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Ansonia resident named ‘Everyday Hero’ by Ahlbin Rehabilitation Centers

Dorothy “Dee” Marinelli of Ansonia is the recipient of this year’s Everyday Hero Award from Bridgeport Hospital’s Ahlbin Rehabilitation Centers for her determined efforts to recover from a stroke in February 2011.

The award is presented at the Ahlbin Centers Auxiliary annual luncheon to a patient who has made significant progress and demonstrated outstanding spirit and courage in the face of disability.

“Dee’s stroke left her with a limited range of motion, decreased strength and decreased coordination in her right arm and hand,” says occupational therapist Kristin Edgerton. “Dee is right-handed so this made most of the activities of daily living very difficult for her.”

Dee arrived at her outpatient therapy evaluation in a wheelchair and could only stand for about five minutes at a time. Her ability to speak was also affected by the stroke.

The Ahlbin Centers therapy team focused first on increasing the range of motion in Dee’s arm. She started working with a device called a SaebFlex, which helps the hand grasp and release and strengthen the upper arm. Therapists then worked with Dee on activities of daily living such as sitting, standing, climbing stairs and balance. They also helped Dee to improve her ability to speak, at first by producing yes/no responses to basic questions and then by formulating meaningful phrases and sentences.

“Dee displayed unbelievable motivation and effort at every single treatment session,” said occupational therapist Sue Rhode. “She was always positive, determined and encouraged challenges, no matter how difficult.”

Dee received outpatient occupational, physical and speech therapy from March to November 2011. She quickly became independent in carrying out daily activities, such as cooking, cleaning and caring for her four-year-old son.

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EVERYDAY HERO...2-2-2

Now 46, Dee has progressed from being in a wheelchair to walking with a cane and being to climb and descend stairs. Since ending her therapy sessions, Dee has installed hardwood floors in her home, mowed the lawn and chopped wood. Her physician has even allowed her to resume driving.

“Dee demonstrated tenacity in an incredibly difficult situation,” said speech therapist Renee Dagostine. “She jumped headfirst into resuming her life and making the most of it. She taught us all about perseverance, strength and bravery. She has greatly touched us all.”

Ahlbin Centers provides inpatient rehabilitation services at Bridgeport Hospital and outpatient services in Bridgeport, Shelton, Southport, Stratford and Trumbull. Services include physical, occupational and speech therapy as well as early childhood and geriatric programs.

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