

Ozanam Hall Looks to Enhance Dementia Care With New Space

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Bishop Chappetto blesses one of the rooms in Ozanam Hall's new wing, which was designed for individuals with dementia. (Photo: Alexandra Moyon)

Drawing from personal experience with her father, Ana Tagle said she understands the challenges of being a caregiver for a loved one with dementia.

With that understanding, she said she knows the importance of places like the Ozanam Hall of Queens Nursing Home's newly dedicated area specifically designed for individuals with signs of dementia.

“As a family member, you really feel the loss because your parents have changed, but it is so important that no matter the stage of the disease, they feel

safe and loved because they have these moments of uneasiness,” said Tagle, an assistant administrator at Ozanam. “This would have been beautiful for him.”

On Feb. 6, Ozanam celebrated the grand opening of its Carmel Hall with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. According to Carmelite Sister Philip Ann Bowden, an administrator at the nursing home, the new space was inspired by Montessori principles, which focus on encouraging participation, offering choices, and demonstration rather than instruction.

Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus Raymond Chappetto began the evening with a prayer, and after the ribbon-cutting ceremony, he blessed the hall. He said he anticipates the Carmelite nuns, who serve as caregivers at Ozanam, will have a positive impact on the new facility’s residents.

“I see a great similarity between what the Montessori program is all about and what the Carmelites are trying to do, and that’s why I think this project works so well,” Bishop Chappetto said. “They dovetail together because they’re both coming from the same background to treat people with dignity, care, and love.”

Those principles will be used to highlight each individual’s abilities, promote meaningful engagement, encourage independence, and provide cognitive stimulation for residents.

With more than 30 years of dementia care, Sister Philip Ann said she has witnessed how this method provides a more gentle approach and level of engagement.

“They can’t just sit for hours without being engaged,” she said. “That’s why we got the Montessori-trained people involved to help the staff interact with the residents in a meaningful way.”



Each room in Carmel Hall has its own card with information about each resident, emboldened room numbers, and pops of color to help them find their way. (Photo: Alexandra Moyon)

Sister Philip Ann added that the new facility promotes cognitive stimulation through “way-finding.” The space, which features different wall art throughout the hall, is designed to help residents identify rooms and the part of the floor they are on. Each piece of art is era-specific, like a picture of Coney Island’s famous Wonder Wheel from the 1970s, which helps transport residents to a time they once knew.

For its efforts, Ozanam received a citation of merit from New York Assemblywoman Rebecca A. Seawright on behalf of the Standing Committee on Aging and another from Assemblyman Edward Braunstein.

Robert Parmach, a volunteer at Ozanam, said he is looking forward to his mother, who is a resident at the nursing home, moving to Carmel Hall.

“What surprised me is how lively it is. It looks like a home. It doesn’t look like any type of institution,” Parmach said. “The dimensions of the place, the use of color — when I walked in here, it looked like a neighborhood, and that’s the visual imagery.

“I think it picks up the spirit.”

Outside each resident’s room are cards designed to teach caregivers a little about the occupant to help spark conversations and recall memories.

The new hall will also offer music-based activities, including singing and dancing to era-specific tunes, and activities to stimulate their minds.

Vincent Antenucci, co-founder of the Center for Applied Research and Dementia, said the work at Carmel Hall is part of an “international change” aimed at improving dementia care. He explained that the Montessori method of education is designed to help children learn at their own pace and has shown similar benefits for individuals with declining cognitive function.

“A big part of this is all of the training we’ve been doing leading up to this and all the training that will follow in order to maximize the benefits of this beautiful space,” Antenucci said. “There are 12 principles that we follow, things like always inviting them instead of telling them what to do.”

He added that often, when someone moves into residential care, they feel like they are losing that sense of control: “And, so, how do we give it back? Choice.”