

## Consistent Care adds quality to lives on and off the island

By Michaela Kennedy

A friend of Gail Sheahan, owner of Consistent Care at 8 Clinton Ave., asked her recently, "How does it feel to do what you were meant to do?"

Sheahan responded with a smile and said she was lucky to have a career where she looked forward to going to work every day.

Hundreds of people look forward to Sheahan's work day, as well, for her company provides a service well described by the name. Consistent Care is a home health-care agency, servicing clients from pediatrics to elderly, acute and long-term care. More than 40 employees, mostly visiting nurses and healthcare workers, make about 11,000 home visits annually, on and off the island.

Sheahan started Consistent Care as a home-based business in February of 1991. With a \$1,000 gift from her mother-



Gail Sheehan, owner of Consistent Care.

in-law, Inez Sylvia, "the first nurse practitioner in Rhode Island," and an unsecured line of credit from the bank, Sheahan made her home care official.

Sheahan laughs about the bank loan for which she was eligible because of her minority status. "In those days, women were considered a minority. I couldn't get that now," she says.

Sheahan graduated from the University of Rhode Island with a bachelor of science in nursing. After marriage and a child, she

soon found herself in home health care. Her first client in private care was Eleanor Pennock, a cousin to Mark Twain. At the time, she also took on caring for her friend's father, "who had Lyme disease before they knew what it was."

Her son Tucker was only nine months old at the time, "and I did it so I could be an at-home mom," she recalls.

The business has been neither an easy road, nor a cash cow, she admits. The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 reduced funding to health-care providers through cutbacks for Medicare and Medicaid. "Stretch the buck' has taken on new meaning," Sheahan says with a chuckle.

The rewards come in other ways, she continues. "It takes a certain kind of person to do consistent care, and we've been lucky with staff, and we have a very low turnover," she notes.

Sheahan stresses the need for health care on the island and in

the surrounding area. She voices amazement at how far people travel for services, "some going as far as Woonsocket in a given day," she adds.

Sheahan also notes a difference in having the company located on an island rather than in another community. "We function as an extended family here. There's a sense of unitedness that doesn't exist elsewhere," she says. The relationship between her employees and clients is a two-way street. "We learn a lot from people on the island," she adds.

An experience with her own children who grew up with exposure to her work made her understand the importance of community interaction. When her second child reached grade school, a teacher quizzed Sheahan on the "extraordinary sense of compassion" that her son and daughter both showed toward others. She observed the same sense in some of the workers' children who also spent time

around the business. "I realized compassion is a learned trait," she says.

Sheahan and her brother, Charles, recently bought property on North Main Road to provide space for Consistent Care and an additional business, an adult social and medical day-care center.

They received a nod of approval from the Board of Water and Sewer Commissioners last month for utility service expansion and change of use for the center, and also received a unanimous recommendation for zoning relief from the Planning Commission.

The Sheahans are scheduled to present their development plan to the Zoning Board of Review on Feb. 27.

"If all goes well, we'll start construction the next day and be open for business by the end of the summer," she says, waving crossed fingers in the air.

## Aquifer

Continued from page 1

eration is wanted to help get relevant data from area communities about how much water, if any, they could supply to Jamestown in an emergency.

Heath emphasized that no towns would be required to provide water, only to report to what extent current conditions would allow sharing water with Jamestown.

Heath said the entire island would be reviewed for the designation of sole source aquifer, even though the island may represent more than one aquifer or categories and types of aquifers. He suggested the net effect of the structure of Jamestown's geology is that it represents a sole source aquifer, with no separate watersheds for each section of the island. He explained the island, surrounded by ocean and with no known connection to neighboring aquifers, would have no fresh water source should the Conanicut aquifer system fail.

Heath discussed salt water intrusion as a major concern. "Once started, it could have a cascading effect. It can't be stopped, and

would take years to clean up," he commented.

Southern Rhode Island relies on groundwater aquifers and much of the rest of the state relies on surface reservoirs for water supply, according to state data. The EPA has assigned SSA rating to 72 communities or regional areas in the United States, with 15 in New England and three so far in the state of Rhode Island. They are the Pawcatuck River, the Hunt-Annquatucket-Pettaquamscutt area and Block Island.

An SSA defines a location having a sole or principal drinking water source for at least 50 percent of the population, and that, if contaminated, would be a hazard to public health. Some 57 percent of Jamestown residents get their drinking water from private wells and 43 percent from reservoirs.

As part of the town decision on an SSA rating, councilors asked Town Administrator Bruce Keiser to review data with a consultant. Keiser said he consulted with Dr. Daniel Urish, professor emeritus of environmental engineering at the University of Rhode Island and a past consultant on town water mat-

ters. Keiser said Urish spoke about the variations in as many as three aquifers in different sections of the island. Keiser commented that the island's water supply has been stabilized through conservation.

The stabilization reflects conservation with municipal water, but has not been extended to private wells, town Conservation Commissioner Christopher Powell noted.

### The SSA process

Heath said the Jamestown petition was at the second of a five-stage SSA process. When he receives letters from the town and area towns, it will commence to stage three, in which he analyzes the data collected. Stage four is a local public hearing. Stage five is an EPA decision via the regional administrator and federal endorsement, then Federal Registry notice, and accounting of any federal funding projects that could be involved.

Heath concluded with emphasis on the need for more awareness and oversight of water resources. "You never may be involved" with EPA and its SSA review for project funding, Heath restated, "but we want to encourage stewardship."

A copy of the SSA petition is available at the town library.

As part of the process, EPA is accepting letters from officials and

citizens, individually or as organizations about the Conanicut Island aquifer petition. Letters may be sent to Heath at the EPA Office of Ecosystem Protection-New England, 1 Congress Street, Suite 1100, CDW, Boston, MA 02114-2023. Information may be obtained from Heath at 617-918-1585.

### Town issues

Councilor William Kelly has spoken and written against the designation. He has suggested EPA's role is an unneeded duplication of governmental oversight. He also has cited claims the SSA designations as misused by aggressive politicians and wealthy residents to prevent some projects or force them into neighborhoods less able to fight them.

Heath said that SSA is not used to block projects. A federal EPA report showed its SSA process involved approvals with no modifications in 91 percent of cases, disapprovals of less than one per cent of projects, and approvals with modifications in the remainder.

Heath said he sees no disadvantages to the SSA designation. Local officials have been leery about adding a federal layer of authority over any project in general and they have been leery about the SSA option because of its initiation by a group of residents seen as controversial.

## Many hands to celebrate piano festival

With two concerts involving some 21 performers on multiple keyboards, a master class, plus a competition including a bonus solo offering by the festival artist, this year's "Piano Extravaganza!" festival at the University of Rhode Island promises to be the biggest yet in the event's five-year history of celebrating the art of the piano.

Slated for Friday through Sunday, March 9-11, the three-day festival will include a Friday night "Preview Concert," a Saturday night concert with URI faculty featuring the festival artist, Kevin Ayesh, a Master Class given by Ayesh on Sunday morning, and the Sunday afternoon piano competition for pre-college students, kicked off by an additional short performance by Ayesh.

All festival events will be held in the Fine Arts Center at 105 Upper College Rd. on URI's Kingston campus.

The Friday evening concert starting at 8 p.m., performing works ranging from classical Bach and Bizet to 20th century works by Milhaud, Poulenc and Piazzolla, is free. The centerpiece of the festival is the concert on Saturday evening at 8pm. Admission for this concert is \$8 for the general public, and \$2 for students, with seating on a first-come basis. For more information, call the URI Music Department at 874-2431. Information is also available at [www.pianoextravaganza.org](http://www.pianoextravaganza.org).

## Learn about diabetes prevention at library

On Wednesday, March 14, at 1 p.m., the Friends of the Jamestown Library will present "An Holistic Approach to Diabetes Prevention."

Nutritionist Mary Proietta, a registered dietician and a certified diabetes educator, will be the guest speaker. She will focus on the important role of life style in preventing this debilitating disease. There will be time for discussion as well as questions and answers. The program is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, call the library at 423-7280.

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