



Participant Moment with Thomas M. January 2025

All his life, Thomas M. has sought out opportunities to help others, even though he's also had to deal with needs that have plagued him since birth.

"I knew the word 'catheter' before I even knew how to say 'mom' and 'dad,'" says the Manistee County native, who endured his first of some 50 surgeries just days after being born in order to address intestinal issues that have dogged him more than 60 years.

Despite health challenges, Thomas has led a full life. He's been married twice and dotes on one son, who lives in Greenville. Being around so many health care professionals growing up convinced him to become a paramedic, and he secured a job with an ambulance company while living in the village of Kaleva, population 500 or so in Manistee County.

"Many of my patients died while holding my hand," he recalls. "I was the last person they saw or talked to before they passed away, and I often said a prayer with them, and sometimes again with their surviving family members."

Thomas also served as a volunteer firefighter in his hometown.

In what scant spare time he has, Thomas was able to build his own home – literally – by laying out the block basement, framing the 24-by-52-foot structure with little assistance, and doing much of the plumbing, electric and roofing with limited help. This was long before the Internet and YouTube self-help videos were available, so he relied on books and magazine articles to guide him through the process.

These days, Thomas lives alone in a Kentwood apartment and has few close friends. "A lot of Sundays, I go to church and come home and sit in my recliner and cry out of loneliness."

But Mondays and Wednesdays and Fridays are much better, he says, because that's when he visits Care Resources and not only receives medical care but is able to connect socially with others.

"My experience with Care Resources has been phenomenal," he says. "They continually exceed my expectations. Every time I have the opportunity to talk with a manager, I tell them how well they and their people are doing. I don't have words to describe it."

Thomas is part of a new initiative at Care Resources called “Support Partners.” It was founded out of a need to control “senior bullying,” which is when people engage in negative talk or behavior toward their peers, a growing problem in some senior communities.

Sometimes, says Thomas, he’ll notice someone is having a bad day, and he’ll gently pull up a chair and offer to chat. If they’re in need of a hug, he’s willing.

“The key is to treat them with kindness,” he says. “Some people just need someone else to love them.”

Thomas has a philosophy for a life well-lived: “Seek out positive people as your core group,” he says. “Also, live the way God wants you to live.”

One more thing, he notes: “Never, ever give up on yourself.”

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