‘Meeting of the Minds’ forum offers answers, raises awareness

By Nicole Tschetter
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At the end of the Westminster Alzheimer’s Awareness Group (WAAG) “Meeting of the Minds” forum, Donna Clark couldn’t help but tear up.

The forum educated and enlightened Tallahassee about dementia, specifically Alzheimer’s disease, which was something that hit especially close to home with Clark.

Clark’s mother was recently diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and her grandmother died as a result of complications from the disease several years ago. She came to the forum in search of answers to guide her through this difficult time.

“It gave me clarity on what I need to focus on and the services I need to start seeking now that we’re at the early stage of this,” said Clark, a sales representative for Heritage Home Furniture in Tallahassee. “That was incredibly helpful.”

Clark was joined by around 300 other community members at the “Meeting of the Minds” forum Tuesday afternoon at the Maguire Center at Westminster Oaks.

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Dr. Ken Brummel Smith was the keynote speaker at the Westminster Alzheimer’s Awareness Group forum Tuesday in the Maguire Center at Westminster Oaks.

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Westminster Oaks. The forum was a product of WAAG’s effort to continually educate and raise awareness about Alzheimer’s disease on a local and national level.

Alexander “Sandy” Halperin was one of the WAAG members who helped create the event. Halperin was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer’s four years ago and has been an active voice for Alzheimer’s awareness in the community ever since.

“This is good as a start, it’s good to bring the community together so we can begin to create some changes,” Halperin said.

Dr. Ken Brummel Smith, Charlotte Edwards Maguire Chair and professor in the Department of Geriatrics at FSU College of Medicine, was the keynote speaker. During his discussion, Smith covered a range of topics involved with dementia — specifically Alzheimer’s. A few of his key points targeted diagnosing, assessing and treating Alzheimer’s, and the challenges that must be overcome when diagnosed.

“It’s so common for people to see the diagnosis of dementia as a stigma and friends and family withdraw,” Smith said during his speech. “Close connections with human beings matter.”

The keynote speech was followed by a forum that consisted of a panel of medical professionals and representatives from local agencies that offer services in support of individuals with Alzheimer’s disease and dementia and their families.

The forum was moderated by Tallahassee Democrat multimedia editor Rebecca Lutz. Panelists included Bill Wertman, Alzheimer’s Project, Inc. CEO; Margaret Farris, Alzheimer’s Association associate director of development and programs; Dr. Teresa Hunter, TMH Neuroscience Center and Memory Disorder Clinic physical therapist; Mark Baldino, Elder Care Services, Inc. president and CEO; Cathy Adkison, Big Bend Hospice president and CEO; and Louise Sobke, vice president for clinical and ancillary services at Westminster.

The panelists each gave a brief description of their organization and how it helps provide care and raise awareness about dementia. There was a short question and answer section after that, where community members were able to delve further into the topics.