

Bruce Nolan is a Light in the Lives of Care Center Residents

Bruce Nolan likes being useful, and residents of the Albert J. Hofstede Care Center help ensure that he is by accepting him as a “Holy Roller.”

As a Catholic Eldercare volunteer, Bruce logs close to 10 hours a week escorting residents to Mass in wheelchairs, and rolling them back to their rooms, when it ends. “One of the women I escort doesn’t want to miss a minute of Mass, so I make sure she is first in line. I take her to the Chapel first, and return her to the Care Center first, and she really appreciates it,” Bruce says. “It makes me feel good.” Bruce was also delighted to see her dance in her wheelchair to a Stevie Wonder song during lunch. “She was waving her arms and having fun. It was nice to see.”



On the days he volunteers, Bruce can also be found in the dining room assisting people during lunch. “I poor coffee and juice, and open ketchup, salad dressing, and jelly packets for those who need a little help,” he says. “I also cut up meat so it’s easier to eat. People are grateful, and it makes me feel happy. I do a lot of smiling at Catholic Eldercare, and that’s not normal for me.”

Bruce also likes spending time with residents he describes as feisty and fun. “I enjoy it,” he says. “And when I had to take a break from volunteering when I had my knee replaced, I missed it, and residents missed me while I was away. It gave me a new perspective on the impact of my volunteering.”

Time is the most precious gift that Bruce freely gives to residents, along with kindness and friendship. His mother lived at RiverVillage and then in the Care Center. A volunteer herself, she’s the person who taught Bruce to give back. “I’ve always spent time with older people,” he says. “It started on my paper route when I was 12 years old. There was a care center on my route, and when I returned to collect money from residents, as we did in those days, I stayed a while, and visited with people. My grandmother had died, and the women living there reminded me of her.”

When Bruce went off to college at St. John’s University, he continued to volunteer at a neighborhood care center near St. Cloud. It began with a slide presentation from a trip he took to Austria, and Bruce recalls that the residents loved it! “Stearns County was settled by German people, and I spoke German. The people really enjoyed talking with me in German.” Bruce also learned a few card games at the center. “I had resisted playing cards with my family, but after learning to play 500 at the care center, I went home and played cards with my aunts.”

Bruce became a CEC volunteer when he retired from a career as a CPA. Recruited through his church bulletin in 2017, he’s been at it ever since, minus the Covid break. His gardening skills are also utilized and appreciated at CEC. “I once asked if I could trim the hedges because I enjoy pruning,” he explains. “I was given permission, so I’ll keep doing it when I see it’s needed.” He says he also plans to continue to help with events, when asked.

CEC Volunteer Coordinator Robin Haenze is grateful for Bruce. “He’s a dedicated volunteer and a blessing to our residents.” And Bruce says, “It’s good for the residents and good for my soul.”