, care advocate at Leeza's Place at Provena Saint Joseph Medical Center in Joliet.

"I met her, and she wanted to do an ornament," Jackson said.

"I went to Leeza's Place with designs and I found out what was going on in this place, and it was pretty cool."

Located at 113 Republic Ave. in Joliet, Leeza's Place offers education, support groups and classes designed to both stimulate the memory and help caregivers de-stress.

"The people walk in so stressed out and by the time they leave, it's like the burden's been lifted off their shoulders," Jackson said.

She was so moved by what she saw that she offered to help Miller with her workload.

"I woke up at 3 in the morning and said, 'I'm doing this; I believe in this place so much,'" Jackson said.

Soon, she was volunteering several days per week, even working out of her home to pro-



Jackson

note the organization.

Jackson also decided she wanted to add to Leeza's Place's list of activities and classes.

It was then that she realized she could turn her own dream of recording her life story into a way to help caregivers, patients or anyone looking to tell the story of their lives.

"I've always wanted to do that," she said.

Jackson began teaching a journal writing class on Thursday mornings at Leeza's Place.

In her spare time, she created what would become her most important teaching tool.

"Journaling" helps novice writers get started by providing questions to spark memories.

The book is divided into sections to allow writers to tell stories from every stage of their lives, from childhood to their teen years to adulthood.

"You can take the book and start writing immediately," Jackson said.

"Most people don't know how to get started. The questions are what keep them writing."

Students are also encouraged to include photos and drawings as they tell their stories.

While it provides memory therapy for those suffering from forms of dementia, the journal-

ing class isn't just for patients and caregivers, she emphasized.

"It's for anyone," she said.

Since she began teaching the class six months ago, Jackson said many area residents have taken advantage of the opportunity to tell their stories.

"It's going phenomenally well," she said.

"Everyone seems excited. A lot of people are finding that they wish they would have done it sooner."

The book also provides a keepsake for families, Jackson said.

"We work with people with strokes, Alzheimer's, people that have chronic diseases where the family knows time might be short and they want to know all

they can about them," she said.

"They're creating a legacy for their family."

Before beginning to journal, participants start each class by reflecting on what they wrote the previous week.

That also helps them generate memories and recall stories from their past, Jackson said.

"It's a technique for memory therapy," she said.

"What happens is people start talking about the story they wrote last week and hear other people's stories and they remember things that happened to them."

This week, Jackson is slated to attend a Leeza Gibbons Memory Foundation seminar in Chicago, where she'll talk with staff

— and possibly Gibbons herself — about the book.

"I'd like to see it used at other centers," Jackson said.

She also hopes to generate more awareness about Leeza's Place in Joliet.

"Everything is free, and it's for anyone in the community," Jackson said.

Jackson teaches journal writing from 9:30 to 11 a.m. Thursday mornings.

For a list of other classes, activities and upcoming events, visit [www.leezasplace.org](http://www.leezasplace.org).

Jackson has also created a Web site for the book, [www.journalyourlife.com](http://www.journalyourlife.com).

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