



The VNA Voice

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From Our House to Yours

In August, we celebrate 40 years of hospice care to our community. It's truly a wonderful tribute to the value and trust all of you put into our organization.

As early as 1979, a group of Douglas County professionals comprised a steering committee to develop an organizational structure, gather community support and obtain funding for a hospice program under the Visiting Nurses umbrella. In 1981, that steering committee presented its formal recommendation to the Board of Directors and once the Articles of Incorporation and by-laws were officially amended, the Hospice program launched in August of that year. This critical addition to the agency's service line occurred under the leadership of Marceil Lauppe, one of VNA's original RN's and Executive Director for more than two decades.

The first Hospice Program Director started while obtaining a



VISITING NURSES HOSPICE

doctorate in social work at KU and worked part-time out of a storage room in the old wing of LMH. Over these past 40 years, there have been numerous leadership changes and increasing regulatory scrutiny as Hospice has become a more significant part of our healthcare continuum. What has not changed is the commitment of the Visiting Nurses staff who provide hospice care. With each person for whom they care, that person's family and/or caregiver,

and anyone in the patient's circle, they offer an entire team of professionals providing medical, emotional, and spiritual support to meet individual needs and goals. The expertise and compassion they display daily is humbling to watch...and about which I hear frequently.

In the words of one of my favorite poets, Maya Angelou, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Thank you to each of you who have felt the care and compassion of our Hospice teams for the past 40 years. As we celebrate this storied program, I celebrate your trust in us.



Cynthia Lewis
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

OUR MISSION

Improving quality of life through
compassionate patient care
wherever you call **home.**



The Heart of VNA: Hospice Helps Improve Quality of Life at Home

Clifford Downing lived a full life for 78 years. He was married to his wife, Verna, for 52 years. They raised a daughter and built their house together. Clifford was a musician for as long as he could remember and played in a band, Clifford Downing with Bad News, for almost 20 years. They opened for numerous Nashville stars including Johnny Paycheck and once played at a country club in Kansas City with Chubby Checker. Clifford and Verna also helped out with her parents' business, the Shiloh Club. On top of all of this, Clifford had a job as a supervisor at a distribution center. It is safe to say he lived a full life, even when diagnosed with a pulmonary condition and being told he had six months to live, he continued to live his life as best he could with the help of Visiting Nurses' Hospice program.

hospice would just help him die, but then Dr. Penn helped us understand they're going to help you have quality of life. You're going to feel better and longer." While the focus of hospice care is improving the quality of life through comfort care and support, rather than attempting to extend life with curative treatments, it can actually help people live longer. Clifford believed that was the case with the care he received from Visiting Nurses. "I think they bought me quite a bit of time," he said. In June, Clifford reached the initial goal he set with his nurse, Meagan, of making it to his family reunion. The care that Clifford received through Visiting Nurses' Hospice program might have helped extend his life, but it definitely improved his quality of life.



Pictured above: Clifford Downing playing guitar and singing for his Hospice nurse, Meagan.

Through medications and a few tips and tricks, Meagan helped make Clifford much more comfortable than when he started Hospice care. Air hunger was one of the biggest challenges to Clifford's comfort and his inhalers were no longer providing relief. Although he was against it initially, Clifford agreed to try taking morphine for some relief after Meagan explained how it could help him. "I'll take morphine now because it helps a lot," Clifford said. "It was the only thing

that would help me." While the medication may have provided the most immediate relief for Clifford, some smaller adjustments also made a significant improvement in his comfort. Meagan suggested a pad for him to sit on for some extra cushion and diabetic compression socks. Even when skeptical at first, Clifford came to appreciate both ideas.

"It's been a big peace of mind and we know we can depend on Meagan and trust her," Verna said. "She's got great advice and she makes sure it gets done. She doesn't give up on trying to help him understand this is a good thing to do and try it and then he loves it and forgets she had to talk him into it. It's been a big peace of mind and just a real comfort, truly."

Out of all of it, perhaps the most important thing was that Clifford was able to stay at home safely and comfortably with his wife, the woman he met over 52 years ago in an ice cream shop, raised a daughter with and built a life and home with. He was also still able to play his guitar and sing, just like he had for as long as he could remember. Being able to make music, a therapy in its own right, was just another comfort for him. "It's made a big difference," Verna said. "I really think we'd be in a different place right now if we hadn't done this for six months."

Clifford took his last breaths in the home he built with his wife, with her and their daughter by his side on July 13, 2021.



Pictured above: Clifford Downing and his wife, Verna.

When given his prognosis, Clifford wasn't sure that he wanted hospice care. He shared the misconceptions that many people believe about hospice, but luckily his doctors helped clarify how hospice care helps improve quality of life. "Initially he was apprehensive," Verna said. "He thought that maybe

Major Milestone: VNA Hospice Program Celebrates 40 Years



40 VISITING NURSES HOSPICE Celebration

Reconnect with VNA Hospice staff & celebrate 40 years of VNA's service to the community



Please join us

August 25, 2021 • Maceli's Banquet Hall
1031 New Hampshire Street, Lawrence

Come and go from 4-6pm • Light Appetizers • Cash Bar

Has Hospice touched your life? Help give that gift to others. Even the smallest donation can help change someone's life.

Donate at [KansasVNA.org/Donate](https://kansasvna.org/Donate)

Volunteer Spotlight: Meet Kevin, Volunteer End-of-Life Doula

"The end of life deserves as much beauty, care, and respect as the beginning." VNA wholeheartedly believes in this statement and VNA's Hospice team has acted accordingly for the last 40 years.

Now, VNA's End-of-Life Doula program is working to provide support and guidance through the end-of-life process in addition to, and also independently of, VNA's Hospice program. As a service that is free and open to anyone

in the community, VNA's Doula service can help someone plan and set expectations for the end-of-life. VNA's newest Doula, Kevin Lee, is ready to help make the end-of-life process easier through support, a listening ear, and a

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Volunteer Spotlight: Meet Kevin, Volunteer End-of-Life Doula (cont.)

helping hand.

Kevin likes to use the words of author Sallie Tisdale to describe the Doula's role. "End-of-Life Doulas are like trail guides," he says, referring to the way they use their past experiences of helping people at the end of life to help others through that process.

"It's a relationship, a companionship, and I like to think about it as a friendship, two people walking this last stage of life together," Kevin says.

Kevin has a background in pastoral ministries and his experiences in that field have

helped make him a better End-of-Life Doula. He understands the value of being present and attentive to what is important to the people he is helping. Kevin also recognizes how helpful an



Pictured above: Kevin Lee, VNA volunteer End-of-Life Doula.

early start to end-of-life planning can be, which is something that members of VNA's Hospice team have long encouraged. "If you've thought about it, if you've kind of prepared and planned ahead of time, you're able to just be with one another and put all of your attention and focus on each other and that is a real gift, especially for the person who is dying," he says.

Kevin and all of VNA's trained End-of-Life Doulas are here to help navigate this natural part of life that everyone will face at some point. Visit Kansasvna.org for more information or call (785) 843-3738 to talk to a Doula.

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