

Flower Power

Brightening lives one petal at a time



By Melissa Weidman

SANDWICH - We've all heard the proverb, "One man's trash is another man's treasure." Here's evidence that it may in fact be true: every week, Hope Hospice volunteer Jan Nowak shows up at several local grocery stores to pick up some of their

flower scraps. She magically transforms them into gold to brighten the day of many in need of brightening.

The items she collects are out-of-date and discarded flowers that the stores can no longer sell. Jan fills her car with buckets of the donated floral rejects and hauls them to her storage room workshop in the basement of McCarthy Care Center in Sandwich. The center, operated by Hope Hospice, is a licensed hospice inpatient unit, with ten private rooms dedicated to symptom management and stabilization. Hope Hospice is a non-profit organization which has provided these services throughout southeastern Massachusetts for more than 35 years.

With the help of another volunteer, Jan separates each of the blossoms and reworks the still usable ones into bouquets themed for every possible holiday. She places them in each private room, the dining area, living room, reception desk and chapel. The impact on patients is immediate.

The hospice model of care emphasizes the importance of caring for the spiritual and emotional needs of both patients and their families, in addition to expert physical care and medical pain management. McCarthy Care Center chaplain Gary German says, "I have seen over and over how patients brighten up as soon as they see these flowers. For some, their world has narrowed to only be able to focus on their room. For these people, flowers can be everything. Flowers touch their soul and are often counted among their significant blessings."

Despite the fact that the buckets are heavy and the work involves hours of standing, Jan considers it a miracle. "Some days I wonder if there will be enough flowers, and somehow it always, "miraculously comes to pass," she says.

Like many of the more than 150 volunteers who donate their time and skills to Hope Hospice, Jan has a long history of volunteering. She started as a candy striper in high school, went door-to-door raising funds for various charities, helped feed young patients who couldn't feed themselves at a local hospital, and helped organize hospice fund-raising events. With a successful 37-year career in real estate, the Centerville resident could be taking it easy in her own golden years. Instead she is deeply inspired by her past experience with friends in hospice care.

"While you may be in need, someone else is in need too," says Jan. "Whatever you do for others, the joy you may give to them comes back to you. I always get more out of this than I give."



FLOWER GIRL Every week Jan Nowak transforms discarded floral scraps into significant blessings for those in hospice care.

Making bouquets is one example of the many varied roles hospice volunteers can fulfill. Patient care and family support is the primary function of most Hope Hospice volunteers. They provide emotional and social support and companionship in the patient's home or facility, assisting with light transportation, as well as respite care so that caregivers may take a break.

Volunteers help with veteran patients and their families. They also provide administrative support such as answering phones, preparing mailings, hosting booths at health fairs and community events, or assisting with fund raisers.

Some volunteers provide professional services for which they are licensed or certified such as hairdressing or therapies such as massage, reiki, pet or music therapy. All must be screened, CORI checked, drug tested and have references. They must take the required initial Hope Hospice volunteer training which covers a range of topics, including: what is hospice; infection control and safety; pain management; confidentiality; communication; spirituality; and grief and loss. Throughout the year trainings and workshops are offered on a variety of other topics like dementia and Alzheimer's disease, music therapy and end-of-life religious traditions and rituals.

Surrounded by a riot of blossoms, the "flower girl," as the McCarthy Care Center staff call her, is in her element in her underground florist shop. "Tell me, how do you feel when you look at a flower?" Jan asks, lifting up a lovely apricot-hued rose. "It's like getting manna from heaven. It helps to brighten up the mood and send a strong message that someone truly cares for you."

About the Author

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