Their Legacy Lives On

If you’ve been around Houston Hospice for long, you’ve heard the jingle of dog tags, and you’ve seen four-legged ambassadors of good will accompanied by their human volunteers. It’s hard to imagine Houston Hospice without our beloved therapy pets, but their service among us began just 10 years ago.

In 2006, volunteers Ann James and Lynn Hoster asked if their golden retrievers, Chrissy and Dixie, could accompany to the In-Patient Unit. Permission was granted as long as the dogs were Certified Therapy Pets. Ann’s research led her to an organization called Faithful Paws that offered weekly pet certification training at Bellaire United Methodist Church. The four attended only one class, and the following week Chrissy and Dixie passed the Canine Good Citizen Test, qualifying them to join Faithful Paws and visit the in-patient unit.

Ann, Chrissy, Lynn and Dixie were the pioneers who introduced Houston Hospice to the value of pet therapy for patients, families and staff members during the end-of-life journey. Their regular visits consistently brought compassion, comfort and emotional support to all whose paths they crossed. Dixie’s pronounced smile brought cheerfulness, while Chrissy’s soulful eyes showed she sensed the pain and was there to brighten the day. They were a perfect duo.

Dixie’s last visit was in 2011 at the age of 17. Ann retired an aging Chrissy in 2015. Ann said, "Appropriately, both dogs had very deserving hospice experiences of their own, dying in the comfort of their homes surrounded by family. Dixie passed away in her sleep just two weeks after her last hospice visit, and Chrissy died on October 2 of this year on her favorite cool outdoor patio spot with the assistance of Last Wishes, whose staff offered her the same love and gentleness that both therapy dogs had given to everyone over the years."

Chrissy's and Dixie's legacy lives on. There are now 13 human volunteers, 17 dogs and an occasional cat following in their paw prints. While golden retrievers are considered ideal therapy dogs due to their sweet dispositions and friendliness to strangers, our current team is made up of a variety of breeds. We remain indebted to Ann, Chrissy, Lynn and Dixie for creating the opportunity to share ourselves and our pets with others in need of comfort.
We l c o m e  N e w  V o l u n t e e r s!

Red Tape Days is the mandatory annual meeting (for everyone who wants to be an active volunteer in 2017) to complete the necessary paperwork to be in compliance. You need only attend ONE of the meetings. If you are unable to attend any of these, please call Patsy or Elisa to schedule a make-up session.

Monday, January 16, 2017 - North - 1:30 p.m. (location TBA)
Saturday, January 21, 2017 - TMC - 10:30 a.m.
Tuesday, January 31, 2017 - West Office - 1:30 p.m.

Please RSVP 713-677-7121

2017 Red Tape Days

Top L-R: Gail Cauthen, Amir Nabizadeh, Ruth Landauer, Cindy Parker, Omar Rahal, Terri McLain, Kimberly Stroup, Buddy Shively, Cathleen Weiss, Patricia Nix, Patsy Piner

Bottom L-R: Elisa Covarrubias, Mila Moroz, Joan Whorton, Debbie Guerrero, Sravana Borkataky-Varma, Barbara Grove, Chika Nworah, Patrick Bonorden, Tabby Akbar, Kay Mansfield

Not pictured: Christina Wesson and Connie Swift
Holiday Grief: 10 Tips to Navigate the Emotional Minefield

Grief is acutely felt during the holidays, when there is an empty place at the table. During their pre-holiday workshops, Houston Hospice grief counselors, Marti Nelson and Tammy Zwahr, help the bereaved navigate the minefield of feelings and expectations they’ll encounter with these helpful tips:

10 tips for those who are grieving:

1) Accept the likelihood of your pain. The energy you would spend evading what is going on around you will be more creatively spend adapting to the reality of what this particular season holds for you.
2) Feel whatever it is you feel. Recognize the fact that something very important has happened in your life which causes reactions within you. Some of the feelings bereaved people feel include: sadness, depression, anxiety, fear, anger, guilt, and apathy.
3) Express your emotions. The best means of expression is simple: be yourself. Choose people who will listen and respond thoughtfully. Journaling helps get feelings off your chest, clarifies thinking, and monitors your progress. Use music, play, dance, or create.
4) Plan ahead. Give yourself permission to change plans as you go. Talk things over with people whom you usually share the holidays.
5) Take charge where you can. Evaluate holiday traditions. Some changes may be healthy and important to make. Eat healthfully and drink wisely. Maintain an exercise program or begin one. Get the rest you need.

6) Turn to others for support. Let others know what you think will help you.
7) Be gentle with yourself. Allow yourself time to rest. Avoid over committing yourself. Pace yourself on good days and give yourself lots of latitude on “bad” days and accept that grieving people have their share of these days.
8) Remember to remember. You may have a special linking object which you might carry, wear, use, or place in easy sight. Create small remembrance area at home. Look at photos and talk to others about your life together.

9) Search out and count your blessings. Stay in the present as much as possible. Savor what there is to savor. Cry and then let the tears pass and see what else you feel. Don’t be afraid to laugh.
10) Do something for others. You can reach out and offer something of what you have and who you are, even if it feels like it’s only a little. Baby sit, cook a meal, or check on shut-ins. You can drive, shovel, telephone, mow, clean, trim, deliver, type, greet, etc. depending on your interests and abilities.

*Emotional Wish List

What would the holidays be like if I could have these wishes granted?

- That I could be alone when I choose, or be with others when I want to be…
- That other people would know without asking or guessing when I want to talk about my feelings or my loved one and when I want to remain silent…
- That others would know how to show their concern for me and my situation without being uneasy or awkward or embarrassed for them or me…
- That they could accept me, my tears, my anger, without criticizing or judging me…
- That people would not assume their estimate of when I should be “over it” is the correct one…
- That others would not try to tell me what is best for me…
- That the holiday season would disappear like the magician’s coin trick and reappear only when I am ready for it…

MISSION STATEMENT

Houston Hospice provides uncompromising, compassionate end-of-life care to patients and families in our community.

Through the efforts of specially trained and highly skilled interdisciplinary teams of health care professionals and volunteers, Houston Hospice patients and their families are guided through the process of illness by receiving clinical care, psychosocial support, spiritual guidance and volunteer assistance.

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*Choose Houston Hospice code (81260) at Kroger
*Choose Houston Hospice code (2278) at Randalls

When you shop at AmazonSmile, Amazon donates 0.5% to Houston Hospice. Bookmark the link http://smile.amazon.com/ch/74-2092951 and support us every time you shop.

When you are filling out your Christmas Cards this Year take a Card and Send to this Address:

A Recovering American Soldier
C.O. Walter Reed
Army Medical Center
6900 Georgia Avenue
NW Washington, D.C.
20307-5001

Pass this on and Think of how many Cards these Wonderful, Special People who have Sacrificed so much would get. Please Share on your Wall, it’s the Least we can do!

PLEASE Like us on Facebook, invite your friends to like us, and share our informative and inspirational posts and photos.