



For immediate release

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Virtual Dementia Tour: A chance to walk in others' shoes

Touchmark at Coffee Creek, Right at Home and Oklahoma Hospice Care are teaming up to provide the Edmond community an opportunity to experience what life is like for those who live with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia.

The Virtual Dementia Tour will provide a glimpse into dementia for caregivers, health care professionals and others. November is National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month and National Family Caregivers Month.

The Virtual Dementia Tour recreates the challenges of dementia by restricting the ability to see, hear and touch as participants attempt to complete a series of assigned tasks in an apartment setting.

Tours will be offered at Touchmark Tuesday, Nov. 10 from 4 to 6 p.m. and Thursday, Nov. 12 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Space is limited, and reservations are required by Nov. 9. Call 405-340-1975 to reserve a spot.

Refreshments will be provided. Touchmark is located at 2801 Shortgrass Road in Edmond.

For 12-15 minutes, participants will attempt to complete tasks such as folding towels, setting a table, writing a note and putting on a sweater.

Special gloves take away tactile touch; goggles mimic macular degeneration; shoe inserts make it painful to walk and earphones overwhelm hearing with loud, random noises.

The impact is powerful and often emotional, said Melissa Mahaffey, Touchmark executive director. "I've had several people come up to me after experiencing the tour, and they were visibly moved. They said it really changed their outlook and understanding. They feel they will have more patience now and talk differently with their loved ones, especially as they give directions."

Among those who experienced an earlier Virtual Dementia Tour was Touchmark resident Ellie Lottinville, Ph.D. A retired psychologist who still volunteers throughout

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the community, Lottinville lost her husband and fellow psychologist Vernon Enlow to Lewy body dementia.

“Being a psychologist, I thought I had a pretty good grasp of what this was like. But once I went through the virtual tour, it added more information for me,” she said.

“It made me aware, emotionally, of some of the things I had not been aware of and wish I had been, in terms of the physiological challenges they go through.”

Patience is paramount to providing care and understanding for a person living with dementia.

“Sometimes people don’t understand the extremes people with dementia are dealing with, and they try to teach their loved ones and expect them to do things,” Lottinville said. “They don’t understand that brain damage keeps them from learning new things.”

The Virtual Dementia Tour is part of Touchmark’s ongoing efforts to provide support to family members and caregivers helping loved ones living with dementia, Mahaffey said.

About Touchmark

Touchmark at Coffee Creek is a full-service retirement community located off Covell at 2801 Shortgrass Road in Edmond. Touchmark is part of North Edmond’s Coffee Creek planned residential development, which includes 638 acres of homes, a golf course, recreational centers, and walking and biking trails. More information is available at TouchmarkEdmond.com and by calling 405-340-1975.

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Caption:

Joel Herdzina with Right at Home helps to adjust electronics for sisters Maureen Seavey, left, and Marilyn Coulson, both of Edmond, as they get ready to experience the Virtual Dementia Tour recently. The Edmond sisters found the visual restrictions were the most frustrating part of the experience.