

# The Caring Line

*Serving the community since 1979 August 2011*



*Hellen Tourtillott getting carried away in her modeling career*

## ***Patient served well by sense of humor***

Hellen Tourtillott, described by one son as “the only Amazon to measure 5-foot-2,” knew something about humor. After raising six kids, mostly as a single mother after her husband’s death, and working for years as a teacher and longtime chief dietitian for the San Mateo High School District, she became an actor and model, capitalizing on her little old lady looks.

Her family’s favorite picture is of her – dressed in red coat and sensible shoes – being dragged aloft by a bouquet of colorful balloons, which was used on a greeting card. The caption: “Get carried away on

your Birthday.” Other shots are of her sticking out her tongue and mugging with a Valentine’s box. As another son related, “She made money making faces.”

She also loved to travel and visited Asia, the Near East, Europe and Central and South America. However, her chief concern was always her family, which grew to include 12 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. When she died last March at age 96, among her last words to her children were, “Do you have everything you need?”

One of the ways she ensured that her family did, indeed, have everything they needed was by becoming a Mission Hospice & Home Care patient. In fact, she did it twice. She was initially referred several years ago, but her health improved to the point that she no longer needed hospice care. After about a year, her condition returned and she was back in hospice care for about 18 months until her death March 15.

Daughter Terry Greene said social worker Karri Kaiser helped with the transition by counseling not only her mother and the rest of

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## ***Life and Laughter retreat brings together Mission Hospice community***

The Rev. Linda Siddall, Mission Hospice & Home Care’s chaplain and director of spiritual care, was finishing a visit with a hospice patient when she was asked the big question: “How long?”

“Well, we don’t really know when anybody is going to die,” Siddall responded solemnly.

The patient looked at her quizzically before her face cleared.

“Oh, that too,” she said, “but when can we schedule our next visit?” The audience roared at the story, recalled by medical director Gary Pasternak, as part of “Life Includes Laughter – Caring for Yourself, Caring for Others,” a day-long retreat for Mission Hospice staff, volunteers and board members held last spring at the Mercy Center in Burlingame.

The event included presentations on humor and multi-tasking by CEO Dwight Wilson, Pasternak on “Humor in Hospice, We All Have a

Funny Bone,” and exercises on stress relief. The main presentation was a wild riff by comedian and former juvenile justice counselor Michael Pritchard that ranged over his work with children and teens, his “Star Wars” voices for buddy George Lucas, and sitting at his dying brother’s bedside.



*Social worker Marilyn Jankowski helped lead relaxation exercises.*

He suggested that anyone who gets sad because of the work they do should “get down” with little kids, because of their directness, such as the child who told him, “Everybody knows the problem Mr. Mike. We need more solutioneers.”

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## Calendar of Events

### NEW VOLUNTEER INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS

Tuesday, Sept. 13, 12 to 1 p.m. and 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at 1670 South Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300, San Mateo.

### NEW VOLUNTEER TRAINING SESSIONS

Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Sept. 24, Oct. 1, 8, 15; and two Thursdays from 6 to 8 p.m., Oct 6 and 13. 1670 South Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300, San Mateo.

### FALL GALA: JEWELS & JEANS

Saturday, Oct. 15, 6 p.m. Mark your calendars now, and get ready to dance the night away at the Mission Hospice Auxiliary's fabulous fall gala "Jewels & Jeans." The fun-filled evening will include dinner, dancing, and silent and live auctions, at the Hyatt Hotel in Burlingame. It's sure to be a grand time! Formal invitations to follow.

### BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUPS

Wednesdays from 6 to 8 p.m. at 1670 South Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300, San Mateo. Open to all members of the community on a drop-in basis. For more information, please call (650) 554-1000.



## From the CEO's Desk

*We hope you are having an enjoyable summer as we are very busy caring for a record number of home and hospice care patients and their families. Our total census across all of our programs now averages between 100 and 110 patients a day.*

### AUGUST PROGRAM CENSUS

- Hospice: 55
- Advanced Care (Home Care): 16
- Transitions: 32

*I want to thank everyone who contributed to our spring appeal, which raised more than \$23,000 to educate the community about the important role of hospice and palliative care.*

*Please mark your calendars for the Mission Hospice Auxiliary's Fall Gala "Jewels and Jeans," taking place Saturday, Oct. 15, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. With western music and dancing, live and silent auctions and a wild-west casino, it's sure to be a fun evening.*

*We are launching a capital campaign feasibility study to determine our capacity to build a Hospice House in San Mateo County. As part of this study, we will interview a number of people and organizations to determine our capacity to raise funds and manage such a program. We want to thank the people who have taken time to participate in the study.*

*Finally, please visit our website ([www.missionhospice.org](http://www.missionhospice.org)) and click on the board and staff sections, where you will see updated photos of the people of Mission Hospice & Home Care. 🐾*



*Dwight Wilson, Maryann Raab, Sheila Young, June Field*



*Sandy Dennison, Glenda Carney, Pat Avanesian*



*Marilyn Porto, Alice Flynn, Hildur Kirchoefer, Margaret Flynn, Amy Newman*

## Auxiliary welcomes new officers

Outgoing president June Field presented CEO Dwight Wilson with a \$30,000 check to support Mission Hospice patients during the Auxiliary's annual installation luncheon. The event, held June 3 at the Peninsula Golf & Country Club, celebrated the outgoing 2010-2011 officers and installation of the new 2011-2012 officers.

New Auxiliary officers for 2011-2012 are:

- Marilyn Porto, President
- Yolanda Crosby, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President
- Margaret Flynn, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President
- Amy Newman, Recording Secretary
- Roberta Smith, Corresponding Secretary
- Martha Melton, Treasurer



# Staff Profile: Lisa Deal, Case Manager



Lisa Deal

Researching public policy for a foundation that funds children's health care, which Lisa Deal did for many years at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation in Los Altos, is a far cry from bedside nursing for terminally ill patients.

Yet, when Deal decided to return to work outside the home after a decade-long hiatus as a stay-at-home mom, she headed for Mission Hospice & Home Care.

"I decided that what I really missed were patients," said Deal, who last worked as a nurse in Seattle 18 years ago. She remembers that she never wanted to be anything other than a nurse, a doctor or maybe a physical therapist when she was growing up in Wenatchee, WA. When it came time to choose, she opted for nursing because she didn't want to spend the time it took in school to become a doctor.

Ironically, she ended up with just as much time in school and eventually earned a doctorate in public health from Harvard. She was especially interested in how public policy impacts health care for both ends of the age spectrum: children and the elderly. When her husband, an economist, was offered a job in Silicon Valley, the family moved and she went to the Packard Foundation.

Last fall, she joined the volunteer class at Mission Hospice as a way of gauging whether hospice would be a good fit. She said she was especially drawn to the work after experiencing several deaths of family and friends over the last few years. She'd maintained her active nursing license but CEO Dwight Wilson urged her to volunteer as a nursing intern in the hospice program to get her skills up to speed. In March, she joined the staff as a nurse case manager.

"It's a unique honor to be invited into someone's home when they're dying," she said, noting that nurses used to working with recovering patients have to learn a different mindset for hospice.

"You have to know going in that the patient is going to die and so, the goals are different," she said. "They're around quality of life. If you don't know that, you will burn out really quickly. Yes, it's sad, but it's uplifting to know that we're really helping patients live as well as possible." 🐾

## THE NUTSHELL EDUCATION

- BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN NURSING, PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY, TACOMA
- MASTER'S DEGREE IN NURSING, MASTER'S DEGREE IN PUBLIC HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, SEATTLE
- DOCTORATE IN PUBLIC HEALTH, HARVARD UNIVERSITY, BOSTON

## CAREER

- VISITING NURSE, CARDIOLOGY NURSE, BOSTON, 1988-1990
- PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE AT HIV AND FAMILY PLANNING CLINICS, SEATTLE, 1991-1993
- PROGRAM MANAGER, DAVID AND LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION, AND EDITOR OF *THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN* JOURNAL, LOS ALTOS, 1997-2001
- STAY-AT-HOME MOM AND VOLUNTEER, 2004-2010
- MISSION HOSPICE & HOME CARE NURSE, 2011-PRESENT

## PERSONAL

- MARRIED, THREE TEENAGERS

## Patient served well by sense of humor *Continued from page 1*

the family, but also the caregivers who tended to day-to-day care. Hospice nurse Maria Caturay supervised medications, baths and care management.

"Mom didn't want people making a fuss over her," said Greene. "However, she was open to hospice care. Many times she stated that she was grateful that her children (and all these people) were taking good care of her."

And she kept her sense of humor until the end. Only 10 days before her death, a doctor asked her one of the standard questions used to gauge a patient's mental status.

"When's your birthday?" he asked.

"The same time every year," she replied with a smile. 🐾



# MISSION HOSPICE & HOME CARE

*it's about life*

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Marilyn Porto

## Life and Laughter retreat brings together Mission Hospice community *Continued from page 1*

He said his solution involves “being with, being for, being there” – even to a 3-year-old who wants to know at 2 in the morning why he never receives any mail. The same applied when he stayed with his dying brother.

“We spent four days laughing, talking about the old days,” he said, “Once the doctor came in and said, ‘You guys have been at it for five hours; he needs to sleep.’ I said, ‘Hey doc, how do you want to go – sleeping or laughing?’”

Pasternak emphasized that “humor is in the eye of the beholder,” whether it’s with a caregiver, mourner or dying person, such as the woman who replied to questions about pain location, “Yes, right there’s my daughter,” and the daughter responding, “You can imagine where my pain is.”

Pasternak said humor can be many things, including an expression of hostility and a means of hiding emotion. On the plus side, it can elevate energy, encourage connectivity, relieve stress, normalize a situation, defuse uncomfortable situations and provide exercise.

Wilson reminded the group that although humor is a normal part of life, some situations can only be sad.

“There’s nothing funny about the death of a child,” he said. “The hole can be too big and black and awful. It’s important to remember that. It’s not our job to make light of situations but to follow our patients and families where they go, whether it’s fear or sadness or humor.” 🐾



*Comedian Michael Pritchard spoke at the retreat.*