

# Comedy for caregivers

BY JASON EVANS  
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Caregivers of people with dementia or Alzheimer's disease quickly learn to expect the unexpected.

On Wednesday, a Greenville performer shared with a group of area caregivers how the tenets of improv comedy can help them with daily interactions and to better understand what their loved ones are going through.

"Improv is a joy in my life, and I'm hoping it can be a helpful tool for you guys," Alchemy Comedy Theater founder Harrison Brookie told the group. "Feel free to share things that are heavy and also feel free to laugh."

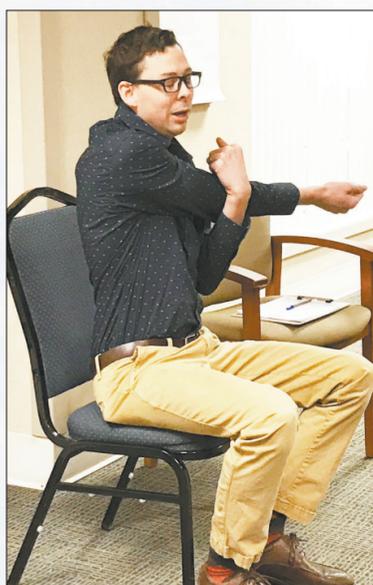
Eunice Lehmacher is a social worker at Prisma Health Oconee Memorial Hospital. She works with caregivers and facilitated Wednesday's "Go with the Flow" workshop with Brookie.

"Caregivers of people with dementia are always trying to convince them to do something different or learn something, and they've lost the ability to learn," she said. "They're trying to teach beyond the point that it makes sense to teach. As the abilities go less and less, the caregiver has to keep adjusting. This is exactly what (caregivers) need — something to get them to be more in-the-moment and see it from their perspective."

The hospital received a seed grant from the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging to put on programs like "Go with the Flow," Lehmacher said.

"I know a lot about dementia, but that's not a skill set I have — improv," she said. "The idea is that it will keep going but, of course, you never know. We're looking into other sources of funding."

If funding were to be available, Lehmacher said she'd be happy to offer "Go with the Flow" more often for caregivers.



Alchemy Comedy Theater founder Harrison Brookie leads caregivers through some stretches during a get to know you exercise.

"We do quite a few trainings like 'Dementia Dialogues' and others, and I have a caregiver support group every month," she said. "We're constantly offering things to caregivers here."

The hospital also offers "Dementia Live," a workshop where people try to complete tasks while wearing gloves, earmuffs and vision-reducing glasses so they can experience firsthand the havoc dementia and Alzheimer's plays with patients' senses.

"For months and months, the caregivers in my support group will say, 'That really opened my eyes,'" Lehmacher said.

One of Prisma Health's physicians' practices recently took part in "Dementia Live," Lehmacher said.



Social worker Eunice Lehmacher said Prisma Health Oconee Memorial Hospital offers a lot of programs for caregivers of Alzheimer's patients.

"They've got to know what their patients feel like," she said. "The idea is to help them come up with some sort of non-frustrating response that sort of stays in their reality."

Brookie opened the Alchemy Comedy Theater in 2011. The theater puts on eight shows a week, in addition to corporate shows and corporate training. He'd like to expand the training in health care settings.

"The more and more Eunice and I talked ... the more it made sense to try and teach people the skill sets of kind of releasing their agenda and kind of engaging in the present with people who really only live in the present," Brookie said. "All they know is what they know now. Everything else feels uncertain."

The first half of the training focused on playing games to get the group used to the process of improvisation, including the concept of "Yes, and."

"That ability to give and take, to go along with the flow," he said. "We don't know what's going to happen. It's what improv is — the idea that I'm going to bring something and you're going to bring something and we're going to build something together."

Following the basic games, Brookie had the group act out scenes, drawing from suggestions the caregivers themselves provided regarding situations they find particularly frustrating when dealing with dementia or Alzheimer's patients.

"How do we redirect?" he said. "How do we engage with our loved ones with dementia in a way that allows them to have conversations while not saying no, while still keeping them safe?"

Using improv skills allows caregivers to engage with their loved ones in their reality "without closing the door on all conversations," Brookie said.

Caregivers can learn to relax and not need to "fact-check" their charges, he said.

"It's so exhausting to play police officer all the time," Brookie said.

The caregivers will hopefully take their new skill set home and put it into play on a daily basis.

"Don't try to teach people with dementia new things," Brookie said. "Try to engage them with what they're living, in their reality. The reality with people with dementia is they're constantly being boxed in by a reality they can't remember. If we can engage with them at that kind of base, emotional memory, we can give them what they used to have, which is just normal, human conversations."

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The "Go with the Flow" workshop taught caregivers the "Yes, and" principle of improv comedy, a concept they can use in their daily lives.

## GOING OUT!

If you want to place your entertainment calendar listings:  
Fax: 882-2381, attn. Pam  
Mail: The Journal, P. O. Box 547, Seneca, SC 29679  
E-mail: [life@upstatetoday.com](mailto:life@upstatetoday.com)

We accept listings for the following events: art, family fare, festivals, museums, music and theater.

### SUNDAY

**ARLO GUTHRIE** Alice's Restaurant Tour 7 p.m. at Walhalla Performing Arts Center.

### ART

**BLUE RIDGE** Arts Center, 111 E. South 2nd St., is pleased to announce the opening of its annual juried show. Gallery hours are Wednesday-Friday 1-4 p.m., and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. [blueridgeartscenter.com](http://blueridgeartscenter.com) or (864) 710-6593

**ART GALLERY** on Pendleton Square will feature drawings of goods and services from other

merchants on the square at 6 p.m. Feb. 8, at 150 Exchange St., Pendleton, with wine, soft drinks and light refreshments. [Artgalleryyps.org](http://Artgalleryyps.org)

**PICKENS COUNTY** Museum of Art and History, corner of Highway 178 at 307 Johnson St., Pickens, open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thursdays, 9 a.m.-7:30 p.m.; and Saturdays, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Free, donations welcomed.

**LEE GALLERY**, Lee Hall, Clemson University with changing exhibits Mon.-Thurs., 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. and Sun., 2 p.m.-5 p.m.

### MUSEUMS

**BERTHA LEE** Strickland Cultural Museum, 208 W. South 2nd St., Seneca, open Tuesday through Saturday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Call (864) 710-9994 or email [blsc-museum@gmail.com](mailto:blsc-museum@gmail.com). Like us on facebook: [facebook.com/cultural-museum](https://www.facebook.com/cultural-museum).

**FORT HILL**, located on Clemson University's campus, home of John C. Calhoun and Thomas G. Clemson, is open to the public for tours Saturdays 10 a.m. to noon and 1-4:30 p.m. and Sundays 2-4:30 p.m. Fort Hill and Hanover House will be closed on game day Saturdays.

**HANOVER HOUSE**, located in the S.C. Botanical Garden, one of the oldest homes in the state built in 1716, are open Monday-Saturday 10 a.m. to noon and 1-4:30 p.m. and Sunday 2-4:30 p.m. They are both closed on Clemson University holidays.

**THE BART** Garrison Agricultural Museum, 120 History Lane, Pendleton, is open for tours Thursdays and Fridays from noon to 5 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Call (864) 646-7271 or visit [www.bgamsc.org](http://www.bgamsc.org) for current hours and admission prices. Group and school tours arranged by advanced reservation.

**SENECA'S BELL** Gallery, "Once Upon A Time," Seneca City Hall, 221 E. North 1st St. City's history from founding in 1873-present Mon.-Fri., 8 a.m.-5 p.m., closed holidays. Thirty historic photos from Louise Matheson Bell's 2005 book, "Seneca, Visions of Yesterday." Stained glass windows by Robert Crenshaw, city memorabilia and metal sculptures. On S.C. National Heritage Corridor Arts Trail. (864) 885-2700 or (864) 882-8213.

**S.C. BOTANICAL** Garden Fran Hansen Visitors Center and Garden Gift Shop, and The Campbell Geology Museum are open Mon.-Sat. 10 a.m.-5 p.m., and Sun.

1-5 p.m. Free admission. (864) 656-3405, [scbg@clemson.edu](mailto:scbg@clemson.edu) or [www.clemson.edu/scbg](http://www.clemson.edu/scbg).

**ASHTABULA AND** Woodburn Museum Houses open for guided tours year-round. \$6 ages 11 and up, \$2 ages 5-10. Ashtabula is on Hwy. 88, three miles east of Pendleton. Woodburn on Hwy. 76, across from Tri-County Technical College.

**CENTRAL RAILROAD** Museum, 108 Werner St., Central, open every Saturday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Visitors also welcome Thursdays 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

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