

Main Line Times

Sunday, December 7, 2014 75 CENTS FACEBOOK.COM/MLMEDIANEWS

mainlinemedianews.com

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2014

MAIN LINE TIMES | SOCIETY | 5

THE ASSOCIATION FOR FRONTOTEMPORAL DEGENERATION

Art therapy designed to soothe the brain



Main Line Art Center's executive director Amie Potsic welcomes AFTD's program director Sharon Denny and Penn nursing PhD Lauren Massimo, to MLA's Haverford home.

By Joan A. Bang
Correspondent

A recent gathering at Main Line Art Center (MLA) painted a picture of Pick's disease from several perspectives. In attendance were MLA staff, members of Penn's Memory Center and representatives from The Association for Frontotemporal Degeneration (AFTD) along with care-givers who are currently assisting someone that's been affected by the disease. The purpose was to learn more about the malfunction and how art therapy might help patients and their families ease the process of the illness.

To begin with, there

seems to be some misconceptions about the deterioration in the brain formerly known as Pick's disease, so named after the discovering doctor and what is the more commonly diagnosed "gray matter" problem which is Alzheimer's. While the initial symptoms of both malfunctions may be similar in nature, that of reasoning, thinking and remembering, the two are very different.

The former, now known as FTD, frontotemporal lobe disorder, begins earlier in life affecting those in their 40s and 50s. With the shrinkage of these lobes of the brain comes changes in behavior that leave the patient disinhibited, free to speak their mind, though

not coherently, eat more (gouging) and ingesting more alcoholic beverages are just a few of the changes observed. It as if the person cannot stem the tide of these behaviors. In Alzheimer's it is about memory loss and therefore more disengagement from social settings.

Regardless, family members dealing with and watching the progression of the disease turned to MLA and Penn Medicine to see if there was a link with art therapy that could engage their loved ones. Though those present understand that FTD is not curable at this juncture, any easing of the characteristic behaviors, through quieter,



AFTD board member Dr. Mara Schiffam, ARTZ Philadelphia director Susan Shifrin, Stacie Bennan of Jeffersonville and Newtown Square resident Jean Shenian, a founder of AFTD.



Penn's Memory Center coordinator and facilitator, Scott Reid speaks with care-givers Jane Good of Exton, Sandy Karger of Wayne and Sylvia Gentry of Mt. Airy.

less disruptive means, i.e., painting, could become a welcome respite for all parties involved.

This pairing of resources just might produce a masterpiece of a solution for a complex problem.