

THINGS TO DO

Michigan nonprofit's goal is to help make caregiving less lonely

'Please reach out. We're here to help.'



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James Speir, president of Senior Caregiver & Resource Network, founded the organization 19 years ago. It exists to aid older adults who didn't know where to turn for help or after being taken advantage of by unvetted service providers. (Photo courtesy of Senior Caregiver & Resource Network)



By **SUSAN THWING** |

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When financial adviser and former social worker Jim Speir noticed more and more of his clients were either older adults or members of the “sandwich generation,” two patterns emerged.

Many didn't know where to turn when health or housing needs changed, and too many were being taken advantage of by unvetted service providers.

“I saw a gap,” Speir said. “People needed trustworthy resources, and they needed a community to help them navigate the hard stuff.”

Some 19 years later, the Senior Caregiver & Resource Network has grown from that insight into a nonprofit backbone for aging services across Metro Detroit. It's part referral network, part continuing-education hub, and part fundraising engine that channels real dollars to urgent needs. Its impact is both practical and deeply human: helping families find respite care so a spouse can attend a funeral, connecting an out-of-state daughter to a reliable home care agency for her mom, and installing grab

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SACRN's structure is simple and unusually intentional. The group meets on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month, from 8:30-10 a.m., at AgeWays in Farmington Hills. Every gathering is built around clarity and accountability. Members introduce themselves, the exact referrals that fit their services, and two members deliver 10-minute presentations that delve into their expertise, everything from legal changes affecting estate planning to updates on retirement policy.

“We’re very structured and goal-oriented about what we’re trying to accomplish in that hour and a half,” said Speir, SACRN’s president.



James Speir

Membership is vetted — references are checked and reputations are earned — and relationships are nurtured face-to-face.

That matters, said Lynn Breuer, senior director of community outreach and wellness at Jewish Family Service of Metropolitan Detroit and a 14-year SACRN member.

“What makes SACRN special is we all ‘stay in our lane’ and refer to each other’s depth of expertise.” she said. “It takes a village to meet the

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Caregivers' needs, Breuer noted, are urgent and layered: overwhelm, isolation, too many appointments and medication changes — and not enough time, money or reliable information.

“Caregivers have the ‘too many’s and the not enoughs,’” she said. SACRN’s answer is coordinated, high-trust referrals to services families may not even know exist, often mixing free or low-cost resources with specialized, vetted providers.

SACRN is deliberately woven into the region’s aging-services fabric.

Long-standing partners include the Alzheimer’s Association and Wayne State University’s Institute of Gerontology. The group also invests in the broader professional community, hosting free continuing-education programs on timely topics and bringing in outside speakers at quarterly planning meetings to keep members current. The COVID-19 years accelerated hybrid know-how, but the heart of the model remains in-person accountability.

Culture matters as much as mechanics.

“People tell me they’d belong even if they weren’t getting referrals,” Speir said. “They care about the mission.”

That mission shows up in SACRN’s finances, too. Annual dues — \$395, which are never increased— run the organization. All fundraising and donated dollars flow to the year’s beneficiary. Nonprofits now join for free, a bylaws change adopted to broaden the safety net.

The giving has grown alongside the network.

“Our first fundraiser brought in \$250 for Holiday Meals on Wheels,” Speir said. “Last year, we wrote a \$27,000 check to the Healthy Black Elders Center at Wayne State’s (Institute of Gerontology).”

This year, SACRN selected JFS’s emergency assistance for older adults — flexible funds that stabilize households when no other resource exists. Breuer has seen those dollars keep people safe.

“Sometimes, there’s no program to pay for grab bars or a small home

On Oct. 23, SACRN's community turned out for a rockin' evening at Club Venetian in Madison Heights, with dinner, dancing and Detroit's well-known cover band, Vavoom, raising money to help JFS provide that lifeline of emergency assistance to older adults.

For families, SACRN is also a front door. Individuals regularly reach out through the website or main phone line. Speir often triages calls personally and matches people to the right member, who includes placement specialists, benefits navigators, dementia supports, home-care providers, financial planners, attorneys and more. One recent inquiry came from out of state. Within hours, a local SACRN member had engaged the family and set services in motion.

Looking ahead, SACRN's goals are straightforward: expand membership to fill remaining gaps, grow awareness so more families find help earlier, and raise more dollars for urgent needs. The network is especially seeking an older-adult-focused tax preparer, providers who can make home visits (think mobile hairstylists), and medical partners such as hospital or physician groups.

"When a crisis hits, those connections can smooth the way for a family," Breuer said.

If the work sounds personal, it is. Speir founded SACRN before caregiving reached his own doorstep. Years later, his mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and his sister needed support.

"You don't really understand the stress until you've lived it," he said. "Even with all the emotions, having trusted resources at my fingertips made a huge difference. My clients know SACRN is in my back pocket, and they call: 'Mom's in the wrong place; who can help?' There's always someone I can trust to pick up the phone."

For individuals or businesses that want to connect, whether you're a caregiver, an older adult or a professional who wants to serve this community, visit [SACRN's website](#) to reach the team, learn about membership, and explore ways to support emergency assistance for older adults.