

The Madison County Journal

FEATURES

‘A caring place’

A look at residents at Cobb Healthcare Center in Comer

By Margie Richards
margie@mainstreetnews.com



Resident A.R. Planning numbers for the owners during a bingo game at Ty Cobb Healthcare Center recently. Photos by Margie Richards/Staff

Ice cream socials, elegant dining, gospel singings, and playing fetch with the dog are not things typically associated with the word “nursing home” but those are exactly some of the things you’ll find at Cobb Healthcare Center in Comer, a 116-bed long term care facility, the only one of its kind in Madison County. And it’s not only for those who need someplace safe to spend the final days of their lives.

For Janet Barber, 58, Cobb Healthcare Center was her first choice to provide her therapy and rehabilitation after breaking both her feet while on a beach vacation in Florida.

“It’s an excellent rehabilitation facility,” Barber said, after spending three weeks at the facility. “Everybody has to have kindness and affection to get along and that’s what you get here,” she said. “Everybody makes it easy for you and tries to give you ease and comfort.”

Barber, formerly an Athens resident who has moved to Colbert, was already familiar with the facility since her mother spent her final days there after a series of strokes.

“I knew she had received such good care here, that I had no doubts I wanted to come here to recuperate and receive therapy,” she said. “It’s quite humbling to be totally dependent on others.”

Bishop planned to try going home in a few days to see if she could manage on her own with her daughter’s assistance — if not, she knew she had the option of coming back to the center and staying for a while longer.

“It’s called an LOA (leave of absence),” she said. “And I feel perfectly comfortable coming back here if I need to.”

And during her stay there Barber says she’s been able to see firsthand the care that long-term residents receive and has made many friends.

“They (staff) get attached to the residents and take a personal interest in them — it’s great to see,” she said.

The facility also provides transportation for its residents to get back and forth to doctor’s offices, a service Barber has utilized on several occasions.

Though known primarily as a nursing home and long-term care facility, administrator Danny Lord says they welcome those with short-term care needs and work hard to offer a good experience for those who need recuperative care.

“Long-term care is stressful and highly regulated, but also very rewarding,” Lord said, adding that it’s not something you can just do “for the pay.”

Lord has been at Cobb Healthcare for 17 years – he started out in billing, eventually moving to social services. After eight years he sat for his state and national board certification and became the nursing home’s administrator. He works alongside his wife, Patty, who is his administrative assistant.

Director of nursing Petra Jordan Williams is a relative newcomer to the facility, having been on the job there since April, but Lord has high praise for her. “She’s has already been an asset to this facility,” he said.

Williams says it’s her job to oversee the nurses on staff, but that she also enjoys working with them on the floor, directly with the residents. “I need, and I want, to know the residents myself,” she said. “This job is something you have to live – and I want to live it – I don’t want just a desk job.” Williams said she has always enjoyed nursing and working with geriatric patients in particular. “It is the most rewarding, gratifying and self-fulfilling profession for me,” she added.

“Long-term care is not just about caring for the residents themselves,” Lord noted. “You get attached to the families of those residents.”

And he acknowledges that bringing a loved one to a nursing home is often a frightening experience – both for the resident and for their family members. “It can be scary, but we try our best to make them, and their families, feel welcome, and most of the time, it ends up being a totally different concept for them,” he said. “It’s a new opportunity to help people everyday.”

And Lord says he always tries to be mindful that the folks who now live at the nursing home have led full lives before they came there – most have been productive, vibrant members of society.

Lord said some of the residents over the years have included a lady who played for the New York Symphony Orchestra, a gentleman who worked for the Secret Service and a university professor, just to name a few.

“When they come here for long term care, many at the end of their life, we become a part of their family,” Lord said. “And their life means something – they’re still very proud individuals, and rightfully so,” he added.

Although they do have some volunteers at the facility, both Lord and Williams would love to see the development of a comprehensive volunteer program. “I would love to get that started – to have folks who could come in and visit with our residents, read to them and spend time with them,” Williams said. “I would like to challenge people to become involved here – I’d like to light a spark in people.”

“I don’t think people realize what a contribution they could make here, what they could mean to these folks,” Lord said, adding that it is always a thrill to watch how visits from children and pets affect residents.

“They love it and we encourage it,” Lord said.

“Though it may be the end of life, eventually, we try to make it a good experience – after all a sunset need be no less beautiful than a sunrise,” Williams said.

Lord says they work hard at Cobb Healthcare to see that the nursing home experience is not a negative one. “We have a lot of longevity here – people who’ve worked here a long time and the staff works very hard,” he said.

Resident Judith Ramos, 70, originally from Anderson, S.C., agrees. “I love it here, we all love it here,” Ramos said. “When I’m away from here on a visit, I miss it.”

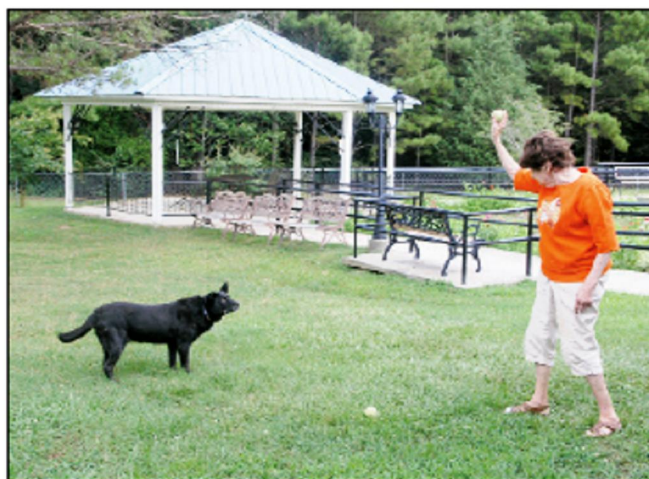
Ramos said there’s always something to do, if you want to do it. “No one forces you to do anything – anything I do these days is for my own pleasure,” she said. Ramos can often be spotted in the halls, socializing, or dropping by rooms to talk to the other residents.

The facility offers plenty of activities, including bingo, gospel singings and church services several times a week. Residents are encouraged to get fresh air – there is an outdoor picnic area out back and a flower garden, courtesy of the Madison County Master Gardeners. There is even a dog, Mika, who provides companionship and a game of “fetch” to those who enjoy the company of pets. An elegant dining area is being set up to encourage more residents to come out of their rooms and socialize during mealtime.

For more information on volunteering at Cobb Healthcare or to inquire about their services, call 706-783-5116.



Pictured is a dining table at Cobb Healthcare Center in Comer.



Resident Judith Ramos throws the ball for the center's dog Mika. Ty Cobb Healthcare officials say Mika provides enjoyment for many of the residents at the center.