



Pomp & Circumstance: Community Hospice Patient Graduates from Care

Most people think that choosing Hospice means giving up and being resolute that their loved one will die. But most people are wrong. Sometimes Hospice patients - after a period of compassionate care, comfort, and support - can get better and a medical evaluation will show that their condition has stabilized, reversed, or improved. In such cases, patients will "graduate" off the program because they no longer have a terminal prognosis of 6 months or less.

Meet Joseph and Ida Cannistraci of Ballston Spa. The snowbirds, who enjoy being in warmer climate during the winter months, were in Florida in 2025 when the 84-year-old Joe fell and broke his hip. He ended up needing surgery and spent weeks in rehab at a nursing home trying to stand again.

But the attempts at rehab were not enough. Joe was now in a

wheelchair. With the trauma and his Parkinson's, Ida says he got very anxious. After several weeks, she decided to hire medical transport so they could return home to Ballston Spa. Back in New York, Joe was not doing well and had to be hospitalized again. Doctors recommended Hospice and Joe was admitted to The Community Hospice for care in April 2025.

With Hospice on board, Joe received visits from a care team, including an RN, a LPN, a social worker, a Chaplain, a massage therapist, and a Hospice volunteer. "He definitely enjoys the massage," notes Ida, who at the age of 81, was now his primary caregiver. A son in the area also helped.

After a year and a half in Hospice care, today Ida is preparing for her husband's "graduation" and

discharge from Hospice. Joe's condition had improved and he no longer requires Hospice care. She is thankful she was able to keep him at home, with help from Hospice. "It's a great service," recommends Ida. "The nurses are wonderful. All the people are wonderful," she says. "The assistance and support of the staff at Community Hospice have given me the ability to have my husband at home," she says gratefully.

An avid gardener and cook, Ida is also happy that she has been able to make wonderful meals for Joe at home with the bounty of fruits and vegetables grown in their spacious garden - from tomatoes and cucumbers to peppers and eggplant, to beans and garlic. She believes that has also helped boost Joe to his improved health. Congratulations, Ida & Joe!



Welcome Diane Carey to The Community Hospice Foundation Board



The Community Hospice Foundation is pleased to welcome **Diane Carey** as its newest board member.

Diane brings more than three decades of healthcare experience, with a distinguished career in

hospital administration and nursing leadership. Locally, she spent nearly 15 years at Albany Medical Center, serving in a variety of leadership roles, including interim chief nursing officer from 2018 to 2020. Following her retirement after the COVID-19 pandemic, Diane continued her commitment to healthcare by serving as director of nursing at Catholic Medical Center in Manchester, New Hampshire. Today, she shares her knowledge and passion for healthcare as a part-time adjunct professor at Russell Sage College.

Having worked closely with patients and families facing serious illness, including many who were considering hospice care, Diane has a firsthand understanding of the important role hospice plays in providing comfort, dignity, and support during life's most

challenging moments. So when the opportunity to join The Community Hospice Foundation Board arose through longtime friend and Foundation Board President Jim O'Connor, she felt it was a meaningful way to continue serving her community.

Diane notes that in healthcare, "you're constantly learning, teaching, and training." She looks forward to contributing through her own background and experience to help raise awareness about the services the organization provides. "Everyone thinks differently and looks at things differently," she says, adding that it's when people come together with their unique perspectives that the best solutions can emerge. "I'm excited to become a member of this board." **Welcome, Diane!**

Camp Erin Offers Hope and Healing for Young Grieving Hearts



How can you mend a broken heart? How do you comfort a child who has lost a parent, a grandparent, or sibling, or friend? The trauma can have immediate and long-term emotional and psychological effects. That's why every year, The

lives to gather with others their age and participate in fun camp games together, while learning the essential skills to cope with loss. This September, Camp Erin hosted 47 youths, ages 7-17, whom

Community Hospice hosts its Camp Erin weekend bereavement camp to help kids start the healing process. The weekend camp in the Adirondacks allows children and teens who have lost someone in their

had lost a significant important person in their lives. Facilitated by Hospice grief counselors, the young campers were able to connect with others their age who are also grieving so that they know they are not alone. Camp Erin is made possible in part by Eluna, our funding organization, and through donations from generous donors.



Community Hospice Volunteer Recognized with Times Union Award for Excellence



Members of The Community Hospice staff celebrate volunteer Mary Azud (front row, third from left).

The Community Hospice congratulates longtime volunteer Mary Azad who has been recognized with the Times Union's "Capital Region Gives Community Service Award" honoring excellence in volunteerism. Mary has been

Kyle Ouimet nominated Mary who he says not only provides social and emotional support, but a lot of extra love and care for her patients. Additionally, she often takes new volunteers under her wing to help

a dedicated Hospice volunteer since 2013, serving patients at the Schuyler Ridge nursing home in Clifton Park. She visits weekly, sometimes several days a week, to spend time with 15 residents on Hospice there.

Volunteer
Services
Coordinator

orient them. Last summer, Mary threw a 100th birthday party for a patient, bringing her a card, balloons, and a treat to make the patient feel loved.

Mary says she was surprised to be nominated but honored. She says she volunteers for Community Hospice "because they were very good when my husband was dying, and I wanted to give back." She adds, "I don't want to see anybody alone at that time in their life. I would like to help provide some kind of comfort, whether that be talking, sharing a laugh or just sitting with them. People often just want someone to talk to, whether it be simple pleasantries or telling me about their life. It's nice to be that listening ear." **Thank you, Mary, for making a difference and being a light to so many!**

Save the Date! Join Us for Expanded Light-A-Life Memorial Tree-Lighting

Join The Community Hospice at our annual Light-A-Life Memorial Tree-Lighting, **Saturday, Dec. 5, at 4 pm.** The annual tradition will be bigger than ever this year as we expand to a larger location at the Hudson Valley Community College, Bulmer Telecommunications Center, 80 Vandenburg Ave, Troy.

A special thanks to our Presenting Sponsors **Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, Stewart's & the Dake Family, and Trustco Bank.**



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Hospice Care a Remarkable Gift: Daughter Shares How Hospice Lovingly Cared for her Dad, and then a Decade Later, Her Mom



Her first encounter with Hospice happened 10 years ago when her father battled cancer. Mary Gibbons learned firsthand then how attentive they were to her dad, and what Hospice care did for her family. Now a decade later, when Mary's 95-year-old mother Ruth began to decline, she again turned to The Community Hospice.

Mary says her mom's vital signs are still strong but she sleeps a lot and hasn't been eating much. Hospice provides nurses, aides,

a social worker, and clergy who visit her. She also has a Hospice volunteer who brings his little dog to see her. Mary notes how each person from Hospice "plays a meaningful role in making a challenging time a little easier." She is comforted knowing that her mother is surrounded by people who genuinely care. "This allows us to focus on being present with her and cherishing the moments we have together," says Mary. "During the most difficult times of our lives, your team provided and provides not only exceptional care, currently for my mom, but also incredible comfort and support for our entire family. Every person we encounter treats her with dignity, kindness, and compassion. Their patience, empathy and professionalism make an immeasurable difference during these difficult days," Mary states.

Recalling when her father was ill, Mary saw how the Hospice team was also aware of what her mother was experiencing as the primary caregiver. She says that realization had resonated with her, that Hospice was about more than just

the patient. They also recognized the tremendous stress of caregiving. "It was an incredible resource for my mom," recalls Mary, adding that the team introduced other resources for her mother that the family was not aware of.

"People think of Hospice as giving up... but it's not giving up. It's more about empowering, about taking control and managing pain and symptoms, and giving patients the ability to make memories," says Mary.

"My family and I have sincere gratitude to everyone involved with my mother's care. They are truly extraordinary individuals, and I know, firsthand, their work has a lasting impact on the families they serve. I feel like they become part of the family. We will always be grateful for the comfort, respect, and compassion they showed my parents and our family," says Mary. "Hospice care is a remarkable gift!"

(Mary's mother passed away peacefully at the end of September. This article is dedicated in her memory.)