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**Alzheimer’s Association Selects Local Alzheimer’s Advocate**

**to Esteemed Spokesperson Program***Local resident honored as “Purple Profile of Courage” for commitment to fighting Alzheimer’s*

**Omaha, NE** – **July 2, 2018** – The Alzheimer’s Association is excited to announce that local Omaha resident, Eli Rigatuso, has been selected as one of eleven total spokespersons for the esteemed Purple Profiles of Courage Program. Purple Profiles of Courage participants are members of various communities in Nebraska who are devoted to advancing the mission of the Alzheimer’s Association. These participants offer inspiration to the public by speaking publicly about their disease experiences, engaging in media interviews, and participating actively in local signature events with the Alzheimer’s Association. The Purple Profiles of Courage participants receive comprehensive training to advocate for advancements in the field, as well as promote free services offered to families affected by Alzheimer’s. Last year, Kathie Bickerstaff, Dylann Ehegartner, Lori Huffman, Mike Hughbanks, Bill Myers, Pam Parker, and Amy Walton served as advocates for the Purple Profiles of Courage in the Omaha metropolitan area.

Rigatuso was handpicked from the local community and has a personal connection to the disease. His mother has been battling the disease for six years. By taking part in support groups and programs offered by the Alzheimer’s Association, Eli has been able to provide support and walk this journey with his mother. After learning about the power of music in memory care during an Alzheimer’s conference, Eli created a playlist of songs his mother loved to help her regain old memories lost to the disabling disease. This inspired him to start documenting time with his mother to showcase how Alzheimer’s affects a person and their extended family

“To this day, music brings a sparkle to her eye and reminds me that although she may have lost a great deal of her ability to communicate, she is still in there,” Eli states.

Moving forward, spokespersons from across the state will represent various connections to Alzheimer’s disease, including having lost someone to Alzheimer’s, currently caring for a loved one with Alzheimer’s, living with the disease, or having a vision of a world without Alzheimer’s. These spokespersons will engage in sharing their story on social media, blogs, media interviews, and various speaking engagements through signature events such as the Walk to End Alzheimer’s, the Growing Hope Gala, and The Longest Day.

Elizabeth Chentland, Director of Communications for the Alzheimer’s Association Nebraska Chapter, looks forward to helping Nebraskans better understand Alzheimer’s through the voices of people with extensive personal experience.

“We know that this disease affects families so deeply. Sometimes, the disease feels overwhelming to families. Being able to learn from a peer with disease expertise who is willing to share their own story becomes critical in increasing awareness about the disease and providing information about care, support, and research opportunities. It also helps generate greater participation in Alzheimer’s Association events.”  
  
In the United States, there are over 5.7 million people with Alzheimer’s and that is projected to grow to as many as 16 million people in 2050. In Nebraska alone, there are 34,000 people over the age of 65 living with the disease and they are supported by 82,000 caregivers across the state. Alzheimer’s is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States, leading to 598 deaths in Nebraska in 2017.   
 **About the Alzheimer's Association**The Alzheimer's Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support, and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's®. Visit [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org/) or call 800.272.3900.

The Alzheimer’s Association Nebraska Chapter serves all 93 counties in Nebraska. In addition to offering free education and support services, the Chapter also raises money for local and national research efforts through the Walk to End Alzheimer’s and The Longest Day events. Staff and volunteers also work together to encourage state legislators to make Alzheimer’s disease a priority in the state by increasing funding for the disease.

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