



**A HUGE thank you to everyone who supported
SSEEO on GivingTuesdayNow, May 5th.**

You're Awesome!

Stroke Awareness Month

May has been busy for stroke awareness!

Programs are happening! COVID-19 hasn't stopped SSEEO's ability to provide programs to stroke survivors, caregivers, their families and the community.

The Stroke Survivor to Survivor ([SS2S](#)) program was restarted and support groups are now coming together using Zoom. Scout groups started learning more about strokes and how to potentially save a life!



Nathan Martorana Stroke Survivor and SSEEEO Volunteer

My name is Nathan Martorana and before my stroke, I didn't really know about strokes or neurological trauma. At fifteen years old, I assumed strokes were limited to older adults. I was a healthy teenager who was about to try out for my high school varsity lacrosse team. I assumed I would avoid severe health problems until I grew older. Like most teenagers, I felt invincible.

This feeling of invincibility changed January 9th, 2019 when I had an ischemic stroke at lacrosse practice. It seemed like a typical lacrosse conditioning practice. While I was running up and down the stairs, my head ached so I slowed down. As other teammates lapped me, I decided to drink water because I thought I was dehydrated. After a large gulp, my headache quickly progressed; it felt like my head was dissected and yanked apart. Like any typical teenager, I concluded I had just overworked myself, and called my mom to pick me up early. While I was walking to be picked up, my symptoms started to proliferate like spreading shocks that became cohesive on the right side of my body. My right arm and leg started to tingle, and then I lost sensation on my right side.



Eventually, I was in the hospital diagnosed with a stroke. While I was lucky my stroke was small, leaving me without cognitive impairment, the doctors reinforced that rehabilitation was vital for my recovery. Eventually, with hard work and determination, I regained movement and coordination on my right side. After a year and half, I am almost fully recovered with few ill effects. What remains from my traumatic experience is a strong desire to help others.

It is important to me to educate others about stroke and that is why I joined the SSEE young stroke group. Since COVID-19 and the recent news about the increase risk of strokes in younger people, it is even more important than ever for individuals to understand how to react when faced with the warning signs of stroke, no matter their age.



#66 Nathan Martorana



The Benefits of Pet Therapy By Maureen Pekosh

Stroke therapy is demanding, often arduous, and sometimes discouraging. While rewarding, improvement is frequently not immediate or obvious. But when a dog is involved, therapy transforms into something more positive, restorative, and satisfying.

It was Ariel's day to visit the hospital. Stroke survivors came to see her. Ariel wasn't concerned if they walked or rolled in. Regardless of how each patient felt about being there, she was pleased to see them. It was unifying rather than isolating experience, invigorating rather than exhausting. Each was a potential source of attention and affection. Ariel was a refreshing distraction helping them improve on or better handle their challenges post stroke. According to the American Kennel Club, "spending time with a canine companion can reduce stress and anxiety, as well as ease feelings of loneliness and depression."

Individuals who couldn't walk or talk could still interact with the dog. She was content laying by their side providing companionship. While performing small tasks with Ariel, stroke survivors reinforced the same skills worked on in therapy with less pressure. Individuals worked on certain hand skills without associating it with the work of "physical therapy". Whether it was cupping a hand to hold a dog treat, grasping the beads to put around her neck, or holding the brush and moving it down her back, these patients were using their hand. The focus is on the dog not the patient. It is the dog who has needs the patient can fulfill. Interacting with the dog gives each patient a sense of accomplishment.

During therapy Ariel spent time with each patient. She does not judge patients based on any impediments. The dog is intuitive, sensing when companionship is best and when to present herself for physical contact. The dog bonds with everyone. The dog gives everyone in the room

a reason to interact. She promotes socialization.

Megan Probst, CTRS Recreational Therapist at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital shared that she particularly appreciates the benefit a visiting dog provides a person with neglect. The dog is positioned on the side they neglect giving them incentive to find that side. She finds dogs are great motivators.

Rowland, Ariel's handler, said the hardest part is saying goodbye. Attendees don't even know his name. He hopes patients remember what their visit gave them the confidence to do. He hopes it assists them in returning to day to day activities.

Check out our podcast on [Pet Therapy!](#)

Save the Date!

The event has been rescheduled to August 24, 2020



The banner features a green grass background. At the top, there are two logos: 'synapse HOUSE' on the left and 'SSEEO' on the right. The main text reads: 'Strokes for Stroke Golf Outing' in a large, bold font. Below this, it says 'benefiting Synapse House & Stroke Survivors Empowering Each Other'. The location and date are listed as 'Glen Oak Country Club, Glen Ellyn, Monday, June 8, 2020'. It also includes the invitation 'Join us for Golf or Dinner on the Veranda or Both!' and registration information: 'Register at www.synapsehouse.org'. At the bottom, it provides contact information for sponsorship: 'For sponsorship opportunities, please contact pattie@synapsehouse.org or christine@sseeo.org'.

SSEEO

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