



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hospice of The Gorge Volunteers Provide Lifeline

September 4, 2007 - Hood River, Ore. - Ann Woody knows what it's like to be on the receiving end of help. As a young woman suffering from a nerve disorder that kept her bed-bound for three months, she was amazed at the generosity of parishioners from her church, who brought food and otherwise kept her family going. It's this feeling of gratitude, of "payback time," as she calls it, which has motivated her to serve as a volunteer of Hospice of The Gorge for the past decade.

Volunteers like Woody begin their commitment with a strong base—a free-of-charge 18-hour training program that includes a thick notebook of materials and presentations from a number of Hospice of The Gorge staff: medical director, nurses, social workers and chaplains. The program covers a wide spectrum of end-of-life topics, from body mechanics to understanding dementia. Volunteers are not required to provide "personal care," rather they visit with a patient and give his/her caregiver a short respite.

"By the time we get there, [the patients have] already made their decisions about how they're going to deal with their diagnosis," says Woody, who usually tries to find common interests to talk about. "You can't live here in the valley and not hit on something."

Woody has visited dozens of patients during her years as a volunteer, some for months—one for three years. On one assignment, Woody knew the patient, a woman who had been a close friend of the aunt who had raised her from the age of 12. This shared past made being with the woman easier in some ways, and harder in others. "Sometimes, you don't know what to say, so you just listen."

Community service is a major priority to Woody, who spent 23 years as the audio-visual instructional aide at Hood River Valley High School before retiring in 1992. She has been known to help however she can, from simply chatting to tailoring clothing for those who have lost weight due to their illness. One patient's family thanked Woody for bringing crafts to work on. "It gave [our mother] meaning and a sense of usefulness in her last days," they wrote.

Woody shrugs off the special place she holds in the hearts of Hospice of The Gorge patients and their families. "You can't always help the ones who helped you, but you can help other people."

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Hospice of The Gorge is a nonprofit, Medicare-certified public-benefit agency that since 1981 has provided comprehensive and compassionate care to those who face life-limiting illness and to their families. From offices in Hood River and The Dalles, Hospice of The Gorge serves eight counties: Skamania and Klickitat in Washington, and Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Morrow and Wheeler in Oregon. Hospice of The Gorge receives support from the United Way. Please visit the website for more information: www.hospiceofthegorge.org.

Sidebar:

Hospice of The Gorge volunteer training takes place on the following three days (all must be attended): Friday, September 28 from 6 to 8 p.m. (welcome ceremony); Saturday, September 29 from 8:15 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and Saturday, October 6 from 8:15 a.m. to 4 p.m. Training, at the Hospice of The Gorge building at 1630 Woods Court, on the Heights in Hood River, is free-of-charge; lunch and materials are provided. For more information or to register, call Christine Jones at Hospice of The Gorge toll-free: 866-680-6449.

Photo caption:

Ann Woody reflects on her volunteer service to Hospice of The Gorge in their Memory Garden