

WITH A SONG IN THEIR HEARTS

Group helps those with Alzheimer's and dementia find joy through singing • By Corey Callaway

My wife Kim and I had the pleasure of meeting Velma Bogart at the annual Chamber of Commerce Awards Banquet last year. We were seated together at the same table. Velma shared with Kim and me about her wonderful volunteer group, Musical Memory Singers.

Her volunteer group's motto is "enriching lives and creating community for those with memory challenges."

Musical Memory Singers present an opportunity for people who are experiencing mild to intermediate Alzheimer's or dementia to sing-a-long and enjoy music together. Their care partners and other community volunteers are also invited to participate and sing.

There is science behind this. I found a short video on their Facebook page by Sarah Wilson of The University of Melbourne. Here are some highlights of what she said:

Singing is a form of natural therapy. When people are CT-scanned while singing, large areas of the brain will light up or activate. Thinking about singing or singing itself will cause this action.

Singing activates motor networks, auditory or listening networks, planning and organizational networks, memory networks, language networks and emotional networks.

The act of singing together augments social bonding and empathy. The complexity of singing is striking for the brain though, to you and I, singing feels like a relatively easy process – except for me, I cannot whistle a tune more so than sing.

The act of singing activates our reward network. The emotions created by singing lead to the release of dopamine, which is the feel-good chemical for the brain.

At the end of the day singing is a form of natural therapy. It lifts our mood, it releases dopamine, and it gives all of our networks a workout, bringing protective, or neuro-protecting benefits for our mental health.

Singing is very helpful for people suffering from Alzheimer's or dementia.

We more recently held a Chamber of Commerce Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for Velma and her friends at Musical Memory Singers. There was quite a large crowd, outnumbering my fellow Chamber Members who arrived for the ribbon cutting. More noticeably to me was the very large number

of volunteers who showed up and show up on a regular basis.

If you have the time – and, more importantly, have a friend or family member who could benefit from singing – come and join the Musical Memory Singers.

Everyone is invited. There is no audition, and there is no fee. They invite you to come and join them. They meet every Thursday, from 9:30 - 11 a.m. The first 30 minutes is social time, followed by an hour of rehearsal, singing. They meet at the Pantego Lions Club, located at 3535 Marathon St.

I highly recommend you come and visit this wonderful group doing amazing things. **A**



Guided by volunteer leaders (top), Musical Memory Singers come together each week to sing old-time favorites and hymns.

Photos: Musical Memory Singers