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In the Shadow of the USGA, Alzheimer's Fundraiser Rich in Meaning

Oakmont, Pa - While most eyes on Oakmont this month were focused on the Oakmont Country Club (where the 2016 USGA attracted well over 200,000 people to this town of 6,400), a brief yet significant event on Wednesday, June 15th, turned a lot of heads on the town's main street.

During the afternoon commute, drivers on Allegheny River Boulevard were briefly detoured around "The Longest Table", an event to benefit the Joseph A. Massaro Jr. Alzheimer's Research Fund. The block of the Boulevard between Washington and California Avenues was curtained off and transformed into a whimsical familial style dining area with 1,000 linear feet of table space. From the corner boutique (Carabella), past the Oaks Theater and to the corner parking lot, long tables were set atop the red brick street and elegantly made up with cloth, flowers and place settings for more than 500 people. The volunteers who transformed the block had only a short window of time between the closing of the avenue and the arrival of dinner guests to make this well-travelled street look elegant and function as an enormous dining room. The relevance of this fact impressed me. No one is ready for Alzheimer's or any illness. The street suddenly shuts down, so to speak, and you quickly get done what needs to get done as best you can without opportunity for a do over.

Though by chance, not design, the nature of the event demonstrated the disease it opposes in several other ways. The street designed for traffic 'made do' as dining space as our homes and families, though ill-prepared for care-giving, step up, sometimes awkwardly, and meet the new needs of our family member. The commuters who travelled through Oakmont that rush hour may not have felt inconvenienced, but their route home

was disrupted to accommodate 'The Longest Table'. Alzheimer's is disruptive. It abruptly drops into a family and alters everyone's plans.

The presence of hundreds of people of varying ages and backgrounds seated together at one table was a powerful image. Alzheimer's invites everyone to the table. It is a great equalizer in a terrible way but a unifier in a beautiful way. For every individual who suffers from Alzheimer's, there are many wanting to help. And there are the gifts. Joseph Massaro III, eldest son and namesake of the man who inspired the aforementioned research fund, noted in an interview with the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette shortly after his father's passing, "*Alzheimer's allows you an opportunity to be much more intimate with people. You can't talk to them, so you kiss them. You hold their hand. So in my view, there was some part of this that was a gift.*"

'The Longest Table' is a gift. Co-chairs Carol Kinkela and Carol Massaro have witnessed loved ones suffer through Alzheimer's, Kinkela through her mother, and Massaro through her husband. They are committed to raising funds to support research leading to treatment of the disease. Kinkela, owner of Carabella in Oakmont, has held a signature fashion show outside of her store annually for years and has raised \$1 million for Alzheimer's. Mrs. Massaro initiated the Joseph A. Massaro Jr. Alzheimer's Research Fund during the course of her husband's illness and held the first fundraiser in 2014.

These women hope that others touched by the disease will become inspired to contribute to or raise money for the fund. The Longest Table could be duplicated in any town. For those who have seen loved ones suffer the disease, raising funds for research can be healing as well as helpful. In addition to raising money and awareness, it is an event that will enrich a community. The link below provides details about the Joseph A. Massaro Jr. Alzheimer's Research Fund.

<http://pittsburghfoundation.org/Massaro>

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