

October 31, 2008

# Family caregivers deserve thanks for doing tough job

**S**tarting tomorrow (Saturday, Nov. 1), we observe Family Caregivers Month to recognize the thousands of Arizonans who provide care for loved ones who are elderly, chronically ill, disabled or otherwise in need of assistance.

So, who are the family caregivers?

Family caregivers are family members (spouses, children, siblings, grandchildren), friends, partners and neighbors.

These family caregivers demonstrate extraordinary love, dedication and courage in helping their loved ones maintain independence and self-sufficiency, while delaying or even preventing placement in institutional settings.

Family Caregivers Month is our acknowledgment of the difficulties caregivers face and allows us to highlight resources available to help them confront their very challenging job.

As I write this column, I am preparing for surgery for an ankle injury that I suffered many years ago. I have been spending the last couple of days preparing to be immobile for the next six weeks.

How ironic to be in the home-care business, providing hundreds of thousands of hours of service to so many of our seniors and disabled members of our community, and to find myself in the position of care recipient while my wife, Susie, becomes my caregiver.

She is one among millions of extraordinary family members here in America who have taken it upon themselves to serve as caregivers. Because of their compassion, most care recipients today enjoy a quality of life that would have been unimaginable 100 years ago.

Despite that compassion, finding the right fit between caregiver and care recipient can be tough. Even when the caregiver is a family member, finding that right person is

so important. You should never compromise when it comes to caring for a loved one.

When finding a family member to be the caregiver, you have to find someone who has the passion, heart, reliability and trustworthiness to do the job.

As our population ages, seniors are increasingly opting to stay home rather than move to assisted-care facilities for a variety of reasons, including the struggling economy. Many seniors are finding it difficult to sell their homes or to get the full value of their

homes in this market, so they are left with no other option but to receive home care.

That means a rising number of family caregivers, people who take time out of their lives to improve the lives of family and friends. Family caregivers exemplify the true spirit of compassion by providing support to their loved ones and assisting them with their everyday activities and special needs. These selfless people must often make great personal sacrifices to maintain the care and support their family and friends require.

As we observe Family Caregivers Month, I want to remind caregivers that they don't have to go it alone and that they have the right to ask for help. I also want to ask those who are not caregivers to think about helping the caregivers they know. Reaching out and letting a caregiver know that you are there to help and listen is a good first step. The second step is to offer your assistance and insist on it, instead of waiting for the caregiver to ask for help.

It is very difficult to be the in-home caregiver. My brothers and I were caregivers for our mom for nearly 18 years. Trust me, it is hard work — but incredibly rewarding, too.

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