



## NEWS RELEASE

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**Contact:**

**Kathy Padro**  
**(925) 829-8770**  
[kathyp@hopehospice.com](mailto:kathyp@hopehospice.com)

### **Milestone of Meaning: Hope Hospice Celebrates 30 Years of Compassion, Dignity, and Excellence**

*"I can't imagine going through this without the help and care we received. The hospice staff supported my family in such a gentle way. They treated our mother with great dignity. They reassured us that we were all doing a good job, even when we weren't so sure we were. Our families will never forget what Hope Hospice did for all of us."*

Quote from Family of Hope Hospice Patient

DUBLIN, CA (April 21, 2010) Hope Hospice, the area's leader in end-of-life care, is marking its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this month at a time when more Americans turn to hospice services for comfort care at home. The journey of hospice care has evolved over time and is now considered an essential option of support services for families whose loved ones face a life limiting illness.

Hope Hospice had its beginnings in 1978, when a group of citizens in the Pleasanton/Livermore area became concerned about terminally ill people facing the end of life as they remained in the hospital. Led by Richard L. Martin of Pleasanton, who was working as a church deacon in local hospitals, the group began to meet and to learn more about the hospice philosophy of care. The early objective was to respond with compassion to the emotional, physical, social and spiritual needs of terminally ill people and others affected by the loss of a loved one.

Martin explains that on one of his hospital visits he asked the staff about the people "at the end of the hall" and was told that they were terminal – nothing could be done for them. He wondered why those patients weren't sent home and was told that their health insurance would no longer cover them; they couldn't afford to go home nor to a convalescent home which would cost them even more.

After he and other volunteers visited a hospice in San Rafael, he says, "I took the new found knowledge to some 'can do' people in our community and they literally took off and managed to find ways to implement the entire program." Thus, the idea for a home care hospice was born.

Incorporated in February, 1979, Hope Hospice was initially formed in a small storage room at Pleasanton Elementary School. One of the earliest volunteers, Ann Rathjen, remembers reading about it in the newspaper and decided to join the effort. She describes her experience in joining the team: "We were all

in one big room. We got to know each other really well. I think one of the most incredible outcomes of my experience was the camaraderie and friendships that developed. When you were there it was very special...you knew you were with kindred spirits.”

Ann later was hired to manage medical records and then became office manager and, in retirement, continues as a volunteer. She recalls, “When I started we had three or four patients. To see Hope Hospice grow over time to the number of people we have helped over the years is just amazing. Looking back, I wouldn’t trade my experiences over the years for anything. I love my connection to Hope Hospice.”

Karen Archer, RN, and current Clinical Coordinator, remembers the early years at Hope Hospice. “We saw our first patient in April of 1980 and I began as a volunteer in January, 1985. We cared for ten patients that year. There were only three employees at that time and the rest were volunteers.” The team moved to their first office in Dublin in 1987.

Archer explains her initial experience: “For me, it was a scary time. I wondered if I could actually do this kind of work. I was interested because my grandfather had died of prostate cancer and spent the last three weeks of his life in severe pain. When I heard about the opportunity to be a part of Hope Hospice at my church, I thought it was a good idea. Everyone has to die but being at home and not in pain seemed to make sense.”

She explains, “My second patient as a nurse volunteer was an 18 month old baby who had a brain tumor. There was nothing more that the doctors could do. He had a four year old sister. He died in his parent’s bed during the night. The call went out to us. It was horrific for the family. But he was at home surrounded by the love of his parents. That’s as good as it could have been. That experience told me I was strong enough to stay in hospice work.”

Later, Archer was hired as a case managing nurse and worked simultaneously as the Volunteer Coordinator. At the time, all the nurses were volunteers who called on hospice patients in the evening after working their regular day jobs. There were no social workers or home health aides so the nurses handled everything...they provided bedside care as well as emotional support. Lay volunteers provided personal care services and respite for the families along with the nurses. There was no reimbursement for hospice services at the time from either health insurance plans or Medicare. The money came from individual donations.

People often assume hospice work is depressing, but quite the contrary is true. There’s humor and laughter in the process as well. It happens with the nursing team regularly and is a great form of tension and stress relief. Many patients have a sense of humor about dying and have a realistic view of things and often are joking with their family over the course of their time in hospice care.

For Karen, “The high points for me are in seeing all the goodness in people, in helping family caregivers do things they never imagined they could do, and in making death of a loved one a positive experience. The most unlikely people turn out to be wonderful caregivers with guidance and support from the hospice team.”

Looking forward, Karen says, “I think the biggest challenge we face is to change the belief that hospice is not just for the last few days but to make the journey more comfortable and meaningful in the weeks and months that precede a person’s final hours.”

Thirty wonderful years have passed since Hope Hospice opened its doors to offer high quality, sensitive hospice care to families in the Tri-Valley, San Ramon Valley, and Castro Valley communities. It has served over 4,000 patients since 1980 and, since its inception, devoted volunteers have contributed over 100,000 hours of time in homes, nursing homes, the office, and at special events. Peter Wong, MD, the organization’s first medical director who continues today at Hope Hospices states, “As Medical Director of Hope Hospice for nearly 30 years, I have seen our organization grow to become one of the most respected providers of high quality hospice care in the area. I’m proud of the dedication and skill of our staff in providing this special kind of healthcare to our patients.”

Staying true to the original mission of offering hope, compassionate support, and services to all members of the community facing end-of-life issues, Hope Hospice embodies the vision of its founders. Richard Martin says, “The credit for the success of Hope Hospice goes to those determined people who saw the possibilities and contributed their ideas, skills, creativity and just plain hard work to see this dream become a reality. I feel blessed to have been part of such a quality organization which has served so many in their hour of need. Each person who has given of themselves in any way has added so much to the lives of those who have left us and to their families. People typically comment that ‘hospice is a God-send’ and that is because of so many working together to bring about these results.”

Charles Crohare, Hope Hospice Board President shares the excitement of this important milestone in the organization’s history. “As a member of the board, I extend my congratulations in recognizing the vital contribution of the Hope Hospice team over the past thirty years. I am proud to be part of an organization that continues to give so much to so many and look forward to sharing in its growth of reaching more families with compassion, dignity and excellence in the future.”

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## **About Hope Hospice**

Hope Hospice, a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization since 1980, provides compassionate care, insight, and guidance as families navigate through the end-of-life process. The hospice team, many with hospice and palliative care certification, provides emotional /spiritual support and state-of-the art methods of pain and symptom control to maximize quality of life. Hope Hospice serves families in Alamo, Blackhawk, Castro Valley, Diablo, Danville, Dublin, Livermore, Pleasanton, San Ramon, Sunol and the surrounding communities in the East Bay of San Francisco.