

BasebALZ Lessons Learned

Random thoughts compiled by our volunteers based on three seasons of interaction with the most fun and appreciative participants:

- Because we are not located in a major league market, our local Alzheimer's Association asked the participants (during the screening process) to tell us their favorite childhood teams and players. We based on program years ("This Year in Baseball – 1955") on their responses. This approach has worked well for us.
- Early on, we tried distributing a box score from the chosen year to be used as a "hands on" reminder of players, teams, etc. for that particular year. Box scores proved to be too much information. The participants' ability to do detailed reading is generally in decline. We had much better luck showing lineups with names and pictures of the players.
- Sing alongs were always popular – "Take Me Out to the Ballgame", singing the top rated song from the chosen year, etc.
- We (the volunteers) need to continually remember to let the participants respond first. As baseball "geeks", we love to show how much we know. The purpose of the program is to get the participants talking and having fun.
- If a participant's reminiscences went down a path other than baseball (or whatever was the topic at hand), we learned to run with it. This would allow participants to keep talking about a memory that was important to them. We learned to deviate from the agenda if that kept the discussions lively.
- We needed to do a better job of previewing the next meeting's topics. Some of participants really got into developing trivia questions to "Stump the Experts" (our volunteers). The questions pertained to the year/topic of that week's meeting. One participant even sent in his questions when he was out of town for the meeting.
- We were fortunate to usually have a 1:1 ratio of volunteers to participants. This allowed us to have a volunteer sitting close to every participant. The volunteers helped participants with their responses and questions. Often, one of our volunteers had a shared interest with a particular participant and their caregiver (perhaps they were fans of the same team or grew up in the same part of the country). We tried to seat these volunteers and participants together.
- We found that the participants and their caregivers liked to consistently sit in a particular spot around the table. We tried to "reserve" their spots for them each week.
- We were fortunate to have the local Alzheimer's Association provide "baseball food" for each meeting. The smells and tastes of the food helped foster the baseball mood. Lunch time provided a great opportunity for informal interaction between participants and volunteers.