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This walkway is among features to draw dementia patients, caregivers to Babylon Town Hall Park.

# 'Respite park' created for dementia patients

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Babylon Town Hall Park has long drawn in joggers and those looking for a tranquil spot to eat their lunch. Now a portion of the park is being renovated to entice another segment of the population: dementia patients and their caregivers.

The town is creating a "respite park" on the west side of the Lindenhurst park using a \$25,000 grant from the Alzheimer's Foundation of America, which has announced plans to use the park as a model for other municipalities throughout the country. Work on the park is expected to be completed within the next few weeks.

"We wanted to create a place that would enable a caregiver to bring their loved one to a peaceful outdoor setting," said former state Sen. Charles Fuschillo Jr. (R-Merrick), president and chief executive of the organization.

According to the national Alzheimer's Association, there are more than 5.5 million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease, a form of dementia, and it is the

sixth-leading cause of death in the United States. The organization estimates that there are 15 million Americans providing unpaid care for dementia patients, a job that often puts a strain on caregivers' finances as well as their physical and emotional health.

The new park within a park will be centered on a new gazebo that will be fitted with USB ports to charge cell phones and iPods so visitors can listen to music.

The park also will be surrounded by a mix of brightly colored plantings, such as dwarf lilacs, drift roses and daffodils, which will bloom at various times of the year. Town Supervisor Rich Schaffer's assistant Gerry Compitello, who has been overseeing the project, said these are important elements, as research has shown that sensory elements such as colors and music can benefit dementia patients.

A widened walkway will accommodate visitors with physical disabilities, and placards with facts about dementia and information for caregivers will be placed along the walkway. Compitello said the town has been working with Fuschillo's

organization to train senior center workers about dementia, and has offered memory screenings to residents.

Schaffer said the park is "the next step in the town's efforts to improve the quality of life for those dealing with dementia, and their loved ones."

At the Alzheimer's Disease Resource Center in Bay Shore, executive director and chief executive Mary Ann Malack-Ragona helped create a similar "serenity garden" for patients and caregivers.

She said such serene settings can help "tame the agitation and aggression" dementia patients often exhibit. As the numbers of patients have increased, she said, communities have strived to create more dementia-friendly spaces, which also can benefit stressed-out caregivers.

Melissa Gallagher, a dementia care specialist who founded Creative Caregiving Solutions Inc., based in Babylon, said she works with dementia patients to come up with a recreational plan with a goal of getting them back into the community. The new Babylon park "will be a wonderful resource for people who live in the area," she said.