

# Role changes create enhanced experience for Gathering volunteers

By Brandi Jewett

**A**uthor Your Life is our philosophy on living well that's meant for anyone connected with the Lyngblomsten family. In each edition of Lyngblomsten Lifestyle, we're profiling individuals who are authoring their lives. This edition, we're highlighting Cindy Lukas and Joy Johnson, volunteers for The Gathering group respite program.

It's a Monday afternoon, which means Rev. Joy Johnson and Cindy Lukas are busy planning for the week ahead. Both serve as volunteers for 2nd Half with Lyngblomsten's group respite program, The Gathering.

The Gathering provides a day of brain-stimulating activities for people with memory loss and a break for their caregivers. Hosted at church sites throughout the east metro, the program is staffed by dedicated volunteers who are trained by Lyngblomsten staff. One-on-one volunteers are partnered with participants and help guide them through the day's activities, while lead volunteers select and plan the activities.

Johnson and Lukas have volunteered together at Centennial United Methodist Church (a Lyngblomsten member congregation) in Roseville for over a year, planning themed days of brain-stimulating activities for their Gathering participants. For an August session, the pair brought the Minnesota State Fair to the participants through food, reminiscing, and special guest speakers

"We try to come up with themes that prompt memories from earlier in their lives," Lukas said. "And we have fun! And the other volunteers are having fun, too."

*Cindy Lukas (left) and Joy Johnson, co-lead volunteers for The Gathering site at Centennial United Methodist Church, meet to plan a day of activities.*



Lukas began volunteering with Lyngblomsten in the spring of 2018, training as a one-on-one volunteer. She had retired early from her job as a human resources consultant with the State of Minnesota and sought to find a meaningful way to fill her now open schedule.

She learned of The Gathering and its special mission, and she was inspired to volunteer. Her own father had lived with dementia and passed away about four years ago.

Through The Gathering, she met Johnson, a Lyngblomsten board director and retired pastor who served at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in St. Paul (a Lyngblomsten member congregation) for nearly 31 years.

During her time as a pastor, Johnson had walked beside many congregation members as they aged and encountered new challenges, such as isolation and memory loss. Following her retirement in 2018, she also desired to volunteer with The Gathering.

"I knew I wanted to stay active," Johnson said. "I knew that volunteering, which has always been something I've promoted at the church level, is a way to keep our minds active as well as keep our interests."

Johnson trained to become a lead volunteer for the site at Centennial United Methodist, but with a busy schedule that included volunteering with other organizations, she found herself needing to step back.

Lukas also was looking to make a role change. Being a one-on-one volunteer at the Centennial site wasn't a comfortable fit for her.

Lyngblomsten staff recruited Lukas to serve as a co-lead volunteer with Johnson, and she has fallen in love with the position. Johnson, too, has found joy in planning activities with another person.

Lukas said she has learned a lot as lead. As an HR consultant, she often would work on projects independently. Now, she oversees a group of volunteers and experiences the importance of teamwork.

"I'm learning to share," Lukas said with a laugh. "But I could never do this alone."

Together, Lukas and Johnson embody the philosophy of Author Your Life by living their best life through service and helping others do the same by facilitating The Gathering.

"Caregivers know their loved ones have a place for the day that is safe and that they love coming to," Johnson said. "When they're here, we're not just sitting. We're one on one, we're having conversations, and there's laughter." **L**

To learn more about The Gathering, visit [www.lyngblomsten.org/TheGathering](http://www.lyngblomsten.org/TheGathering).

**Want to make a difference in the lives of people experiencing early- to mid-stage memory loss?** Consider becoming a volunteer for The Gathering. Volunteers receive comprehensive training so they are able to plan the day's activities and promote socialization for their participants. **To learn more about volunteering with The Gathering, contact:** Jeanne Schuller (651) 632-5320 | [jschuller@lyngblomsten.org](mailto:jschuller@lyngblomsten.org)

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