

NEWSLINES

The Gift of Flowers Lifts Spirits and Brightens Days



“Just living is not enough ... one must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower”
— Hans Christian Anderson

If it's Tuesday, you'll find Leigh Yost in a workroom at Randy McManus Designs, arranging small vases of cut flowers to be delivered to patients of Hospice and Palliative Care of Greensboro (HPCG). These are not bouquets a customer has ordered; instead, they are the end-product of a unique non-profit organization known as Friends With Flowers.

“There's no place I'd rather be on Tuesdays than right here,” said Leigh. “It allows me to connect my love of flowers with my desire to help others in need – especially those who are coming to the end of their lives. I hope every patient will feel uplifted, knowing that someone thought of them in a loving, caring way.”

Leigh is joined by a host of other Friends With Flowers volunteers, each echoing Leigh's passion about the work – work they have been doing for four years. From individuals to church groups and gardening clubs, there are countless volunteers involved in the project.

In addition to creating these bedside bouquets, the volunteers also deliver these flowers to facilities on the HPCG campus. They intentionally do not interact with patients. Each bouquet is left without any identifying card, allowing for a sweet air of mystery around its delivery.

However, stories float back to the Friends With Flowers volunteers as wonderful affirmations of the healing power of these flowers.

Some patients call Friends With Flowers directly, sharing words of praise. Others send thoughtful notes and letters of thanks via their HPCG team. One patient's wife created note

cards from a photo she took of her husband's beautiful bedside arrangement.

Organized in May 2004, Friends With Flowers is the brainchild of Randy McManus, well-known floral designer who owns a shop located on Battleground Court in Greensboro. The concept of Friends With Flowers was born from Randy's interest in extending the life of beautiful flowers, often discarded after special events.



Randy McManus, President of Friends With Flowers

“Recycling is on everyone's mind these days, and I found many clients and personal friends who were eager to brainstorm with me about recycling flowers,” Randy said.

Randy and his friends realized there were many places that would benefit from the recycled flowers, but unanimously decided to focus the efforts on HPCG patients. With the mission secured, the group moved forward to develop a plan and recruit board members and a team of volunteers.

This August will mark the creation of the 10,000th bouquet designed for HPCG patients. And the project would not be successful without the beautiful flowers needed to create the 58 bedside bouquets each week.

“We are always educating our clients about Friends With Flowers, encouraging

them to donate flowers after an event,” said Randy. “We also work with other local florists and suppliers and have even cultivated a relationship with a rose grower in Ecuador who routinely sends roses for the project.”

Pat Gibbons, BSN, CHPN, Director of Beacon Place, has countless stories of Beacon Place patients enjoying these flowers.

“On Mondays, when those trays of beautiful flowers come through the door, we feel so blessed to be the recipient of Friends With Flowers,” said Pat. “In fact, Clifford Latham in Room Eight has been looking at his watch for the past thirty minutes.”

Clifford knows that his mystery flowers arrive around 11 am each Monday. When he sends his wife to the front desk, she returns with a beautiful bouquet. She holds them close so Clifford can smell the sweet aroma of the flowers – most especially the roses. She waits patiently as he carefully examines each flower and sprig of greenery. He is pleased ... he is very pleased and will enjoy the bouquet throughout the week.

Randy isn't surprised about Clifford's enjoyment. “Everyone loves flowers; it is a testament to how the simplest things can mean so much.”

HPCG nurses and social workers who deliver the flowers in the homes of their patients have also seen first-hand the impact these fresh flowers make.

One nurse said, “I never stop getting goose bumps when I see the impact of these bouquets. Patients look up at me with such disbelief, often asking, ‘Are these for me?’”



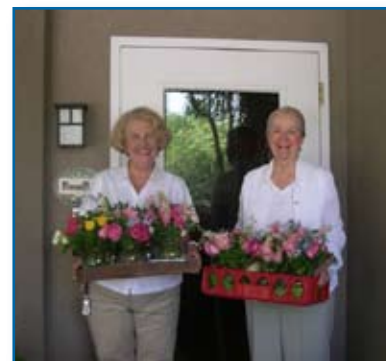
Judy Latham, with her husband, Clifford Latham, enjoying flowers recently delivered.

Some patients say they have never received a vase of fresh cut flowers before. Others tell how the bouquets help them feel less alone, less isolated, knowing that a stranger took the time to create something so special for them.

“My most meaningful delivery was to a patient who lived alone and had just received some distressing news,” an HPCG nurse explained. “Bill told me how the beauty of the flowers filled his entire room and created a spiritual connection for him. The flowers also helped him recall treasured childhood memories – memories of his grandmother's garden. As I pulled out of Bill's driveway, I was so thankful that Bill was no longer alone ... he was in his grandmother's garden, thanks to Friends with Flowers.”



Volunteers June Dotson (left) and Yvonne Gragg.



Volunteers Jane Pearce (left) and Martha Smith deliver bouquets to Beacon Place on the HPCG campus.

