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By JESSICA CRAWFORD • Daily Leader Even in 2010, people with developmental disabilities tend to be alienated to some degree. Reasons can vary from not knowing what to say to a fear of the unknown. Lyle Swanson has spent well over two decades trying to break down these barriers through volunteer work at Mosaic, and in the process, he made life-long friends.



Approximately 23 years ago, Swanson retired from his job as a gas measurement specialist for Northern Natural Gas. With time on his hands, he ended up volunteering his heart. “He has been a volunteer for us for more than 20 years,” Mosaic’s Executive Director David Jasper said. “He was a volunteer and guardian. As he got older and wasn’t able to do some of that, he remained a great friend by coming out here and visiting folks. He has got to where he can’t drive now, but he will call us to come pick him up so he can come out here and visit.

“He just always has time for everyone,” he continued. “He was very instrumental in getting a garden going for us. He got people to volunteer to come out and till it up, bring fertilizer and just things that needed to be done. He is always working at getting people to volunteer and be a guardian and different things.”

Swanson was honored Friday afternoon for all he has done throughout the years with the individuals in service at Mosaic. Swanson’s wife of 56 years, Lea, said his heart for giving and volunteering began way before retirement and his time spent at Mosaic.

“He has just been this way ever since I have known him,” she said with a proud smile. “He helped with scouts, 4-H and things like that. We worked out at Good Sam’s for about 15 years making crafts.”

Swanson’s grandson, Josh, was also in attendance at his grandfather’s reception at Mosaic on Friday. Josh beamed with pride as he watched his grandfather go from table to table treating everyone in the room as if they were family.

“It makes me feel good because he does good stuff,” Josh said proudly.

Swanson began not only as a volunteer, but as a guardian for several people in service at Mosaic following his retirement. However, when a stroke slowed him down, he had to give some of that up – and it nearly broke his heart.

“After I retired, I was a volunteer and guardian to four of them until I had my stroke – then I had to quit,” he said with a sadness in his voice. “The hardest thing about quitting was the next time

one of them saw me they said, 'How come you didn't want me anymore?' That brought tears to my eyes."

Swanson's own limitations didn't stop him from spending time with the people he had come to love and admire and respect at Mosaic.

"I still come out every week or so," he said. "I just love these people. I will tell you, anyone wants to make me mad, all they have to do is say something against these people."

Mosaic's staff is extremely thankful for the time and love Swanson has given so faithfully over the years. But according to Swanson, he is the thankful one – thankful to have his life filled with such special people.

"They are just lovable people," Swanson said of Mosaic's clients. "They are not trying to take advantage of you or anything. They will jump right in and help if they can. They are very pure hearted."

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