

Hospice provider regularly 'Lights Up a Life'

Hospice Profile: Nancy Allen

BY BECKY GOEHRING
PEACE HARBOR HOSPICE

Entering her 21st year as a Peace Harbor Hospice health aide, Nancy Allen brings a wealth of experience and compassion as part of the team helping the Hospice patient and family members.

Allen was working with Home Health in 1994 when then director Kyle Geers asked if she would like to be a part of the newly forming Hospice program.

"I said yes and it was the best decision I've ever made," Allen said. "It is an honor to help patients, and their family members, through the transition of dying. It's a part of life and I can help by answering questions, listening and just being with them."

As part of the Hospice team, Allen works with patients as the bath aide, helps with some simple wound care and healing touch massage. And though her primary assignment is to the patient, she takes a holistic approach to care. When she is at the home, she often tells the spouse or caregiver to take a break.

"I encourage that," she said. "I tell them to take a walk, or lie down for a nap or go out. It really is about taking care of the whole family."

Allen's caring attitude is not lost on other Hospice team members.

"I've known Nancy for over 14 years," one team member said. "During that time I have seen her dedication to our

patients. She often goes the extra mile, bringing in groceries, delivering medications and flowers and will even do after hour work if needed."

For Allen, the reward is in the relationship she establishes with her clients.

"I learn a lot from them," she said. "I've learned about other religions and beliefs about death and dying, listened to the history of this area from long-time residents and heard stories from the wars and work experiences."

"My patients have stories to tell and experiences to share. It broadens my perspective."

Recently, a family member shared with her a small, crocheted angel that a friend had sent. Nancy admired it. A few weeks later, a package arrived for her. Inside was a bag of crocheted angels.

"The woman who makes them lives out of state," Nancy said. "She sent a note and said anytime, she'd make more. I'm giving them to my patients now."

Allen also loves the opportunities that Hospice offers to patients and their families to celebrate and honor the life. The scrapbooks made by a volunteer group that tell the patient's story, the musicians

who donate time to bring peaceful melodies into the home, or the handprint project, that creates a lasting memory are all ways that the program honors the patient's life.

"The handprint project is so great," she said. "We had one guy, I helped him make several prints. He wrote a message on each handprint to his kids. He died and that Christmas, they all received a casted handprint with his personal message to each one."

"His wife said there were a lot of tears that morning, but gee, what a lasting gift."

The work is not always easy and Allen's even temperament and caring spirit helps families as they move through each day, coming to terms. She recognizes, as do all members of the Hospice team, that each patient and each family member deals with a terminal diagnosis in his or her own way.

For some, there is an acceptance and understanding; others are angry. Allen respects where each one is in that process.

"I had one patient who was near death but couldn't let go," Allen remembered. "There was one family member who couldn't get here so they finally called. I was there while they held the phone to the patient's

ear. The patient was, at that point, near death. But I watched a tear trickled out of his eye while he was listening. He died the next day. That was his closure."

Closure can be difficult for caregivers. Allen will sometimes stop by the ocean, after she learns that a patient has died, just to take it in and breathe.

"They become like family to me," she said. "I'm with some of them for a long time and there is a bond. I rely on my team members to talk it through."

"It's never easy." Camping trips, time spent in the garden and family gatherings create balance for her. Her husband, Steve, works at Peace Harbor in the rehab department. The couple have been married 31 years and have three children and three grandchildren, all living in the area.

Her face lights up when she talks about her family but it is the same smile that appears as she talks about her Hospice patients, families and team.

That dedication, compassion and care is the gift she brings to the patient and family members. It is her primary goal as she meets them where they are on the journey and walks with them along the way.

Peace Harbor Hospice is sponsoring its 20th annual Light Up a Life fundraiser ceremony Dec. 12, from 2 to 3:30 p.m., at the Florence Events

Center. The Light Up a Life ceremony presents a wonderful opportunity to remember a loved one in your life. Stars can be purchased to recognize a loved one who has died or to recognize someone special in your life.

All stars will have your loved one's name attached to it. Stars are hung on a holiday tree; Stars of David are placed on a Menorah table.

Recognition will also be given during the "reading of the names" segment of the ceremony.

All contributions are tax deductible. 100 percent of the contributions to Light Up AaLife remain in Florence to benefit Peace Harbor Hospice.

Donations can be mailed to Peace Harbor Hospice, 400 Ninth St., in Florence, or you can drop it off at its new location at 2230 Kingwood Street.

For more information or to make a donation, contact the Hospice office at 541-997-3418.

Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., closed from noon to 1 p.m. during lunch.

Admission to the ceremony is free. All are welcome. Refreshments and music will be provided.

Anyone living inside the city limits in need of transportation can contact River Cities Taxi at 541-997-8520 for free transportation.



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