

'Steppin' Out & Swinging with Hospice' dance and auction set for Friday

Hospice patient gives back to program with gift of afghan

By SHANNON HARSH
The Review

When hospice patient Leah Miller, of Sebring, heard items were needed for Friday's Alliance Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice fundraising event, she didn't hesitate to offer one of her handmade creations.

Miller, who learned the skill as a teen and has crocheted hundreds of afghans over the years, had one left sitting in a box in her apartment, and she decided the event was the perfect place for it. "They needed one donated, and that was the last one I had," she said.

Since August, Miller has been in the care of hospice workers who have helped her stay home despite her declining health. "They are the greatest people I ever met," she said of the hospice staff, which includes registered nurse Jan Fugate and volunteer Marsha Graham.

Fugate comes to see Miller three times a week. Graham calls, visits and brings medicine. Other caregivers bring their crochet materials and sit with Miller, who began teaching one nurse how to make an afghan.

"I don't know what I would do without (hospice). I wouldn't have anybody," Miller said.

Though Miller doesn't like to talk about her terminal diagnosis, she remains in good spirits and hasn't given up easily.

"She's still here, and Dr. (Ferdinando) Cortese didn't think she'd be here," Fugate said.

"The man upstairs has got something for me to do. I don't know what it is, but I'll find out," Miller added.

Fugate admitted it is not an easy job working in hospice, but said it is needed. "You don't want to see us coming, but it's a wonderful program if you have to have it," she said.

After working as a visiting nurse for 20 years and helping fill in for hospice nurses, Fugate said she decided to move to hospice full time. "I felt led by God to be here. I had to pray and pray about it to get here, and here I am," she said.

In addition to its dedicated staff, volunteers are an important part of the hospice program — and Fugate said volunteers are always needed. She said volunteers are asked to visit once a month, but may visit as much as they want. She said volunteers may read to the patient, just sit



Hospice patient Leah Miller holds an afghan that she crocheted and is donating to the "Steppin' Out & Swinging with Hospice" fundraising dance and auction set for Friday. Standing is her nurse, Jan Fugate.

Review Photo/Gayle Agnew

and talk or fix them a meal. She added that volunteers may also work in the office.

Fugate said volunteers helped get the dance/auction fundraiser started last year. After its initial success, Fugate said they expect it to be even bigger this year.

"Steppin' Out & Swinging with Hospice" will be held Friday night at Don Pancho's Tex-Mex Cafe, 2105 W. State St. Doors open at 6 p.m. Cost to attend is \$20. The event includes chips and salsa/queso, entertainment by Jimmy & The Soul Blazers and live and silent auctions.

In addition to Miller's afghan, some items up for bid include: season tickets to the next season of Mount Union football, bread for a year from Panera Bread, a Coach purse, an oil painting, a party for 20 children including train rides on the KCB Express, a hot air balloon ride, a tandem skydive, and stays at the Pittsburgh Marriot, Spread Eagle Tavern, Mountaineer Race Track and Casino, Breezewood Cabins in East Rochester and a condo on Top Sail Island.

Attendees may also enter a raffle for a chance to win \$500.

The funds raised from the event will help support the hospice services. "The money all goes back to the patients," Fugate explained. "If patients need a gas bill paid or if they need medication that their insurance won't pay for, they get it through the foundation. We've had patients who went way above and beyond what insurance paid, so it comes out of that."

For more information about the event or how to become a volunteer, contact AVNAH at 330-821-7055.

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