

Peace Harbor Hospice profile: Debbie Hunt

For Debbie Hunt, working with Hospice patients and their families as they navigate the final chapter of life is both a gift and a challenge.

Hunt, who holds a master's degree in social work from Chico State University, has some of the first contact with a patient who have been referred to hospice by a primary care physician.

"I think one of the key things that helps me do the work is an understanding that death is a natural part of life," Hunt said. "My role as a social worker with hospice is to meet the patient — and the family members — where they are and help them navigate what is such an emotional and difficult time."

Hunt, who initially was going to pursue a degree in psychology until a friend suggested social work, earned her bachelor's degree at Humboldt State University in Arcata, Calif. In her final semester, she received word that her grandmother was nearing her end of life. She made the decision to take a semester off to help with her grandmother's care.

"On the first day I arrived, the hospice team came through the door," Debbie remembered. "They took charge and I immediately felt held by that and knew that we could do it."

That experience with the hospice team that assisted her family in the final days of her grandmother's life, gave Hunt a personal insight into how important it was, as a family member, to have hospice offering support and taking over some of the details so that she and the rest of her family could devote their time, energy and love to her grandmother.

Back at graduate school, Hunt did an outside internship with Yreka Hospice in 2003, gaining further insight into the role that hospice plays in its patient's journey.

For seven years, Hunt worked with the North Valley Catholic Social Services organization in Yreka, focused mainly on children who had mental health or profound traumatic incidents in

their lives.

In 2011, due to a funding collapse, the agency was forced to close and Hunt began the search for a new job. Wanting to be near the ocean and drawn by the passion she felt for hospice work, she applied for an opening at Peace Harbor Hospice.

Hunt began work in Florence in early 2011.

When she first meets a patient and family members, Hunt enters with a focus of having an open, intimate and honest dialogue to understand where each member is in acceptance of the diagnosis.

"There are really important conversations to be had," she said, "and when I can, I try to help facilitate those very important dialogues."

Some of that includes the business that is necessary, including conversations about end of life decisions, filling out the POLST form (Physicians Order For Life Sustaining Treatment), advanced directives and personal wishes.

She noted that each family

and patient are in different places when it comes to facing a terminal diagnosis.

"Part of my work is to take a good pulse as to where people are in that process and understanding," she explained. "I want to meet them where they are and find out how I can help."

In addition to working with hospice patients and their families, Hunt is the Bereavement Program Coordinator at hospice and facilitates the weekly Grief Group meeting.

For those who aren't ready for a group setting, Hunt is also able to work with survivors on an individual basis. As part of hospice support, survivors can receive formal support from Peace Harbor Hospice for roughly 13 months after the death of a loved one.

For her own life's balance, Hunt is a certified yoga instructor and teaches classes two evenings a week.

"I was impressed, when I moved here in 2011, by how giving and supportive this community is," Hunt said. "People

are always helping one another, volunteering in the community. We have an amazing group of volunteers who work with hospice patients and I had a chance to work closely with them this summer. There is such commitment and care."

That care and responsibility to others resonates with Hunt and is a life philosophy that carries her through each day.

For Hunt, it's not about changing or directing, but rather being a guide at her patient's side, helping navigate the journey that lies ahead.

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

The Light Up A Life ceremony presents a unique 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.

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.

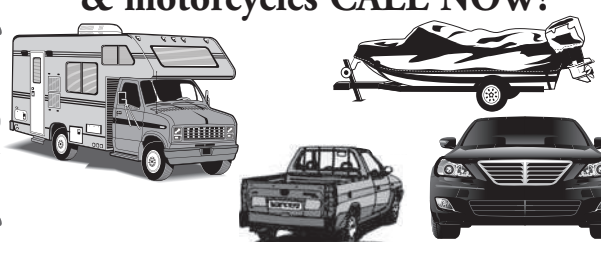
Admission to the ceremony is free. All are welcome, whether or not your loved one was on hospice.

Refreshments and music will be provided. Anyone in need of transportation can contact River Cities Taxi at 541-997-8520 and request free transportation to and from the event. To take advantage of this service, you must live within the city limits.

Peace Harbor Hospice is a nonprofit organization. All contributions are tax deductible., with 100 percent of the contributions to Light Up A Life remaining in Florence to benefit Peace Harbor Hospice.

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

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



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