

# A final salute to those who answered the call

By Jim Cornelius  
Editor in Chief

One of the most sacred obligations undertaken by Hospice of Redmond is honoring military veterans in their last days.

The population of aging veterans is growing, and Hospice Veterans Outreach Coordinator Maureen Krebs notes that “generally, about one-third of our patients are veterans.”

Krebs, herself a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, has assembled a team of dedicated volunteers who fully appreciate the unique needs and desires of veterans as they enter their twilight. There are aspects of military service that the most caring and empathetic civilian cannot quite grasp; shared experience can mean a lot. Thus, having veterans reach out to veterans becomes a key element of hospice care.

“There are certain things that we all go through as veterans,” Krebs said.

Don DeLand, a U.S. Navy veteran of the Vietnam War, got involved with Hospice of Redmond through the Wall of Honor, which stands at the organization’s Redmond office at 732 SW 23rd St., Redmond. DeLand is the commander of the honor guard at the Wall. Each third Wednesday of the month at 4:30 p.m., there is a gathering to play “Taps” at the Wall, where the names of departed

veterans are inscribed.

It’s “just a few minutes to honor all of those on the Wall,” DeLand said. And those few minutes are profound.

DeLand also attends pinning ceremonies.

“It’s very informal, but very personal,” Krebs explained.

Hospice volunteers join a patient and his or her family, describe the veteran’s service and present the veteran with a certificate and a pin commemorating that service.

“We give them a final salute,” Krebs said. “Oftentimes, we’ve seen that it really gives them peace in their final days and hours.”

Christine Gittins, an Army veteran and retired law enforcement officer, recalled arriving to the bedside of a dying Vietnam veteran. The man was unconscious.

“I did the pinning ceremony and thanked him for his service,” Gittins recalled.

“At that time, he woke up and he moved and he smiled a little bit... and he passed away about five minutes later. That meant everything to the family.”

Gittins, like the other veteran volunteers, find in the Hospice program a new way to fulfill their lifelong desire — their need — to serve. Gittins discovered Hospice when her grandparents were dying.

“I was so blown away by their services that I wanted to give back,” she said.

Larry Morris, who was drafted into the Army in 1966 and served in Vietnam, has been helping veterans for decades. It started with helping one of his best friends, who lost a leg to an anti-personnel mine in Vietnam.

“I came back from Vietnam alive and in one piece,” he said. “You kind of go through a guilt thing. A lot of people don’t get that — but I started giving back then.”

Morris taught his friend to waterski on one leg, and the man went on to become an accomplished ski athlete both on water and on the slopes.

Morris recalls visiting with a World War II veteran who was confronted with severe memory issues. Despite his troubles, the man remained upbeat.

“Really, I learned a lot from that gentleman,” Morris said.

Tim Benesh, who retired recently after a 28-year career in the Navy, also gets a lot out of his service with Hospice.

“One of the biggest things that I’ve missed in the two-and-a-half years I’ve been retired is the camaraderie you have with other members of the military,” he said. “It’s nice to talk to somebody who has a shared experience.”

That shared experience can loom larger and larger, Benesh said, as an elderly person looks back on their life’s course.

“As you reflect on your life, that becomes a very



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William ‘Bill’ Sexton, who served 32 years in three branches of service (U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Army Air Corps and Air Force) starting in World War II.

significant piece,” he said.

The experience of serving those who served at the end of their lives is a powerful one.

“It seems almost a duty,” Benesh said. “There’s such a need to connect with these folks. I think it’s a huge thing that we do, and I think, what better way to pay it back.”

Gittins concurs: “It’s just been a really rewarding

experience to serve these veterans because I think it means a lot to them. I really do.”

More information on the Wall of Honor can be found at <https://www.hospiceofredmond.org/wall-of-honor>. To find out more about Hospice of Redmond’s veterans programs, visit <https://www.hospiceofredmond.org/we-honor-veterans-2>.

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