

Tourmaline Singers bring comfort and peace

by Lyn Rowden

The Tourmaline Singers is an a cappella choral group whose mission is to bring succor to the ill and to ease the passage of the dying. They do this through their harmonious singing and comforting presence. "We are caring providers of a service rather than entertainers or performers," explains Director Harry Vayo.

The group formed in the spring of 2008, inspired by a similar group called Hallowell Singers who pioneered this kind of musical service in Vermont. The name, Tourmaline Singers, is significant because tourmaline is a gem that comes in many colors, reflecting the changes that accompany the end of life and the fact that every life is unique and special. Tourmaline was valued by the ancient Romans for its relaxing properties; it is also the official gem of Maine.



Tourmaline Singers, with director Harry Vayo, left, come to a patient's home with their loving presence and harmonious voices to bring comfort to the sick and peace to the dying. Photo by Lyn Rowden

The music, too, is varied, coming from many sources and traditions, including standard Christian hymns, spirituals, folk hymns, chants, and popular tunes. Songs from such cultures as Celtic, Hebrew, South African, and Croatian, are sung, according to the cultural preferences and spiritual beliefs of the patient. The singers will even, when possible, try to include personal

favorites of the person for whom they are singing. I had the pleasure of hearing the Tourmaline Singers when they came to my parents' home when my father was seriously ill with his heart. Fortunately, it was not a terminal moment and he is doing much better. I do believe the turning point for us all was the night these singers filled their living room, bringing light and hope into the darkness of December.

My Dad, still in a weakened condition, even crooned along to some familiar strains and we all had tears when they sang his favorite, "Edelweiss." It uplifted my care-giving mother as well. The joy of this half hour of singing is still remembered and felt.

I recommend these singers to everyone who needs to feel some inspiration, peace and joy in life's difficult hour. The love they shared was palpable and would certainly soothe the crossing from one life to the next. Tourmaline Singers is an independent volunteer choir. Referrals for their services may come from Hospice Volunteers of Waterville Area. They also honor requests, such as mine, from private individuals to sing for a family member or friend. They share the Hospice philosophy of

respectfully serving the dying and the very sick without trying to "fix" anything.

If someone you love is in Hospice care, or is seriously ill, whether in the hospital or at home, be sure to inquire about these singers. On occasion they sing for groups in churches, nursing homes, or other venues to raise awareness of their mission and service. As volunteers they do not charge for singing, but gratefully accept donations.

Currently there are 13 singers in the group, and they are always open to more members. "Love of singing and desire to be of service to the dying and their families are the only requirements...although being able to carry a tune in a bucket is helpful," says Harry.

If you would like Tourmaline Singers to sing for a loved one approaching the end of life, or if you are interested in singing with them, please call Harry Vayo at 313-9418.

Senior Corner

Science finding Alzheimer's hard to treat

Finding a cure for Alzheimer's disease, or an effective treatment, has been difficult for the world's best researchers. There is substantial progress in finding ways to delay or prevent the disease by identifying AD risk factors and developing targeted treatments, according to a special issue of the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease.

This month, too, a study funded by the National Institutes of Health, sent out a notice seeing volunteers for a clinical study examining the subtle changes that may take place in the brains of older people many years before overt symptoms of Alzheimer's disease appear.

"Just as the harmful consequences of cervical cancer, pancreatitis, severe anemia, and acute renal failure can be generally improved through routine lab test detection and administration of appropriate therapy, so too can preclinical AD become responsive to early detection of risk factors and targeted treatments aimed at reducing the severity and progress of the discovered pathology," according to Dr. de la Torre.

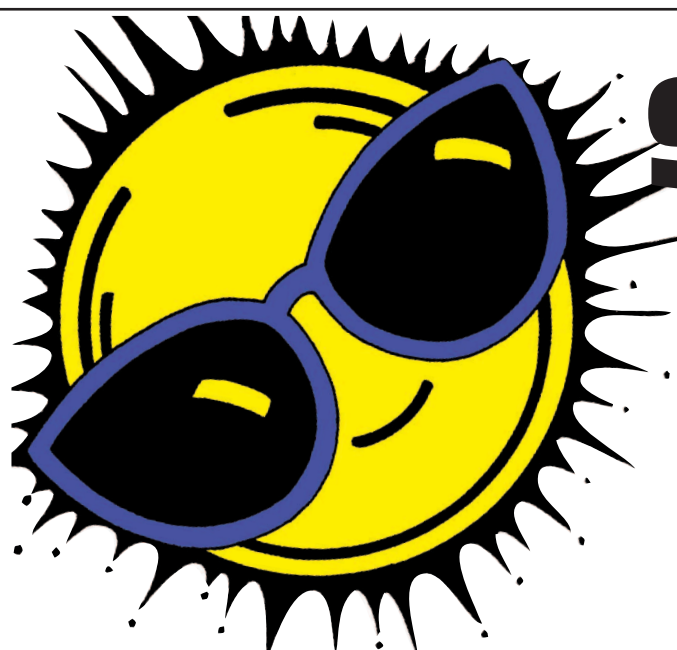
"Unlike the potentially lethal disorders stated above, people with AD have no effective treatment options—prevention thus becomes the alternate and essential primary weapon to combat this disease."

The strategies proposed offer a realistic hope to the millions of people who face a range of maladies associated with aging and cognitive decline - including multiple risk factors that can culminate in dementia.

This approach of knowledge-to-action using evidence-based medical decisions to opt for the most judicious treatments or management of patients when risk factors to AD are discovered, as reviewed in this issue, should become a gold standard of clinical practice.

Collectively, the contributing authors advocate an AD preventive plan that would incorporate:

1. Early identification/detection of AD risk factors;
2. Early intervention based on evidence-based medical decisions;
3. Patient follow-up to assess and modify when necessary, strategic intervention.



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