Say "I love you" every day
As you will most definitely notice, the focus of this issue of our newsletter is coming full circle. The circle is symbolic for so many of us and in many different ways. If you look closely at the Hospice of the Panhandle logo you will notice our circle is not closed. This is intentional because we recognize that the people we serve are on a journey, one that is not complete and one that is open to new experiences and opportunities. As our circle evokes a journey, I am reminded of the journey our organization has made.

Each time we welcome new employees to Hospice of the Panhandle, they take part in an orientation process. I am fortunate to begin this orientation by sharing with them the history of Hospice of the Panhandle. As I share our story, I show them copies of minutes from our founders’ meetings and I make a point of recognizing that the vision of our founding mothers and fathers is alive and well today. One of the statements that always strikes me is the heading on what is really a statement of mission, vision and philosophy, it reads “Life More Abundantly.”

How very true this statement is today. And it is really the driving force between our new efforts to increase community education and awareness. Our reality is that there are goals we have at the end of life, some of them poignant but simple like telling those around us that we love them. There are times when goals take longer to accomplish – and that’s where hospice care can help even more. When a person has their basic needs meet – their pain managed, they can breathe easier - then they can concentrate on the living. We know we can help but we can’t do as much when the time is short.

So we want the community to call us sooner. Let’s work together while there is time to achieve those goals and make the end of life as meaningful as the beginning. Spread the word – we are not an organization focused on the end, we are an organization that desires to help others live more abundantly, we want to help our patients come full circle.
Three Italian Greyhound puppies scurry up into their “daddy’s” lap, nestling in a plush tan oversize blanket that covers Gene Mulder’s legs. On this frigid but bright, sunny winter day, Bella, Luci and Pia find a comfortable spot, and quiet down.

“They’ll stay that way,” said Gene’s wife, Lynn. “They love being there.”

The puppies came to the Mulders last October, on a whim. Gene, who is a Hospice of the Panhandle patient, and Lynn, had been previous owners of a Greyhound, and decided to embark on the journey of having a new dog - well, dogs - again.

“We decided it would be the last big thing we would do together,” Lynn said. “We’re back to our original (newlywed) selves - happy, smiling - with them.”
Gene, who is originally from Chicago, and Lynn, who hails from Catonsville, Md., met more than two decades ago at a “Parents Without Partners” group outside of Baltimore. Gene had spent his career as an engineer and Lynn was working as a paramedic. In 2003, they bought 23 acres of land off Pious Ridge Road in Morgan County, an area with which they were well familiar, as family members live in nearby Berkeley Springs. They intended to build a log home on the land, the plans for which Gene “drew up.”

“She thought of it; I designed it,” Gene said. “It was the third house I’d built.”

But when their home in Baltimore sold in 13 days, they found themselves living in an RV for a year while their house was being built – on the Morgan County property.

“He’d wake up in the middle of the night and say, ‘Something’s wrong,’” Lynn said. “And sure enough, it was.”

The house has three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a large loft area – and lots of room for the puppies.

Gene, turned 85 in February, is a cardiac patient who also has vascular dementia. Lynn’s paramedic partner was the first person who suggested that Gene consider hospice care, more than a year ago. Lynn balked at first.

“My partner said I needed to talk to Gene’s primary physician (nurse practitioner Allison Wade),” Lynn said. “I fought her for a month, but when I realized hospice means making someone comfortable and providing support to the family then we decided to make the call. We’re really glad that we did.”

The Mulders have used “everyone” – that is, many of the disciplines that Hospice offers. They have had visits from nurses and aides, as well as Hospice of the Panhandle’s physician, Sarah Phillips. Gene has had a respite stay at the inpatient facility when Lynn was traveling to pick up the puppies. The facility, Lynn said, offered her “huge relief, knowing Gene was being taken care of.” And Lynn uses the grief support department for pre-bereavement counseling.

“Everyone we meet is so real,” Lynn said. “And it’s so nice to have someone there to give you direction. We’ve called at least twice during ‘off hours’ and it’s just a huge help.”

The Mulders have been married for 27 years, and have traveled throughout the U.S., mostly in their 34-foot motorhome. Most of their favorite trips have been out west – to the Tetons, Mt. Rushmore, Yellowstone and Montana. They’ve also spent many fall months in a favorite spot down south – Hilton Head, South Carolina. While they don’t travel anymore as a result of Gene’s illness, they still
enjoy the outdoors. Gene spends a good part of the day, observing the wildlife while looking out a large picture window in their family room. They both have hunted over the years on the 23 acres of land that they own.

“I do love to hunt,” Lynn said. “Gene got me a tree stand one year.”

Gene chimes in that he hunted for about 10-12 years, and in all that time, bagged one deer. He added that the couple processes venison themselves.

During these twilight days of their marriage, Gene and Lynn still take the time to say “I love you” to each other several times a day and take time for lots of hugs.

“We’ve been getting used to a different way of life,” Lynn said. “We appreciate every second we have together.”
How sweet it is!

Annual Valentine’s cookie event thanks those who help care for hospice patients.

14,000+ # of cookies it takes to say thank you

407 boxes of cookies delivered

more than 100 # of volunteers who bake, pack and deliver cookies

Hospice of the Panhandle has been delivering homemade cookies to our community care partners for more than 30 years. Thank you to everyone who helps with this sweet project!
Volunteer trainings & events

Volunteers are a vital part of the care provided to hospice patients and their families. Volunteers may work with hospice patients, lend their special talents (like sewing, baking and cutting hair) or assist with office tasks.

Patient support volunteers need to complete 2 days of training, a background check and an interview prior to working with hospice patients. Organizational support volunteers need to complete 4 hours of training, a background check and an interview prior to receiving any tasks.

Volunteers also have social and educational opportunities throughout the year.

Upcoming Volunteer Trainings

Fridays, May 10 & 17
9 a.m. - 4 p.m., Main Office

Fridays, July 19 & 26
9 a.m. - 4 p.m., Main Office

Upcoming Volunteer Events

Volunteer Annual Review
Friday, March 28
2 p.m. - 3:30 p.m., Main Office

Veterans’ Mental Health Inservice
Wednesday, April 24
2 - 4 p.m., Main Office
Thursday, April 25
8 - 10 a.m., Main Office

Boundaries & Ethics Inservice
Thursday, May 16
2 - 4 p.m., Main Office
Friday, May 17
8 - 10 a.m., Main Office

To RSVP for any volunteer events or trainings, contact Tricia at (304) 264-0406, ext. 1224 or tlawrence@hospiceotp.org
My first experience with hospice services began in high school when my grandparents moved into our home after they both received a terminal diagnosis. Their diagnoses were devastating to our family, but we were dedicated to making them comfortable in our home and our routines became based on their needs.

My mom coordinated hospice services, in-home caregivers, and out-of-town visitors’ schedules to ensure that no matter what the quantity, the quality of her parents’ lives would be full of meaning.

This would be one of the most stressful times of our lives, but with the help of hospice, we knew we could face the unknown of their diseases.

We relied on the hospice nurses’ expertise in medication management to assist my grandmother to be as pain free as possible which was important to combat the spreading cancer.

My grandfather was given medical equipment like oxygen to help his breathing. The seasoned hospice staff provided helpful tips so that he could maintain as much independence as possible since the ALS affected his body but not his sharp mind.

We were as prepared as possible for the medical implications of their disease progressions; however, I don’t think we could have ever been prepared for the loss of both of these precious people just 18 days apart.

My grandparents were the most special people in my life and had a unique role in my upbringing. When they passed away I had difficulty accepting the reality of the loss and adjusting to a new life, where my grandparents did not exist in a physical form. I longed for their presence and tried to find ways to maintain a connection to them which according to Worden’s 4 Tasks of Grief (a therapeutic model used by the grief counselors in the Center for Grief Support) is a typical experience for those experiencing grief.
My mom, now an “adult orphan” could not adjust without the professional help of hospice. She knew hospice had said they would “be there after the death” for support so she reached out. She learned of a grief support group and decided to join. As part of her grief process, my mom utilized a closed-ended support group (much like our Grief in Progress group) where she joined with others who were grieving. This group normalized her experience and taught her healthy ways to cope with loss. Ultimately it lead her in a very positive direction, one my grandparents would be proud to see.

When I’m developing programs for the Center for Grief Support, I see them from the perspective of a grief counselor but also from another perspective—one that is very much personal to my own life’s experiences.

For more information about how the Center for Grief Support can help you, call (304) 264-0406 or go online to hospiceotp.org.

Upcoming Grief Support Programs

A Time to Remember is a special remembrance ceremony open to all who have lost a loved one and want to honor their memory.

Sunday, March 31
2 p.m., Main Office

For more information or to register, please call (304) 264-0406 or email griefsupport@hospiceotp.org.
On this wintery – but hopefully soon-to-be-spring – day, I have been looking over some of the copies of the Comforter that have appeared over the past 10 years. And I have to say that I can hardly believe I’ve been here at Hospice of the Panhandle for 10 years. It seems like the blink of an eye!

One story that caught my eye was in the magazine in the spring of 2014, just five years ago. In that article, I mentioned some trees that we had moved from one location on our campus to another. Tall pines, they appeared sturdy enough. However, moving trees can be a dicey proposition. We actually worried at the time that they might not survive the move – even though it was simply from one side of the campus to the other. In 2014, those trees were 12 to 15 feet high. As I look out my window now, these same trees are probably 20 feet tall, maybe even a little taller. What a difference five years makes! Over the course of the last five years, the landscaping on the campus has matured. Smaller trees, once saplings, stand tall, and bloom beautifully each spring. The shrubs, once measuring a few feet high and wide, are much more robust. And our beautiful garden outside the Education Center, cultivated with love by donor Lee Snyder, bursts into vibrant colors each spring.

It’s been quite a five years! At the time of that particular issue, Hospice of the Panhandle’s ‘new campus’ was just two months old. Staff at the inpatient facility, which had opened in March 2014, had cared for 30 patients.

Fast forward to 2019, five years since setting foot on this campus. We have now served more than 1,200 patients. When we first opened, and community members would ask about the need for the facility, I would often share not just the numbers, but the stories of patients who spent days – sometimes their last on this earth – there.
In five years, a mom was able to witness her daughter “walk down the aisle” (on one of the outdoor porches) to marry the love of her life. The daughter continues to celebrate her wedding anniversary each year on that day of her outdoor wedding on the porch.

In the chapel, a father watched his son and daughter receive their middle school and high school diplomas. He stood proudly, with the help of staff, while Pomp and Circumstance played and his children walked in, donning their school graduation caps and gowns, while friends and family members looked on.

A local performer, who wanted to give one last concert, sang several Christmas carols in front of a crowd of about 30 staff and volunteers. His nurse helped him “warm up” by providing lemon water, so his voice rang out loud and clear for his audience.

A retired commander at the Air Guard was able to host more than 200 visitors, who shared stories of their times together.

From her bedside, a young woman watched as a minister baptized her 9-month-old son. Her family celebrated the occasion with an outdoor barbecue afterward.

And a couple, married for 70 years, held hands, looked at each other lovingly and whispered their final goodbyes. They passed away within days of each other.

These are only a few of the hundreds of stories that we were able to witness in five years. We also often get to be a part of many rich, wonderful memories of patients and families who are cared for in our home care program – generally more than 1,000 year.

Here’s to the many, many more years of sharing memories.
Hospice of the Panhandle presents

HOLLYWOOD NIGHTS

Friday, June 7, 2019  6:30 - 10:30 p.m.
Bavarian Inn, Shepherdstown

You’re invited to walk our red carpet and dance the night away at the newly-renovated Bavarian Inn. A ticket to this premier party includes champagne upon arrival, dinner, one drink ticket, live music and an opportunity to bid on fabulous live and silent auction items. All proceeds benefit hospice patients. For more information, call Ashley Horst at (304) 264-0406.

Thank you to all those who have already chosen to help hospice patients and their families by sponsoring Hollywood Nights this year:

Hollywood Star Sponsors:  CNB Bank, Farmers & Mechanics Insurance
Hall of Fame Sponsors:  Bank of Charles Town, Rosedale Funeral Home
Best Picture Sponsors:  Valley Health
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