

History of the Cleveland Stroke Club Part 2

Following a successful career as a Master Sergeant in the US Marine Corps, Bill Pitts attended Western Reserve College (which later merged with Case Institute of Technology, making it Case Western Reserve University), and became a Speech-Language Pathologist. His first position was at Highland View Hospital (which merged with Metro Hospital), where he worked primarily with stroke survivors providing individual and group therapy sessions.

Bill quickly discovered that his patients primarily attended group therapy sessions for the social benefits and their caregivers attended because of the support they received from other caregivers. In 1974 he started the Cleveland Stroke Club to fill the void in the community. The first few meetings were held at Highland View Hospital but members soon asked that they find another place to hold their meetings that was not in a hospital setting. The search began for a place to hold meetings for 50 members and eventually the board of directors settled on a church in Cleveland Heights, the Euclid Avenue Christian Church (which later became Disciples Christian Church).

Starting the Cleveland Stroke Club was no small feat and Bill worked hard to establish a strong foundation and focus, on which the club would develop. The success of the club is a testament to Bill's dedication, organization and determination. Menninger once wrote "that the six essential qualities that are key to success are sincerity, personal integrity, humility, courtesy, wisdom and charity." Those are the qualities that our Founder William Pitts possessed and they serve as the cornerstone on which the Cleveland Stroke Club will continue to flourish,.

As the years went on, Bill decided that a dinner meeting would attract more members and he was right again! Bill personally (with the help of his wife, Geri) prepared meals for 50 people every month. After the meal and a short business meeting, members had the opportunity to listen to speakers who would cover topics related to stroke and health topics. Again, Bill noticed some members' needs were not being addressed. New stroke survivors and their caregivers needed something else: something to help them get through those early months. Thus, the "Caregivers' Meeting" was started where caregivers could meet in a group with other caregivers and talk and listen to how others cope with

situations, get encouragement and sound off, if needed. This meeting is held now at Kindred Hospital, who has welcomed our group for many, many years.

The years have gone by and things have changed. Bill's position of chief cook and bottle washer came to an end when the sister of one of our members relieved Bill of those duties. Rita has been our Excellent Chef since the 1990s. We are so very grateful for her meals each month and they are served with a smile, too.

Bill ended his position a Director when Dottie Norton graciously took over the position, which she held for 20 years! Bill's wife, Geri, now is the director and she has a team of volunteers who make her look good.

Bill died in March 2014 at the age of 94! He has been missed but thought of daily as we benefit from his intuition and hard work in developing the Cleveland Stroke Club. In October 2014 we celebrated our 40th anniversary, maybe the oldest stroke club in the United States that is apart from hospital/institutional support.

What has been the reason our Club is so successful? Ask any members: it's the people. More and more people are surviving strokes and living with the consequences of stroke for many years. Sometimes old friends fall away and previous support systems wither. When new members come to their first meetings they find others who know exactly what they are going through and can offer suggestions on how to cope. Their expectations change. While survivors will probably not be the person they were before, they find a new level of achievement and satisfaction. They observe others that have more difficulties than they do and are able to encourage them to grow. They find others that have less difficulties and are encouraged themselves to grow. They find their new hemostasis (according to Bill).

We expect the Cleveland Stroke Club to continue for at least another 40 years because of the closeness that our members achieve and the value we have in each other.