

# Companion

Spring 2008

*Hospice of the Rapidan* is a not for profit community based organization providing medical care and social, emotional, spiritual and grief support for people with a limited life expectancy and their caregivers

Serving Fauquier, Culpeper, Orange, Madison and Rappahannock counties

Virginia Licensed, Medicare & Medicaid Certified

Founded 1983

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## Happy Tails Make Patients' Hearts Rejoice

Over time, many hospice patients begin to feel that their hospice nurse and volunteers are almost like family. However there is one visit that always seems to generate more smiles, more affection, and more pure joy than the others—a visit from one of our therapy dogs!

A number of *Hospice of the Rapidan* volunteers work with their four-legged, wet nosed, furry companions when visiting patients, who respond instinctively to the dogs. Petting them, kissing them, feeling their fur and being nuzzled by them often draws an automatic smile. For years healthcare professionals have noticed that animal companionship can have a range of therapeutic effects, including relieving stress, lowering blood pressure, and raising spirits. Affectionate animals can also ease feelings of loneliness and depression. From early childhood to old age many people love hugging, petting and talking to dogs (often in a voice they would otherwise be embarrassed to use).

Therapy dogs come in all sizes and breeds, but share common traits including being calm, friendly, affectionate, gentle and enjoying human contact. They undergo specialized training and are certified to perform therapy work with adults and children. They are selected for their calm dispositions and are tested to make sure they are not frightened by canes or wheelchairs, loud noises, or being petted or hugged clumsily by people whose motor skills



Children petting Cash, a therapy dog, flanked by his owner Theresa Bryant and Sue Hurt Shifflett, a member of our Board of Directors, at Culpeper Fest

are impaired. Smaller breeds can lie in bed with a patient and larger breeds can nuzzle, kiss or simply respond to being petted.

Therapy dogs can visit patients at home, in the hospital, or in assisted living facilities or nursing homes. They work well with patients of any age or diagnosis. Their training keeps them from responding in fear to medical apparatus or unusual noises like the motor on hospital beds.

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**April**

**National Healthcare Decisions Day**  
**Wed, April 16th, 11:30 –1:30pm**  
 Free Luncheon Seminars—two locations  
 Limited seating—RSVP Required  
 See article in this issue for locations and times

**Hospice Foundation of America Teleconference**  
 “Living With Grief: Children & Adolescents”  
**Wed, April 16th, 1:30 –4:00pm**  
*Joe Daniels Technology Center, Culpeper*  
 Call Valarie Diamond to register

**Healthy Culpeper Presents “For a Child’s Health”**  
**Sat, April 26th, 1:00pm-4:00pm**  
 Stop by and visit our booth and meet one of our therapy dogs

**Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon**  
**Tue, April 29th, 11:30am-1:30pm**  
*Prince Michel Vineyard & Winery*  
 154 Winery Lane, Leon

**May**

**Volunteer Training Classes**  
 Beginning the week of May 12th  
*Bethel United Methodist Church*  
 6903 Blantyre Rd, Warrenton  
 7 three-hour sessions  
 Contact Ruth Pavlik for more information

**Grief Support Group**  
 Evening sessions beginning  
 Thurs, May 8th, 6:30–8:00pm  
 Contact Craig Wilt for more information

**Madison Business Expo**  
**Thu, May 15th, 1:00–7:00pm**  
*North Main Street, Madison*  
 Stop by and visit our booth

**Old Town Warrenton Spring Festival**  
**Sat, May 17, 9:00am-4:00pm**  
*Main Street, Old Town Warrenton*  
 Stop by and visit our booth

**2008 Butterfly Release Celebration**  
**Sunday, May 18th, 3:00pm**  
*Annie DuPont Formal Garden*  
*James Madison’s Montpelier*  
 11407 Constitution Highway (Route 20)  
 Montpelier Station, VA

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**Letter From the Executive Director**



**Kathy Clements**

Sixteen years ago when I joined *Hospice of the Rapidan* as a field nurse I did not truly understand what hospice was all about. Yes, I knew how to manage symptoms, monitor medication,

teach family members how to care for their loved one, coordinate with physicians, and the other professional aspects of hospice care, but it took me a while to grasp the extent to which hospice provides real comfort; the kind that comes from the compassion and dignity we strive for every day.

Curiously, I learned about this more from my patients and their families than I did from my professional training. The appreciation I received had a different feel—a combination of urgency, relief, discovery and peace I had not previously experienced. They conveyed how much hospice meant and a genuine sense of “we could not have made it through this without you” that initially took me by surprise.

In 2006 over 1.3 million patients received care from hospices across the nation. This is more than double the number of hospice patients only 7 years earlier, even though the number of

deaths in America was constant over that period. Clearly more patients, families, and most importantly, physicians and other health care providers, are discovering what I learned those many years ago, and this is a blessing.

But there is still work to be done. First, only half the patients who can benefit from hospice now receive it. Second, too many patients wait too long to start hospice care. Whether this is out of fear of facing the end of life, the tenacity of the myth that hospice means “giving up,” or the reluctance of physicians to shift treatment from curing to providing comfort, delaying the start of hospice significantly reduces the difference it can make. When a patient receives hospice care for months rather than days or weeks, we can truly provide the full range of care that so amazed me all those years ago. With enough time, hospice can not only make our patients comfortable and keep them pain free, we can also help them and their loved ones say the important things while there is still time, even laugh and smile; all the ingredients that, when nursed carefully for enough time, create peace and dignity. When we are called in with only days or weeks remaining the opportunity to provide these gifts is greatly diminished, and that, more than anything else, is a tragedy.

**Kathy Clements, RN, BSN**

**MANAGEMENT TEAM**

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Theresa Bryant takes her American bulldog Cash on patient visits, where he is always a hit. As she explains, "Cash loves kids. After he passed his therapy dog training we joined the Waggin' Hearts Therapy Dog Books and Barks program. Children at Waverly Elementary School in Madison read to him and he patiently



Cash is dressed up to "go fishing" for Halloween

listens. Cash gets hugged, admired, and used for a pillow for an hour and a half each Tuesday morning. He thinks it's a great job and he is very good at it! Cash's brother Billy is also a registered therapy dog. When I learned *Hospice of the Rapidan* used pet therapy, Cash, Billy and I became volunteers. After all, what's better than a friendly, big-headed bulldog to hug when you're feeling down?"

Similarly, Beverley Christiana has been a *Hospice of the Rapidan* volunteer for over 4 years and her black labrador Tempe joins her on many patient visits, bringing comfort and joy. Until they moved away last year one of *Hospice of the Rapidan's* all time favorite volunteers was Dickens, a loving standard poodle, and his human, Betsy Tuttle, one of our nurs-

es. We still get calls asking about them from patients and families!

*Hospice of the Rapidan* welcomes more therapy pets and their people to join our team of over one hundred volunteers. We offer a comprehensive training program for Patient/Care Volunteers and hold training classes throughout our five-county region. For more information about upcoming volunteer classes, contact Ruth Pavlik at 540-825-4840 or rpavlik@hotr.org.

**Editor's note**—Your faithful editor's chocolate lab Morgan is certified as a therapy dog who is occasionally spotted at the office and has visited a few patients. Perhaps that's also why this article focuses on therapy dogs even though visits from other animals can be just as therapeutic...

## ***Hospice of the Rapidan Partners with Area Businesses for National Healthcare Decisions Day***

*Hospice of the Rapidan* will commemorate National Healthcare Decisions Day on April 16th with a pair of free seminars and luncheons open to the public. *National Healthcare Decisions Day* is designed to raise public awareness of the need to plan ahead for health care decisions related to end-of-life care and medical decision making whenever patients are unable to speak for themselves, and to encourage the use of "advance directives" to communicate these important decisions. Attorneys, financial advisors and other professionals will join us at both locations to help area residents understand their options and make sure their choices about the health care they want to receive, and do not want to receive, are honored in the event they cannot speak for themselves.

The seminars are free and open to anyone interested in this important but often overlooked aspect of personal planning. Free advance directive forms and legal advice will be available. Lunch will be provided.

Following Benjamin Franklin's adage that "nothing is certain but death and taxes," The Health Law Section of the Virginia State Bar started an initiative in 2006 to make the day after tax day Virginia Advance Directives Day to increase awareness of this important issue and to make it

easier for people to learn more about it. In 2007 Governor Kaine issued a proclamation acknowledging the day, and this year, following Virginia's lead, the effort has expanded nationally and has been renamed *National Healthcare Decisions Day*.

We will host events in two locations, each including a luncheon, on Wednesday, April 16th from 11:30 am to 2:00 pm. In Orange County we will be at the Lake of the Woods Clubhouse, 102 Lakeview Parkway, Locust Grove, and in Fauquier County we will be at The Fauquier Springs Country Club, 9236 Tournament Drive, Warrenton. Both events are free; however space is limited to 30 in each location so reservations are recommended. To secure your seat please RSVP by Monday, April 7th by contacting Nancy Walbridge at 540-825-4840 or nwalbridge@hotr.org.

The Orange County event will be co-hosted by Frederick J. Getty with the Law Office of Getty and Associates, Ernie Johnson, Director of Johnson Funeral Home, and Richard T. Harrington of Raymond James Financial Services. The Fauquier County event will be co-hosted by Thomas Tucker, a Financial Advisor with Edward Jones Investments, Patricia A. Woodward, an attorney in Warrenton specializ-

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## A Gift of Bears Brings Joy to Patient's & Families

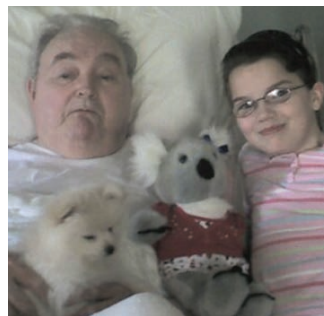


Children of Salem United Methodist Children with their bears. Top, left to right: Adam Woolfrey, Jason Woolfrey, Aaron Peters, Kaylan Davis, Thomas Williamson, Zachary Cabbage, Katelyn Woolfrey. Bottom left to right: Christa Williamson, Kaneesa Davis, Katelyn Peters, Gideon Schrumm, Winston Schrumm

Karen Peters, a member of the Salem United Methodist Church, was inspired by an article in her local paper about Build A Bear Workshop, a worldwide chain of retail/entertainment stores in which children of all ages design, make, and dress their own teddy bear or other stuffed animal which includes a voice recording. Karen approached her Parish with the idea of donating this experience to families who wished to record the voice of their terminally ill loved one.

The congregation responded generously, raising over \$500 to purchase 20 bears. The children of the parish then went to work choosing, recording, stuffing, dressing and naming the bears, and they were very creative indeed! There were big hearted bears, Harley Davidson bears, baseball bears, the list goes on and on. Each bear came

with its own birth certificate and a place for the name of the child who "built" the bear. The voice recorder fits into the bear's paw and when you want to hear your loved one's voice, there it is!



Ronald Roach visiting with his granddaughter Olivia and the bear she built with her grandpa's voice recorded inside. His dog Fife looks on.

Karen was touched by the outpouring of generosity by the members of her church: "I wish I had a recording of my mom's voice; it would have meant so much for me and my children as well. This gives me the opportunity to help *Hospice of the Rapidan's* patients and families record the voice of their loved ones to keep as a memory for years to come."

Gifts like these from the children and parishioners of Salem United Methodist Church truly make a difference. The service we provide for patients and families is immeasurably enhanced when the community unites to help us. Our heartfelt thanks go out to everyone involved in this generous and thoughtful contribution to *Hospice of the Rapidan* families living with a terminally ill loved ones.

If you would prefer not to receive future issues of *Companion*, please call Elaine at 540.825.4840 or e-mail her at [info@hotr.org](mailto:info@hotr.org).

## National Healthcare Decisions Day

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ing in estate planning, and Randolph Minter, Director, Moser Funeral Home.

These professionals will address a variety of topics relating to healthcare decision making and advance directives, other aspects of personal planning, sharing your decisions with your loved ones, and will be available to answer questions and help with advance directive forms, which will be available for free. Further information about advance directives, including free forms, is available on our website at [www.hotr.org/directives.htm](http://www.hotr.org/directives.htm). *Hospice of the Rapidan* will also be available to answer questions about hospice and end-of-life care options.

For more information contact Nancy Walbridge at 540-825-4840 or [nwalbridge@hotr.org](mailto:nwalbridge@hotr.org).

## Living With Grief Teleconference

*Hospice of the Rapidan*, in conjunction with the Hospice Foundation of America, will host a teleconference entitled "Living with Grief: Children and Adolescents" on Wednesday, April 16th from 1:30 pm-4:00 pm at the Joe Daniels Technology Center, Room 209, 18121 Technology Drive, Culpeper. CEU credits are available to those attending the additional 30 minutes immediately following the teleconference, from 4:00-4:30 pm. For more information contact Valarie Diamond at 540-825-4840 or e-mail her at [vdiamond@hotr.org](mailto:vdiamond@hotr.org).

## A Hospice Story



Catherine Banks with her Christmas flowers

Last July our family travelled to Massachusetts to visit my husband's mother, Kay, who had waged a valiant battle with Cancer. We knew that after 78 years of self reliance her illness now made her dependent on others for daily support, but were surprised at how much help she needed with the activities of daily life.

On the drive home we talked about her situation and decided to invite her to move to Virginia and live with us. We did not expect her to accept, since that meant moving hundreds of miles from

her community and friends, but the very next day she did just that. The next 30 days were a whirlwind as we rearranged our home to accommodate her. Our dining room became her new bedroom so she could be close to all the family activity yet still have privacy and quiet when she wished.

Amidst all this activity it occurred to us how little we knew about caring for someone with Kay's needs. I knew very little about Cancer and was unsure what special needs Kay had after her various surgeries.

Kay had Stage 3 Cancer and decided for herself (over the objections of some family members) not to continue her chemo or radiation. She wanted to make the most of the good days she had left. Her new doctor reviewed her prognosis, listened to her wishes, answered her questions about quality of life, and then recommended hospice. I was relieved. It seemed to me that hospice could provide both the kind of care Kay now needed and the support I needed as her caregiver.

I called *Hospice of the Rapidan* that day. They started immediately and arranged for all the equipment, medication and supplies she needed. For the next four months their wonderful nurses, staff and volunteers were in our home three times a week and almost became like family. Their skill and compassion was extraordinary. It was always clear how much they cared, not just about Kay but about all of us.

In addition to managing her pain and symptoms and otherwise keeping her comfortable, the hospice nurses seemed to know just what was needed. A volunteer would style her hair when she was too uncomfortable to travel much farther than the kitchen. They knew when my husband and I needed a break so as not to become overwhelmed. Most notably, *Hospice of the Rapidan's* care, which was fully covered by Medicare, covered all of the costs including some extremely expensive pain medication that she otherwise would not have been able to afford.

From Kay we learned about the cycle at the end of the life. I likened her to a caterpillar during her active life. As her mobility became more limited her bedroom became like a cocoon as she prepared for her journey to become a butterfly.

Kay passed away peacefully on January 4, 2008 with her family by her side.

You never know who God will send you as a teacher, but I now know hospice will send angels! Thank you to all the angels we grew to know so well, and to the others who supported them behind the scenes. Words cannot express how grateful we truly are.

Sincerely,  
Anita Barry

## Hospice Q&A

***Most hospice patients are over age 65. What do you do for patients and families when the patient is a child or young adult?***

A terminal illness is difficult to deal with at any age, but when it strikes a child or young adult it has several added dimensions. In addition to the sadness and loss that are typically part of the grieving process (and which begin while the patient is still living), anger and a sense of being cheated often occurs when the stricken patient is young. Parents are not supposed to outlive their children. Children are entitled to grow up and discover the world. But sadly this is not always the case.

Everyone deals with grief in his or her own way, but the range of emotions and the length of the grieving process are often expanded when confronting the loss of a young person. *Hospice of the Rapidan* understands this process, and provides emotional, practical and grief support that takes the issues attendant to the loss of a young person into account. We have grief programs and resources designed for children, for whom grief is usually a new and scary experience. We also have experience guiding parents and siblings through their grief processes when they feel they lost someone before their time.

Youthful friends of terminally ill patients also face emotions, fears and questions that are new to them, and not being a member of the patient's family, often do not know where to turn for support. *Hospice of the Rapidan* understands that grief touches many people beyond the patient's family, especially when the patient is young. This is one of the reasons our grief care programs and resources are available to anyone feeling a loss, regardless of prior hospice affiliation or their relationship with the patient. All these services, including individual support from our Grief Care Coordinator, Craig Wilt, are always free of charge.

If you or someone you know is having difficulty dealing with their emotional pain and grief, please do not hesitate to call Craig at 540-825-4840.

# Hospice of the Rapidan Turns 25!

## Gala Celebration Will Honor People Who Share Our Passion for Caring



Part of a growing 25th Anniversary Gala Committee at work: Margaret Clark, Carol Couch, Cindy Greene, Gala Co-Chair, Suzanne Williams, John Hagerty, Peggy Simmons, Valarie Diamond, Staff Event Chair, Thad Cardine, Raven Yates, and Bill Tidball

*Hospice of the Rapidan* considers it a privilege to have provided compassionate and dignified end-of-life care to our community for 25 years. Over the last quarter century we helped many patients and families manage a very difficult time in their lives with dignity and grace, and our staff and volunteers take great pride in the difference we make in people's lives every day.

This auspicious anniversary is an opportunity for us to share our accomplishments of the past, and hopes for the future, with members of the communities we are delighted to serve. On October 11, 2008 we will host our *Passion for Caring Gala* to celebrate this milestone at The Inn at Kelly's Ford, and will honor individuals from each of the five counties we serve who, like our organization, have made a meaningful difference in the lives of area residents.

This special evening will feature dinner, dancing, silent and live auctions, and special recognition for our distinguished honorees. Show your support for the important work we do by saving the date and planning to attend this wonderful celebration. Information about the *Passion for Caring Gala* is available at [www.hotr.org](http://www.hotr.org) and details will be provided in the summer issue of *Companion*.

In addition to celebrating *Hospice of the Rapidan's* first 25 years, the gala will recognize the following people who, in each in their own way, have made a difference in the quality of life in our area:

**John J. "Butch" Davies** of Culpeper has been practicing law locally for 35 years. He represented the 30th Legislative District in the Virginia House of Delegates and was a member of the Joint Commission on Health Care, which dealt with policies directly related to the delivery of quality hospice care in our area. He has served on numerous civic and community boards, including that of *Hospice of the Rapidan*. He currently serves on the Commonwealth Transportation Board and the Boards of Directors of Second Bank and Trust and Virginians for the Arts.

**Karen Henderson**, President of the Fauquier County Chamber of Commerce, is also a well-known broadcaster, vocalist and speaker whose entertainment career spans over three decades. She has been a dedicated supporter of *Hospice of the Rapidan* and has made a significant impact on the business and cultural life in Fauquier County. She recently shared, "As *Hospice of the Rapidan* creates miracles for the families they serve in a loving and compassionate manner, I am bowled over and truly

honored to be the recipient of the award representing Fauquier County."

**Delegate Ed Scott of Madison** is currently a member of the Virginia House of Delegates. He has served on many area boards over the last 20 years and is an active and visible community leader. He is past chairman of the Madison County Planning Commission, an ex-officio member of the Culpeper Chamber of Commerce and a dedicated member of *Hospice of the Rapidan's* Board of Directors. Ed lives in Madison County with his wife Pauline and daughter Danielle.

**Dr. Randolph "Randy" Merrick**, a native of Orange County, has been a long time friend of *Hospice of the Rapidan*. He understands the importance of hospice and helps to educate those he cares for. Dr. Merrick has been an active contributor to his community throughout his life, serving on many professional and civic boards continuously since his student days. He is currently Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Orange Free Clinic, a Trustee of the Girls & Boys Club of Orange, and teaches about hospice to medical students who rotate through his practice.

**Clarissa Leggett**, a resident of Rappahannock County and past board member of *Hospice of the Rapidan*, has spent her life giving back to her community. Clarissa was formerly a US Magistrate in Rappahannock County, and her husband currently serves as mayor of Washington, VA. She has also served on the Board of Directors of the Child Care and Learning Center. Clarissa and her husband have been residents of Rappahannock County for nearly 30 years.

## Hospice of the Rapidan 6th Annual Butterfly Release

Celebrate life at *Hospice of the Rapidan's* 6th annual Butterfly Release on Sunday, May 18th at 3:00 pm at James Madison's Montpelier in Orange.

The Butterfly Release is a life-affirming expression of hope and peace. This event is held in the beautiful Annie DuPont Formal Garden at Montpelier, and offers an opportunity to remember loved ones and honor those who have made a difference by sponsoring a butterfly in their name. Sponsorship supports *Hospice of the Rapidan's* grief care program, which provides free, comprehensive grief support for anyone who has lost a loved one, regardless of hospice affiliation. Services include individual and telephone support, grief support groups, printed information, and services tailored to the special needs of children. Medicare and private insurance do not reimburse *Hospice of the Rapidan* for the cost of these services, which

are entirely funded by support from the communities we serve.

Butterflies are symbolic of the grace that eventually comes to each of us following the loss of a loved one, and many hospices across the country now hold annual butterfly release ceremonies. Butterflies herald the return of spring and the renewal of life. Their release signifies freedom and happiness. Their beauty reminds us to marvel at the beauty in the world even in the face of painful loss. The highlight of the Butterfly Release is the mass release and flight of 200 hundred Monarch butterflies accompanied by live harp music. Sponsorship is \$25 per butterfly and includes free admission to the Formal Garden and recognition of the names of those honored in the Butterfly Release program. Sponsors of 3 or more butterflies will receive a handsome picture frame commemorating the event. All Montpelier exhibits and presenta-

tions are available to participants before and after the Butterfly Release at a reduced rate. We thank the Montpelier Foundation for their continued support of this event. Directions to Montpelier are available at [www.montpelier.org/directions.htm](http://www.montpelier.org/directions.htm).

For more information call Craig Wilt at 540.825.4840. To sponsor a butterfly please complete the enclosed card and return it with payment to us by April 30th to ensure proper acknowledgment in the Butterfly Release program.



### **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!**

Contact us at [www.hotr.org](http://www.hotr.org)  
or call 540.825.4840

## Making the Most of Tax Time

This is the time of year when most of us face the cold, hard realities of preparing our tax returns. When our tax advisors show us the opportunities we missed to both save on taxes and make a difference in our community, we typically resolve to do better next year but often forget to follow through.

*Hospice of the Rapidan* encourages all our supporters to take the time to do some effective tax planning now so you can feel better—and maybe even smile—this time next year. Well planned gifts to *Hospice of the Rapidan* can be very productive for both donors and our organization. When properly structured, gifts that help us provide outstanding care to every patient, every time, can also provide valuable tax benefits to you and can provide income advantages and/or increase the size of the estate you leave for your heirs. Planned gifts can be designed to meet the needs of donors with widely divergent goals. We welcome the opportunity to discuss how we can help each other by sitting down with you and your tax, financial and/or legal advisors.

Planned giving strategies include leaving a bequest to *Hospice of the Rapidan* in your will, which enables you to maintain your income for your lifetime and reduce your estate tax bur-

den when you die, and gifts of appreciated property, such as securities, artwork, and real estate, which provide the same charitable deduction as cash gifts plus avoidance of capital gains taxes.

More specialized planned gifts using various forms of trusts can help donors maintain or increase their investment income or maintain or increase the size of the estate they leave behind while providing substantial financial support for our programs. Planned giving also provides the opportunity to arrange a deferred gift or lasting legacy that can help ensure the ability of *Hospice of the Rapidan* to effectively meet the needs of patients and families for years to come.

In order to meet the individual goals of each donor, your tax, estate planning or legal advisor should participate in the planning of the gift. *Hospice of the Rapidan* welcomes conversations with you and your advisors. Contact Nancy Walbridge at 540.825.4840 or [nwalbridge@hotr.org](mailto:nwalbridge@hotr.org) to learn more or to arrange a consultation. More detailed information about planned giving is also available on our website at [www.hotr.org/plannedgiving.htm](http://www.hotr.org/plannedgiving.htm).

## Hospice of the Rapidan Welcomes Speaking Opportunities

Last year *Hospice of the Rapidan's* staff, volunteers and board members spoke at 129 different events. They addressed over 6,000 people throughout the year at various clubs, civic organizations, church groups, professional meetings, and community forums. Their efforts were the backbone of our educational outreach program, which helps people learn what hospice is, the care and dignity it can provide, and what it means to patients and families facing a terminal illness. We would like to thank everyone who stepped forward to help with this vital function.

If you or someone you know would like to have someone from *Hospice of the Rapidan* speak to a group or if you are interested in becoming part of our speakers bureau, please call Nancy Walbridge at 540-825-4840. Our presentation can be tailored to your group's needs and are always offered free of charge.

## Next Grief Support Group to Begin in Mid-May

*Hospice of the Rapidan* will offer its next grief support group program beginning in mid May. The program consists of a series of weekly meetings to help people who have lost a loved one deal with their grief and begin to heal. Participants share their thoughts and feelings and *Hospice of the Rapidan's* Grief Care Coordinator Craig Wilt will share strategies that have helped many others come to terms with their grief in their own way. The program is free and anyone who has lost someone is welcome, regardless of prior hospice affiliation.

The weekly sessions will be held evenings from 6:30–8:00pm beginning on Thursday, May 8 and concluding on May 29. The program can be extended to June 12 if the participants so desire. The support group will meet in *Hospice of the Rapidan's* community room, 1200 Sunset Lane, Culpeper. Reservations are not required but are appreciated. Please contact Craig Wilt for more information at 540-825-4840 or [cwilt@hotr.org](mailto:cwilt@hotr.org).

## Letter From Craig Wilt—Grief Care Coordinator



Craig Wilt, Grief Care Coordinator

Each spring, *Hospice of the Rapidan* hosts its annual Butterfly Release, a life-affirming expression of peace and hope. An article about this year's event is featured in this issue of *Companion* and I truly hope you will join us. Every year people come away from their afternoon in the beautiful Annie DuPont Formal Garden at James Madison's Montpelier with a feeling of peace, serenity and the rebirth of spring.

The Butterfly Release is an event of our Grief Care program, and each year people ask me about the connection between grieving and butterflies. Hospices around the US and in other countries associate the release of butterflies with the care hospice provides both patients and their surviving loved ones. Butterflies imply color, lively flight, freedom, renewal and transformation. Their fleeting beauty also reminds us to enjoy moments of joy that can be found amidst sorrow and those of peace and hope that surprise us even in the face of great loss.

Interestingly, different hospices offer different reasons for this connection. Some feel the butterfly's beauty, most apparent in its wings, symbolizes the beauty achieved as it emerges from its cocoon, transformed by metamorphosis. It

reminds them of the hope hospice gives during the freeing of the spirit. Others feel the butterfly represents the different phases of our lives, a transition that is endemic to the human condition. Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, a pioneer in the field of understanding how people confront grief and death, wrote "Death is simply a shedding of the physical body, like the butterfly shedding its cocoon. It is a transition to a higher state of consciousness where you continue to perceive, to understand, to laugh, and to be able to grow."

The butterfly imagery speaks to me because it suggests the way our work helps people burdened by the loss of a loved one to again see the beauty in the world, much as a butterfly that unexpectedly flits in front of us distracts us with its splendor. Sometimes grief causes people to withdraw from the world out of pain, but a glimpse of the bright colors and divine delicacy of a butterfly can remind them of the beauty that surrounds us, and the hope and joy that always accompany beauty, even amidst great loss.

Peace, serenity, transition, hope and renewal are what we achieve through grieving the loss of a loved one, each in our own way and time. The butterfly conveys all this, with beauty and grace, so to me, the fit makes all the sense in the world.

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