

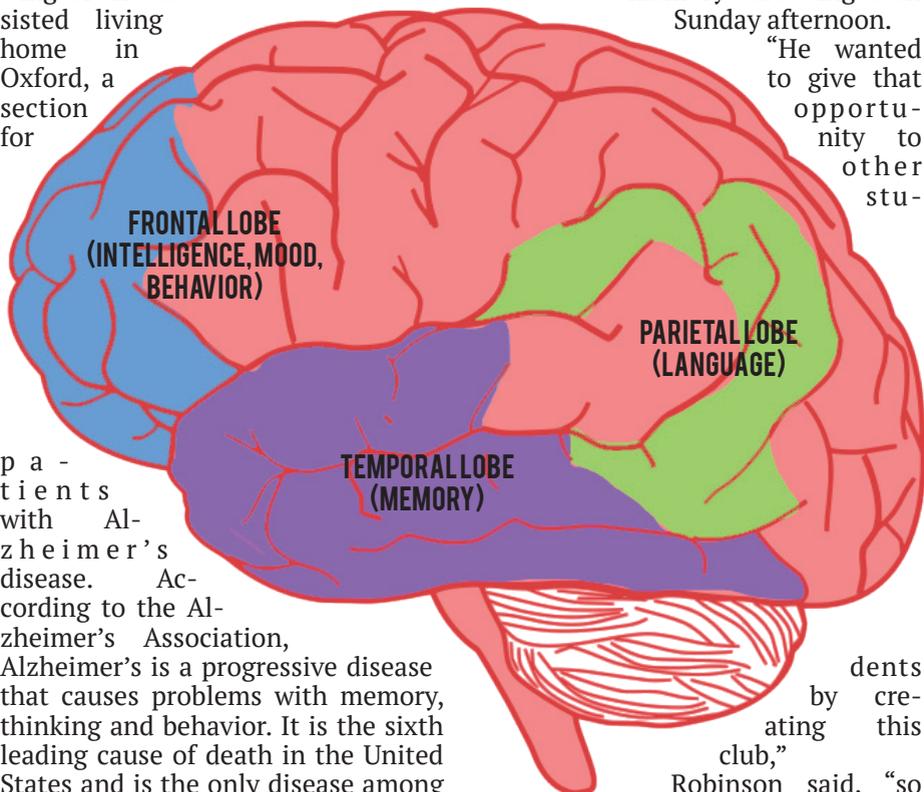
Student introduces school club to help Alzheimer's patients

By Caroline Crews
features editor

Every Sunday, Jack Ligon walks into The Blake, introduces himself to the same group of people, and engages in the same conversations. He volunteers in the memory care wing of the assisted living home in Oxford, a section for

After volunteering at The Blake last semester, he realized that other OHS students could benefit from the experience. Thus, Ligon organized a new school club called Students for Alzheimer's sponsored by biology teacher Sarah Robinson in which OHS students have the opportunity to volunteer in the memory care wing each Sunday afternoon.

WHAT'S AFFECTED IN AN ALZHEIMER'S BRAIN



patients with Alzheimer's disease. According to the Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's is a progressive disease that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. It is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States and is the only disease among the top 10 causes of death that cannot be prevented or cured.

"I've always liked working with the elderly ever since I was really little, and I felt like this would be a way to give back to the community," Ligon said. "It also helps you to realize your blessings in life, because you could always end up with Alzheimer's. There's a very possible chance when you get older, so you're giving back in the hope that somebody will give back to you if that ever happens to you."

"He wanted to give that opportunity to other students

Robinson said, "so he contacted me directly, and really he just needed someone to help coordinate meetings so that they can schedule times to go volunteer."

Ligon noted that not only is volunteering beneficial to the Alzheimer's patients, but that students can also learn many important lessons from the experience.

"I just want more people to experience what I've experienced," Ligon said. "Even if your life isn't very good and you have problems at home, you still have your memory and your brain

THE AGE OF ALZHEIMER'S

SIXTH LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN THE UNITED STATES



MORE THAN 5 MILLION AMERICANS ARE LIVING WITH ALZHEIMER'S



EVERY 66 SECONDS, SOMEONE WILL DEVELOP ALZHEIMER'S



2/3 OF AMERICANS WITH ALZHEIMER'S ARE WOMEN



1 IN 3 SENIORS DIE WITH ALZHEIMER'S OR ANOTHER FORM OF DEMENTIA



IT KILLS MORE THAN BREAST AND PROSTATE CANCER COMBINED



1 IN 9 PEOPLE AGED 65 OR OLDER HAS ALZHEIMER'S (HALF A MILLION EACH YEAR)



source: www.alz.org

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is functioning and you hopefully have your health. Just remembering that makes you feel thankful when you go there. I've stopped taking as many things for granted."

While volunteering, students play memory games and have conversations with the Alzheimer's patients. Many of the conversations revolve around the memories that the patients still retain.

"With a lot of them, it's more of a short term memory loss where they can remember the stuff that happened years ago," Ligon said.

He observed that some of the patients are humorous, while others are extremely intelligent. He has met a former calculus professor, and several people involved in World War II, building planes and working with the "We Can Do It" Rosie the Riveter campaign.

Freshman Patricia Hughes, a member of the club, feels that it is not only a valuable volunteer experience, but also a great history lesson.

"I think that it is a good thing to be involved in your community and

with this great opportunity to connect with people of a different time than yours to understand history a little bit better," Hughes said.

According to Ligon, some patients remember his characteristics when he returns, while others forget him completely. He often engages in the same conversations multiple times, though he said that he doesn't mind it.

"I have the same conversation all the time, but it's a different conversation to them so it helps them just as much," Ligon said.

Ligon emphasized that he would love to see the club grow and have more people join in, and that they could even create their own memory game in the future.

"I just want the most amount of people possible," Ligon said, "because it's just a great thing to experience, and they love it. When you come it makes their day, and it can be scary for people when they first go, but they're very nice to you and it's not as scary or overwhelming as a lot of people think. It's very easy and it's a very rewarding experience."