



AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

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CARING FOR SOMEONE YOU LOVE

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The annual Iowa AgrAbility conference will be held on Saturday, April 13th in Des Moines at the Iowa Historical Building. The conference, "Helping Each Other in Hard Times," will focus on the experiences and needs of both individuals with disabilities and their loved ones. The event is open to all AgrAbility consumers and their families/support network. Registration is \$10 per person if received by April 5th and \$13 thereafter. If you did not receive an invitation or would like more information, please contact Brenda Reeves at (515) 294-8522 or breeves@iastate.edu (BR)

CARM'S COMMENTS: Carmen Schacht

Caregivers. What do you think of when you hear this term? To me it means an extremely vital, crucial part in the life of a

person with a disability. This can be a spouse, a child, or an attendant. I particularly think of the people in our AgrAbility Friends and Family group. These people are excellent examples of people dedicated to doing what needs to be done to help their spouses. Some have done this for many years. It often means doing things that are not considered typical "man things" or "woman things." They do them out of love and concern. So many times caregivers are so busy doing for others that they don't take time to take care of themselves. A BIG THANKS to all caregivers. (CS)

A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

In the early years of their marriage, Roger Goedken and his wife Joni kept very busy raising their two young boys, raising hogs, and growing corn and soybeans. The young couple was puzzled and worried when Joni began experiencing spells of arm numbness and blurred vision. After visiting several physicians and receiving a number of incorrect diagnoses, doctors eventually concluded that Joni has multiple sclerosis.

For the Goedken's, who live in Winthrop, many things dramatically changed for their entire family in the years following Joni's diagnosis. One of these changes was Roger's role within the family. According to Roger, Joni's condition worsened very quickly after her diagnosis. Joni became

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less and less able to perform daily tasks. Whereas before Roger and Joni shared the farm work and household chores, Roger began to assume most of these responsibilities.

Today, a typical day for Roger involves a variety of activities both in the home and on the farm. He says that among other things, he does the dishes, laundry, and most of the cooking. He also helps Joni with toileting, bathing, and dressing. Once he has completed the household chores and Joni is comfortably in her power chair or lift chair, Roger heads out to the farm.

Roger misses the companionship that he and his wife used to share on the farm. Joni enjoyed riding the tractor and combine, and used to drive to the store whenever they needed parts. Although she was able to drive for a while after her diagnosis, she is no longer able to do so.

Roger understands how important it is for Joni to stay as involved as possible. Together they have tried to think of creative ways that she can still help out. According to Roger, “there are certain things you just learn to do.”

The Goedken’s first became involved with Iowa AgrAbility after Joni’s health took a severe downturn in 1994. Tracy Keninger from the Easter Seals FaRM program visited the family and helped them get a ramp built in their garage. Mary Yearn, Iowa State University Extension Housing Specialist, helped the Goedken’s perform a modest home makeover in order to make their home more convenient and comfortable for Joni. Another resource that has been helpful to the Goedken’s is the AgrAbility peer support program. Roger says that meeting with other people in a similar situation provides him with the opportunity to pick up new information and tips.

As tempting as it might be to help Joni at times, Roger has learned that he must be careful to avoid infringing upon her independence. At times this requires patience and a reminder that there’s no hurry to get things done.

Making an effort to maintain a positive attitude has helped both Roger and Joni surmount many obstacles. Roger says that in order to keep going forward “you have to laugh a few things off.” Although at times it has been a difficult journey, he feels that their relationship has gotten stronger over the years.

For Roger, the most challenging part of being a caregiver has been trying to understand what Joni is going through. He says that “being a caregiver is a learning experience. It requires patience and learning.” He notes that although this may sound over-simplified, this is truly the basis of what caring for someone you love is all about.

WAYS TO FIND BALANCE

The following tips for caregivers are offered by the National Family Caregivers Association (www.nfcares.org):

- Choose to take charge of your life, and don’t let your loved one’s illness or disability always take center stage.
- Remember to be good to yourself. You’re doing a very hard job and you deserve some quality time for yourself.
- Be alert for signs of depression, and don’t delay in getting professional help when you need it.
- When people offer to help, accept the offer and suggest specific things that they can do.
- Educate yourself about your loved one’s condition. Information is empowering.

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- There's a difference between caring and doing. Be open to technologies and ideas that promote your loved one's independence.
- Trust your instincts. Most of the time they'll lead you in the right direction.
- Grieve your losses. Then allow yourself to dream new dreams.
- Stand up for your rights as a caregiver and a citizen.

Seek support from other caregivers. There is great strength in knowing you are not alone.

RESOURCES:

Organizers of a support network for family caregivers in Iowa have established a website and hotline to provide information about transportation, legal assistance, meal programs and other issues.

www.iowafamilycaregiver.org (1-515-255-6142/1-866-468-7887)

The National Family Caregivers Association (NFCA) has valuable tips for family caregivers as well as news and information on caregiving.

www.nfcacares.org (1-800-896-3650)

Contact your County Extension office for information on caring for older adults. Publications are available on ways to communicate, handle finances, provide food for body and spirit, cope with losses, and more.

www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/ol.htm

The Caregiver Survival Series, James R. Sherman, PhD., Pathway Books, 1994.

--These are practical and fun to read books.

Titles in our library are: Creative Caregiving; The Magic of Humor in Caregiving; Positive Caregiver Attitudes; and Preventing Caregiver Burnout. There are many good quotes to offer encouragement and inspiration. Borrow these books from ISU Extension:

cjolly@iastate.edu or (515)-294-4824.

Are you looking for a listing of quality seeds for 2002? Published annually by the Iowa Crop Improvement Association (ICIA), the Iowa Seed Directory is a resource that helps farmers and gardeners find seeds of native prairie species, oats, soybeans and other crops. The directories are free and available by contacting ICIA at (515) 294-6921 or iowacrop@iastate.edu

National Poison Prevention Week is March 17-23. The Iowa Statewide Poison Control Center (ISPCC) services all 99 counties with a 24-hour toll-free telephone number. For information on treatment for acute poisoning, poison prevention, hazardous substance disposal, pill identification, and many other poison-related concerns, contact the ISPCC at (800) 222-1222.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

From August 27 through October 20 the Brunnier Museum in Ames will showcase an art exhibit created to raise awareness of the magnitude of orthopaedic conditions, including arthritis, osteoporosis, amputation, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and others. This nationally touring exhibition will showcase the works of art of orthopaedic surgeons, patients and children, all of whom have had an orthopaedic condition influence their lives. We are currently exploring ways for AgrAbility to become involved with this exhibit. If you have an interest in viewing the exhibit and participating in a reception for AgrAbility consumers (date to be determined), please contact Brenda Reeves (515-294-8522 or breeves@iastate.edu) as soon as possible. Interest in such an event must be shown before a program involving AgrAbility is planned. Information and photos of the exhibit can be obtained at www.emotionpictures.aaos.org

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AGRABILITY FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Freewheeler's AgrAbility Friends and Family
April 6, 1:00 p.m., New Hampton Library
Pizza party and music by Vernie and Leonard
Contact Carmen Schacht for more information: (563-547-2932).

To find the AgrAbility Friends and Family group nearest you, call Carmen Schacht at 563-547-2932, or access:
www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/friends-and-family.html

IOWA AGRABILITY - A joint effort of ISU Extension and the Farm Family Rehabilitation Management (FaRM) Program of Easter Seals Iowa. The program can help farm family members with a disability stay in farming.

This newsletter from the Iowa AgrAbility Project will be sent monthly to AgrAbility families and other interested individuals. Please send comments and suggestions to:

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