



**(Left) John and Peggy Luker before her diagnosis. (Right) A Hospice music therapist visits Peggy weekly to play guitar and sing for her. Husband John says Peggy loves music.**

## Caregiver: There's a Special Place in Heaven for Every Hospice Worker!

Many people think that "hospice is just for the last few days of life," but that is one of the biggest misconceptions about hospice care. Just ask John Luker, whose wife, Peggy (Margaret), was admitted to The Community Hospice more than two years ago in March 2023. "I can still remember the day I went to the nursing home," he recalls. Peggy had been there for nearly a year due to the progression of her early onset Alzheimer's diagnosed 4 years earlier. "I assumed it would be a routine meeting to discuss her care, but I was introduced to a representative from The Community Hospice. The nursing home staff thought it was time to bring the Hospice team into Peg's care. I literally fell apart during the meeting," admits John. "To me, Hospice meant end of life. I was SO wrong!"

To his surprise, John says the addition of Hospice has been "nothing short of amazing!" He notes that as Peg's disease progressed in recent months, he says the entire hospice team has been right there to support them. "Between music and massage therapies, and she gets so many visitors, it's been such a pleasant surprise. The Community Hospice has been nothing short of an awesome experience for both Peggy and I. Every person we've met from Hospice has been the most caring, attentive and loving individual," John exclaims, sharing how a music therapist visits weekly to play guitar and sing to Peg in her room, and a massage therapist too. "It's absolutely awesome. Peg always loved music and responds very well, tapping her toes and fingers to the music. it is very easy to see how Peg truly enjoys the full body massage while sitting

comfortably in her recliner. The massage therapy quickly puts her into a very noticeable, relaxed state. Very peaceful," says John. A Hospice chaplain also visits to pray with them and to help John try to make sense of the situation. He adds there is also nursing, social work and aide support, and a volunteer who he says sits and talks to Peg, reads her books, pushes her in her wheelchair, and just serves as a loving, caring friend.

"I have become a huge advocate for Hospice in any way I can," notes John, who says he has learned firsthand "the tremendous benefit Hospice has to offer well before a person is even close to passing. Every individual working or volunteering for Hospice has a special place in Heaven awaiting them," he exclaims. "I could never begin to thank each and every one of them enough!"





## Mother & Son Mission to Give Back to The Community Hospice

Donna Jurczynski lost her father in 2016. He had been admitted at the Inpatient Unit at St. Peter's Hospital. "I had heard how compassionate and caring Hospice was for patients but I experienced firsthand how that extends to family members," recounts Donna. "The nurses and volunteers were such a comfort and support to me and my family." She felt so strongly about how Hospice supported her family that after taking time to grief, she was inspired to become a volunteer "to give back." Since then, she has visited patients both at the In-Patient Unit and at nursing homes. "In my effort to give back, however, I always come away with the feeling of receiving more than I give," says Donna.

In 2024, Donna's son John followed in her footsteps. "I was first introduced to hospice volunteering when my grandfather was transitioning," John recalls. "I was particularly struck by the apparent isolation that many patients must feel, especially those who didn't have many, or any, loved ones by their side. The hospice volunteers seemed to fill that void, providing dignity and companionship during the final stages of their lives," says

John. "My experiences have highlighted the profound value of simply being present for someone else, particularly a patient. Even in situations where coherent conversation isn't possible, your energy and presence can offer significant comfort."

Mother and son also enjoy volunteering together at the Camp Erin Family Camp at Thatcher Park, helping grieving youths. The camp offers a safe environment where children can enjoy fun activities while learning coping skills to deal with loss, and meeting other children who are also grieving so they know they are not alone. Donna says the special bonding with John has been a bonus for her. "Working together



John Jurczynski with his mom, Donna.

with John at Camp Erin and watching him interact with young people and seeing how they were enjoying spending time with him was such a proud moment," smiles Donna.

*If you'd like to volunteer, please contact Amy Scarlett, manager of volunteer services, (518) 724-0281.*

## Hospice Intake Nurse Recognized with Statewide "Caring Award"



Congratulations to Diana Christine, RN, supervisor of Central Intake & Admissions for The Community Hospice, who has been

recognized with the HCA's (Health Care Association of New York State) "Caring Award." Diana has a caring and compassionate approach to individuals who are seriously ill or at the end of life. She is cited for her "can-do" attitude, always willing to take the extra step to break through any barriers that

might deter a patient's admission to services. Recently, her fight for a homeless patient who had been passed over by other providers ultimately enabled the patient to pass comfortably in Hospice care.

**Congratulations, Diana!**



## “2025 Walk for Hospice” A Triumphant Success

An estimated 1,000 people turned out to support the 25th Annual “Walk for Hospice” at Siena College in June, raising more than \$171,000! Proceeds will support patient programs, including music & massage therapies; a special Wish Fund; Camp Erin – a bereavement camp for children and teens who have lost a significant person in their lives; and free grief counseling for the community. Thanks to everyone who turned out to make our event a success!



## Camp Erin Set for September to Help Grieving Youths

Grieving the loss of a loved one is hard, even for adults, but for children who may not yet understand, the sudden loss of a significant person in their lives can be too much to bear. To support these youth, The Community Hospice offers Camp Erin, an annual bereavement weekend held in the Adirondacks to help young people learn to cope with loss. Children and teens ages 6 – 17 who have lost a significant person in their lives are eligible. The program combines grief education and emotional support

with fun camp activities, like hiking, canoeing, star-gazing, making s'mores, and a special luminary ceremony to honor their loved ones. Facilitated by professional bereavement counselors and caring volunteers, campers are provided a safe environment where they can explore their feelings, learn essential coping skills, and make friends with peers their age who are also grieving. The camp is set for **Friday-Sunday, September 19-21**. There is no cost to attend this special program. *For more info or to*



*apply, please contact Tiffany Smith at [tiffany.m.smith@sphp.com](mailto:tiffany.m.smith@sphp.com)) or call 518-724-0272.*

## Save the Date for Tasty “Touched By An Angel” Fundraiser

Save the date! The 27th Annual “Touched by an Angel” is set for **Thursday, October 16, 6 - 8 pm**, Canfield Casino, Saratoga Springs. The event will feature an evening of complimentary champagne and beverages, along with a scrumptious variety of elegant savory and sweet food stations featuring more than 20 of your favorite local restaurants, and a dessert buffet. Live musical entertainment. Raffles for great prizes. Proceeds will directly

support essential patient services in Saratoga and Washington counties, including pain management, music & massage therapies, counseling, and spiritual support as well as bereavement care for families navigating the loss of a loved one. Many of these programs are typically not covered by Medicare or other insurance programs. *For more info or to attend, visit [www.saratogaangel.org](http://www.saratogaangel.org) or call Jodi at 518-525-1070.*





Serving patients and families in eight counties:

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Call **(518) 724-0242** if you or a loved one needs care or support.

## Dr. Irma Waldo: Founder of First Hospice Program in New York State

*She became a doctor at age 25 and practiced medicine over 7 decades caring for everyone from preemies to those in their twilight years. And she did it all while raising a family at a time when women were expected to be homemakers. She also incubated and co-founded the first hospice program in New York State – believed to be the first such service established in the Northeast.*

At age 100 today, Dr. Irma Waldo, a pioneer in end of life care, began her pursuit of medicine against all odds. Few women were in the field then. She was told by her uncle, “you cannot be a doctor, be a nurse.” But raised with a can-do attitude, she wanted to show him she could do it. She earned her medical degree at the University at Buffalo School of Medicine, graduating first in her class in 1949. At age 25, she became a doctor, moving with her dentist husband, John Waldo, to rural Hillsdale, NY, where she was the first woman doctor in town. In 1952, she opened her own family medicine practice. At one point, she was the only physician in the community when the only other doctor left to honor a military commitment.

In the early 1970s, Dr. Waldo received a request from a New York City doctor that would change the trajectory of her work. He had a 3-year-old patient who was dying from a brain tumor and wanted to spend her remaining time in the country with her puppy. He asked if Dr. Waldo would care for the child; if not, he would decline the family’s request. Dr. Waldo said yes. The experience was heartwarming and demonstrated to Dr. Waldo the need for families who wanted dying loved ones to be at home. So in 1976, Dr. Waldo co-founded Roe Jan Hospice along with Yvonne DelGrande, her nurse. Together, they formed an all-volunteer hospice, training volunteers in surrounding towns. They never charged patients and families. Over 18 years, the service evolved into Columbia County Hospice, and later the Hudson Valley Community Hospice. In 2014, Dr. Waldo was recognized with the “Women of Distinction: Honoring Women in New York” award for her compassion and extensive service. She finally retired at age 93.

During the COVID lockdown, Dr. Waldo, at her daughter’s

encouragement, penned her memoir, “The Doctor Wore High Heels”, with her daughter, granddaughters and a great-granddaughter helping to compile articles, clippings and photos. ***On behalf of all our patients, families and staff, The Community Hospice salutes Dr. Waldo for her incredible contributions to end of life care that helped make Hospice what it is today!***



Dr. Irma Waldo (r), co-founder of the first Hospice program in New York State, with Michelle Mazzacco, EVP of the Continuing Care Division, St. Peter’s Health Partners.