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Ending Alzheimer's

Residents inspire Windham Terrace Alzheimer's walk team

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People like Windham Terrace resident Evelyn Guerin, center, are the reason for the Walk to End Alzheimer's fundraisers held across the country, including this past weekend in Manchester. The Salem native, shown with her daughters Laurie Whelan, left, and Marianne Guerin, has vascular dementia, the second most common cause of dementia after Alzheimer's disease. (COURTESY)

WINDHAM — Members of the Windham Terrace assisted living community showed their support during the weekend for a cause near and dear to their heart.

The facility's staff and many of the residents' family members joined the hundreds of walkers who participated in the Walk to End Alzheimer's on Saturday in Arms Park in Manchester.

The walk raised money to support research for a cure for Alzheimer's disease and related dementia disorders.

"The focus of this year's Walk to End Alzheimer's is on dementia, which is close to my heart as my mom suffers from vascular dementia," said Marianne Guerin, a former Salem resident whose mother, Evelyn Guerin, lives at Windham Terrace.

This type of dementia, also referred to as "vascular cognitive impairment," not only causes

memory loss, but also causes the vascular system to slowly decline from a series of small strokes. Vascular dementia is the second most common cause of dementia after Alzheimer's disease and accounts for 20 to 30 percent of all cases of dementia, according to the Alzheimer's Association. Every 68 seconds, someone is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia.

The Guerin family lived in Salem for generations. "My grandfather built a home in Salem, and then my father built our family home across the street," Marianne Guerin said.

The family of six spent many happy years in their craftsmen home, though most memories from those days are now lost to the family's matriarch.

Diagnosed in 2001, Evelyn Guerin continues to struggle with memory loss.

"It's been difficult to see our mother decline, but we're grateful for the time we have with her," said Marianne Guerin, who now lives in Olympia, Wash. "She's a lovely person and her beautiful essence still shines through, despite the dementia."

Guerin said she wants to help increase public awareness "about a very debilitating disease that affects so many families.

"With greater awareness, there is the hope that dementia and Alzheimer's research will become a greater priority for public funding," she said.

September is World Alzheimer's Awareness month, and the staff at Windham Terrace is doing its part to help spread the word.

"With the population continuing to live longer, this disease will be affecting more and more people," said Lynda Brislin, the facility's executive director. "It impacts the quality of life in so many ways, so finding a cure in the beginning stages would be a miracle."

"This disease robs the functioning and memory of those it inhabits and is just a heart-breaker," she added.

It's still possible to support the Windham Terrace team. To donate or for more about the walk,

go to www.alz.org and click "NH" on the map, select "Manchester" and then enter the team next to "Find a team." There are also links to donate to teams that participated in walks on Sept. 21 in Keene and Sunday in Portsmouth.

To contact the N.H. chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, email alzwalkMANH@alz.org or call (800) 272-3900.