



## **The Alleghany Foundation supports the Alleghany Highlands Diabetes Education Program**

In 1997, The Virginia affiliate of the American Diabetes Association and Columbia Alleghany Regional Hospital, now known as Alleghany Regional Hospital, identified type 2 diabetes as a serious health concern in the Alleghany Highlands. The Center for Disease Control and the American Diabetes Association already considered this dangerous, yet avoidable, disease to be a national epidemic, and statistics showed that the Alleghany Highlands was above the norm.



**Photo Courtesy of Buck Rumpf, Virginian Review**

Knowing that diabetes education was the least expensive, preventive, cost reducing option available, a partnership was formed to promote public awareness and to develop a diabetes education and support program in the Highlands. With an initial three year grant in the amount of \$57,400, The Alleghany Foundation helped the program get off the ground, and it continues today.

Since 1997, The Alleghany Foundation has funded diabetes education for a total of \$97,400, allowing the program to grow and thrive under the direction of certified diabetes educator, Brenda Graham, RN, CDE. “Our goal is to help prevent diabetes in this high-risk area and provide education and support to those who have it” says Graham. “We don’t know exactly why the Highlands have a higher rate. Most likely it’s a combination of heredity and lifestyle.”

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 24 million people, or 7.8% of the population, in the U.S. have type 2 diabetes, but statistics show that Alleghany County is over 10%.

From health fairs and public speaking engagements to community fund raisers, Graham reaches out to the Alleghany Highlands community to teach the risks, symptoms and dangers of type 2 diabetes. She hosts community programs like the Walk for Diabetes, which involves children in kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, helping them learn about diabetes, teaching them to give back to the community by raising money for a good cause, and promoting diabetes awareness in the community.

“Our community needs to know that diabetes is a very serious disease that greatly increases the risk factors for other diseases,” says Graham.

Diabetes is a leading cause of heart attacks, strokes, nerve damage, eye disease, kidney failure, and non-traumatic amputations. It also results in billions of dollars lost across the nation because of employee sick days and increased cost of medical care.

By reaching out to the community, Graham also seeks out those who have diabetes, or pre-diabetes, and don't know it. Pre-diabetes is when glucose levels are higher than normal, but not high enough for a diabetes diagnosis. It almost always leads to type 2 diabetes; however, taking action can delay or prevent the onset.

"Most often, there are no symptoms until the disease has advanced, and often they are overlooked," says Graham. "We offer free blood glucose screenings at health fairs and upon request for anyone interested."

The education support group, held the first Thursday of each month in the Allegheny Regional Hospital cafeteria, meets at 7 pm and usually attracts 50 to 70 people.

"It is critical for us to help diabetics manage their disease. Since 1997, we've empowered a lot of people, thanks to The Allegheny Foundation," says Brenda Graham. "We have a very active support group which also includes caretakers and people who are interested in helping their kids and other family members."

Graham states that type 2 diabetes is on the rise in children because of obesity and sedentary lifestyles. There are, however, people with type 1 diabetes, previously known as juvenile diabetes, who account for about 10% of those with disease. The cause is so far unknown, but the lifestyle management is the same.

In the support group, people learn that managing diabetes is an ongoing process, and that it's important for them to attend the support group on a regular basis. Graham says it's her job to help them keep focused or to get back on track. "Loss of a job or any other type of stressful event draws focus away from managing their diabetes. So, stress management is an important part of what they learn." Learning how to eat healthy in today's economy is also a regular topic at the meetings. Participants learn that they can find healthy food in every price category.

"It's an interactive process," says Graham. "We provide hands on instruction about preparing healthy foods and portion control. We show them how to cook foods they wouldn't normally prepare like tofu."

Graham tells her group that the world is not set up for diabetes and it's not sugar free. "They work hard to learn how to modify their lifestyle."

The monthly diabetes education program also brings in guest speakers and provides DVD players with educational discs for anyone to check out to view at home, which also helps diabetics who are homebound. "A large number of people with type 2 diabetes are over 65 years of age, so many can't make it to meetings and often have caretakers who attend," says Graham

Betty Bradberry's husband, Arnold, is 78 years old with type 2 diabetes. As a caretaker, she brings him to the support group. They both have learned a lot since they started coming two years ago. Because of the support group and the education they receive, both have changed their eating habits, helping Arnold's glucose levels to drop. "Brenda and the group have helped us so much, especially when it comes to managing stress," says Betty. "Even outside of the group, Brenda has worked with us so we can better manage our lives."

Marie Wilson, diagnosed with type 2 diabetes several years ago, attends meetings regularly, and often brings home a DVD player for more education. "It's really impacted my life," she says. "It's a great service to the community." She has also volunteered for community service activities like the Walk for Diabetes, hosted by the support group. "Brenda encourages us to give back to the community."

"We have impacted so many lives because of The Alleghany Foundation funding," says Graham. "Diabetes is a serious epidemic and providing education, screenings, and even diabetic equipment to those who can't afford it, free of charge, is invaluable to our community."

The Alleghany Foundation's executive director Beth Webb agrees that the diabetes education program is invaluable to the community. "With such a large number of people affected by this disease, our community is fortunate to have the dedication of certified diabetes educator Brenda Graham. On behalf of The Alleghany Foundation, we are proud to have helped get the program out to the residents of the Alleghany Highlands."

Since its inception, the foundation has granted over \$27 million to the following 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations with the purpose of improving the quality of life in the Alleghany Highlands:

- Alleghany County
- Alleghany County Parks and Recreation
- Alleghany County Public Schools
- Alleghany County Sheriff's Office
- Alleghany County United Fire and Rescue Association
- Alleghany Health District
- Alleghany Highlands Arts & Crafts Center
- Alleghany Highlands Arts Council
- Alleghany Highlands Community Services Board
- Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Authority
- Alleghany Highlands Economic Development Corporation
- Alleghany Highlands Free Clinic
- Alleghany Highlands Genealogical Society
- Alleghany Highlands YMCA
- Alleghany Highlands Youth Soccer Association
- Alleghany Historical Society
- Alleghany Humane Society
- Alleghany Mountain Radio
- American Diabetes Association
- American Red Cross
- Appalfolks of America
- Art Museum of Western Virginia
- Bath County
- Bath County Health Department
- Bath County Historical Society
- Bear Trust International
- Blue Ridge Public Television
- Boiling Springs Elementary School
- Boiling Springs Fire Department
- C.O.P.E.
- C & O Historical Society
- Callaghan Elementary School PTO
- Charles P. Jones Memorial Library

City of Covington  
Clifton Forge Little League  
Clifton Forge Main Street  
Clifton Forge Nursery School  
Clifton Forge Public Library  
Clifton Forge Volunteer Fire Department  
Covington City Schools  
Covington Fire Department  
Covington Rescue Squad  
Dabney S. Lancaster Community College  
Diabetes Education Support Group  
Falling Spring Elementary School PTO  
Falling Spring Fire Department  
Falling Spring Rescue Squad  
Greater Alleghany Highlands School Health Consortium  
Jackson River Enterprises  
Jackson river Technical Center

Local Office on Aging  
Mill Mountain Theatre  
Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District  
Mountain View Elementary School PTO  
Rockbridge Area Community Services Board  
Safehome Systems  
Science Museum of Western Virginia  
Scott Hill Foundation, Inc.  
Sharon Elementary School PTO  
Sharon Volunteer Fire Department  
Shenandoah Autism Center  
Southwest Virginia AHEC  
Southwest Virginia Second Harvest Foodbank  
Special Olympics  
Total Action Against Poverty  
Town of Clifton  
Forge  
Town of Iron Gate  
Unified Human Services Transportation System (RADAR)  
Virginia Hunters Who Care  
West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine  
Western Virginia Emergency Medical Service Council