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Delaware County senior services levy would help agency where volunteer also a client

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DELAWARE — Seated at the concierge desk at SourcePoint, Catherine Schonauer shows an ever-present smile that lets visitors know they are welcome.

Her smile is a striking contradiction to what many might expect from her.

Schonauer, 51, lost all four of her limbs almost three years ago after what doctors told her was a simple bout of strep throat.

“I thought my life was over. You don’t expect to be missing four limbs,” she said.

Schonauer exudes warmth and positivity, said Marilyn Clark, a SourcePoint member specialist. “She doesn’t let anything stop her. She brings that air, ‘We’re going to thrive here; it’s going to be a great experience.’ She just embodies that.”

On May 8, Delaware County voters will decide a five-year, 1.2-mill renewal levy that would provide about 80 percent of the funding for SourcePoint, an agency serving residents 55 and older. It would cost about \$36 per \$100,000 of property value, an increase of about \$3. If approved, it will generate about \$9.3 million a year.

SourcePoint was busy on a recent Friday morning, its pool tables filled with friendly competitors, its dining hall alive with banter.

As one of 10 volunteer concierges at SourcePoint, Schonauer takes visitors on tours, explains programs and promotes the senior services agency.

Some pass Schonauer with a wave, a pat on the shoulder, a polite hello or a curious glance.

“How are you, girl?” an older man stops to ask. Schonauer quickly throws the question back.

“What’s going on with you?”

“I get a lot of cramps,” he said, pointing to his legs.

“I do, too,” she said, smiling and glancing down at her legs. “I get phantom pains.”

Raised in Lexington in Richland County, Schonauer always considered herself a happy, positive person. But what happened to Schonauer — a human resources professional who was raising three sons — and the reaction she gets from others have tested her.

She was initially hospitalized on June 25, 2015, for a bacterial infection that spread to her blood and became sepsis. A week later, after her body shifted its healing defenses and blood supply to her vital organs, gangrene set in. Amputations were needed to save her life.

Coming out of a coma on July 3, 2015, she was told by friends that she had survived. But she wasn’t so sure. Doctors preferred to have a vascular surgeon break the news of her surgeries.

Before that, however, Schonauer had learned on her own — reaching down to grab a leg with an arm that ended at the elbow.

“A lot of people feel sorry for me,” she said, adjusting the cap on her prosthetic left arm, the one with a two-pronged hook that grasps. Her other, dominant hand, is more human-like, with fingers that squeeze when a stranger shakes it.

“I didn’t ask for this,” she said, “but it’s a part of my life.”

Schonauer is not only a volunteer at SourcePoint, but also a recipient, receiving Meals on Wheels lunches five days a week. “It always provides a warm lunch for me,” she said.

Levy success is not a given because much of Delaware County’s growth is from young families moving in, yet the 55-and-older population has grown by about 20,000 since 2010, said Kim Schuette, SourcePoint spokeswoman.

Between cooking, doing house chores, volunteering at her church, gardening and spending time with her sons, Schonauer still has moments to reflect. She often wonders whether “there’s got to be a greater purpose to make me live,” she said.

The answer often comes back to the realization that arms and legs don’t make the person: “I am the same personality I always was.”

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