



## *Hospice* *It's about living, not dying*

### *Locals play a vital role in Mayo Health System hospice care.*

While Le Sueur's hospice services are now provided by Mayo Health System, vital operational elements still come from area volunteers and a local advisory board.

The Hospice Board of Le Sueur has been in place since 1982 when Dr. Jo Anderson and Dr. Don Walden organized the city's first hospice program. All during those years, current board chair Elaine Ashpole has been a caring, guiding hand on the Le Sueur Hospice program.

"Dr. Jo twisted my arm," Ashpole laughs. "He asked me to chair the committee and I didn't have the good sense to say no."

In its early years, Le Sueur Hospice trained its own staff and coordinated volunteers. The board of directors was responsible to provide many of the services Mayo Health System now oversees. While the Le Sueur board's powers have lessened, it still plays a vital role for area hospice patients.

"We meet four times a year," Ashpole said. "Our main focus is growing awareness and providing information on what hospice is.

We also serve in an advisory role and keep in contact with Dr. Cory Ingram." (Dr. Ingram is the chair of the Palliative Care Department at Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato.)

There are 14 members of the Le Sueur Hospice board. Every November a Christmas tree is placed on the front lawn of Le Sueur's W.W. Mayo House to commemorate the years of hospice service and remind the general public there is more work to be done. In 2011 alone, 45 patients received Le Sueur Hospice care. The local board makes sure hospice has a presence at community expos and fairs such as the recent Senior Expo.

"The members of the Le Sueur board are the eyes and ears of the community," said Mayo Health Systems Hospice Volunteer Coordinator Kim Rotchadl. "We want a local presence and the board provides us with a needed spokesperson in the field. Patient comfort is the ultimate goal for Mayo Health Systems Hospice and the volunteers who provide that comfort are the backbone of hospice's success. We like to have volunteers who live in an area stay in that area. Currently we have 18 volunteers in the Le Sueur area."

While 18 seems like a pretty healthy number, Rotchadl reminds us each patient is visited by volunteers two or three times a week by one of a team of three volunteers assigned to that patient.

"We don't want to overwhelm the volunteers," Rotchadl said. "In order to enhance the volunteer/patient experience, we like to match people with similar interests. We get information on our clients from (interviews with) the social worker. For example, if a client used to be a farmer, we try to find a volunteer with an ag background."

Volunteers are always needed and training sessions are offered for the communities of Arlington, Le Sueur, Madelia, Mankato, St. Peter and Waseca. If you or someone you know is interested in becoming a hospice volunteer, please contact Rotchadl at 507-385-2618 or 800-327-3721, ext. 2618 (toll free).



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