

Project - Van's Friends Program

Van's Friends Program is a name given to Deaf Senior Companions Program, honored by the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Washington State. The project has been officially re-named as early as January 2020, upon learning of Van Scheppach's sudden illness. He has been diagnosed with a spine bacterial infection called Osteomyelitis.

(He, Van Scheppach, passed away on March 18, 2020.)

Van Scheppach, 77 years of age, had a dream of setting up a program for deaf seniors who may be lonely and in isolation from their own circles of friends. He aspired to have this project run by Deaf volunteers calling by videophone (VP) to let these seniors know they are not forgotten. Ellen Scheppach and Karen Atwood as co-ordinators have been working with him to make this program operational, hopefully effective by the end of the year.

In 2016, the AL TSA - Aging and Long-Term Support Agency in Olympia, WA - held a Combined Fund Drive (CFD), a Washington State government agency's annual fundraising activity. AL TSA hosted an event where these state government employers and employees met with members of the Washington State Deaf Senior Citizens organization. Because Van Scheppach, Treasurer at the time, gave a compassionate speech explaining the dire situation that we Deaf senior members have unfortunately acknowledged having seen certain friends become more and more removed from the society, they donated \$1,600 for the Deaf Senior Companions Program. WSDSC had been randomly chosen along with a selected few organizations to obtain this one-time funding from the CFD.

Van's mission is to ensure that Deaf seniors who are isolated, whether by force or nature, across Washington State have access to video communication and/or human connection, conveyed in their native language, ASL. Dr. Jaime Wilson, a Seattle-based clinical psychologist, calculated that older Deaf seniors aged early 70s have a far more rapid decline in keeping brains active, hence developing dementia or Alzheimer's disease at very early stages in their lives. They do not have the intellectual, social, economical and cultural means to stay connected with friends.

By connecting with lonely ones by videophones, our senior volunteers can reach out to them and elevate their senses of well-being and belonging. Chats and calls can be as simple, positive and humanely warm as possible just with cheery hellos and "how-are-you's".



Added to the \$1600 balance in the WSDSC accounts is our new revenues, resulting from the sales of T-Shirts that emboss a Nancy Rourke's artwork of a hand-sign, "Friends" at the front. Members and no-members are encouraged to wear those t-shirts that come in cobalt blue, steel grey and golden yellow to support our causes on Van's Friends Project. T-shirts come in any size at L, XLarge, XXLarge and XXXLarge for \$25 each plus \$8 shipping fee.

To request a purchase, please contact Ellen Scheppach at ellenscheppach@gmail.com.

We hope to raise \$10,000 in order to start up the videophone stations and hire people to put the program in place of launching. Please help us see that Van's mission comes to life. Also, please address to ellenscheppach@gmail.com if you have any questions.

On behalf of all of Van's friends, I thank you,

Ellen Scheppach