

Caregiving is her calling: Staff really are family at Sue's Loving Care facility

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By Mark McGlothlen
Special to the Gazette

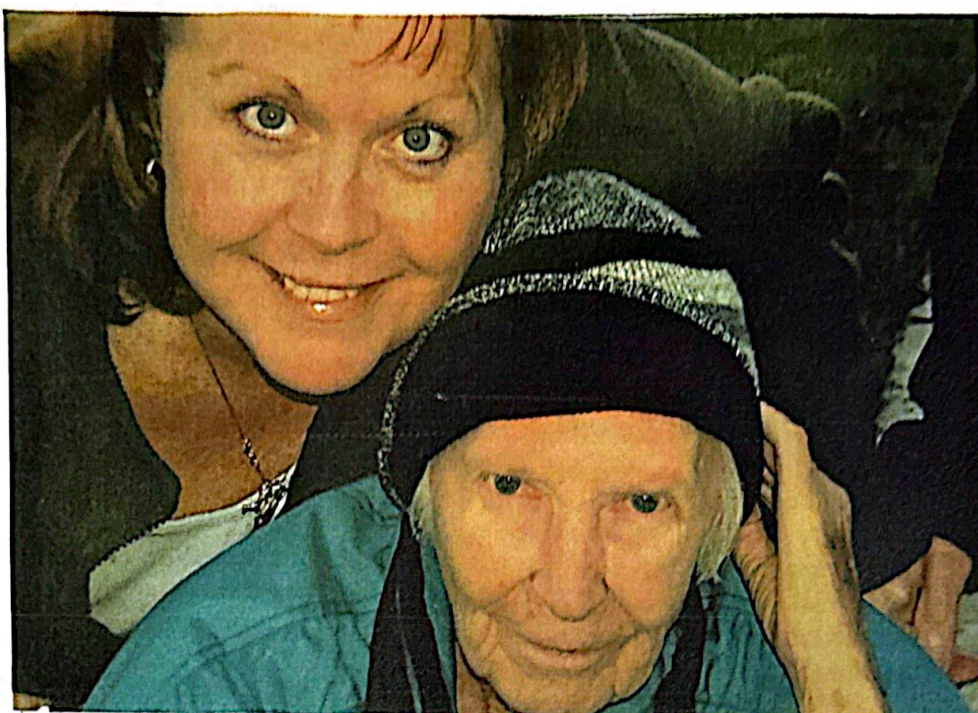
Sue's Loving Care is all about family caring for families.

Sue Dornan, owner of Sue's Loving Care, said it was her passion for helping other, and the love and support of her family, that led her to open her business in 2005.

Sue's Loving Care is an assisted-living facility for seniors in a family setting. The home on Courtlandt Avenue, on the east side of Kalamazoo, specializes in caring for those who have Alzheimer's disease or are physically handicapped.

Assisted-living facilities look to bridge the gap between independent living and nursing homes. Residents in a assisted-living facility are those who need assistance with activities of daily life such as eating, bathing, dressing, laundry, housekeeping and the taking of medications.

Sue's Loving Care, which can care for six adults, is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week,



Grace Liehr, 89, left, a resident at Sue's Loving Care, is comforted by Sue Dornan, 53, owner of Sue's Loving Care, an assisted-living facility in Kalamazoo.

SHAWANO CLEARY /
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by experienced caregivers.

The staff at Sue's Loving Care consists of Dornan, her husband, Dave, their adult son Chris Dornan and daughter Katie Clarke, Sue's brother, Mike MacKenzie, and other family members and friends. It did not take any coaxing from Dornan to get her family involved.

"Once they were seeing

the faces of the people I was talking about, they knew they wanted to be a part of this," Dornan said.

A little over seven years ago, Dornan, 53, learned first hand the trials that families go through when deciding whether to put a loved one into a nursing home.

Dornan's best friend's mother was facing an increasingly difficult battle with Alzheimer's

disease, which got to the point where keeping her home was no longer an option. A suitable facility was found and, as luck would have it, it also was accepting applications for caregivers. Dornan jumped at the chance and was hired on as a full-time caregiver.

"I wanted to ease my friend's mind," Dornan said. "I knew that I could keep an eye on her mother

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just to make sure she would be OK."

Dornan said she felt the job of caregiver would be right up her alley considering her love of people.

Much to her surprise, however, it was the residents of the facility that made a difference in her life, especially when she was faced with a personal challenge right off the bat.

Just four weeks into the job, she learned she had cancer.

While she continued to work during her chemotherapy treatments, the effects of the cancer and treatments took a physical toll on her; and she feared the residents would shy away.

Nothing could have been further from the truth.

"The senior residents all had their own health issues and yet they seemed to be more concerned about me," Dornan said.

The residents embraced Dornan and were thankful

that she could still be a part of their lives.

It was then that Dornan knew she had found her calling in life.

"I just loved it," she said of the job. "It was really rewarding."

In the summer of 2004, and with a clean bill of health, Dornan decided with her family to take a next step.

When the house next door went up for sale, the Dornans purchased it and renovated it to make it handicapped-accessible and suitable for the care of the elderly.

Once it was licensed, Sue's Loving Care opened its doors to its first resident, and that is when "this house of care for the elderly was turned into a home," Dornan said.

Sue Campbell, an early client, felt at peace with her decision to place her mother at Sue's Loving Care.

"They provide a great level of caring," Campbell said.

"The staff encourages the residents to be

independent but provides assistance when needed," she added. "They really cater to the needs and wants of their residents."

The staff at Sue's Loving Care make sure the house is full of music, laughter, and love. For a more personal touch, the walls of the home are adorned with pictures of each resident from their past as well as recent photos.

The residents, their families and the staff have come to see themselves as one big family, Dornan said.

"I believe the best businesses are those created from our own passions," she said, "rather than trying to make just any job a passion."

Dornan said she and her staff believe that giving of themselves and their time to care for the residents is the most rewarding part.

"You hope that people like this are there to care for you if you need it," Campbell said.