

Otsego County Chamber / NBT Bank Distinguished Business of the Year

Local hospice helping people for 25 years

By Denise Richardson
Staff Writer

Bernadette and William Cannon were lifelong sweethearts.

"I called him 'Bill,'" she said. She took care of him after he was diagnosed with cancer in 2001.

"I had never even heard of hospice," Cannon said. "I made that phone call, and it changed by life."

Catskill Area Hospice and Palliative Care provided nurses, a social worker and other support during the last 10 weeks of William's life, she said. They helped make him comfortable and gave them emotional support.

"He was taken care of in such a loving way," Cannon said. In return, she said, she shares her story and volunteers as president of the auxiliary.

On March 28, Catskill Area Hospice will be honored as the Otsego County Chamber/NBT Bank Distinguished Business honoree.

The award will be presented at the Chamber's annual banquet at the State University College at Oneonta.

Rob Robinson, chairman and chief executive officer at the Otsego County Chamber, said previous award recipients have included not-for-profit businesses, like hospice.

The defining question for award purposes is whether the business meets a payroll, rather than if it makes a profit, he said.

Catskill Area Hospice has about 130 employees and 170 trained volunteers who serve residents in Otsego, Delaware and Schoharie counties.

Its mission statement is: *Making life easier for patients and families facing serious illness or end of life by providing choices, dignity and compassion.*



Star photo by Brit Worgan

Auxiliary members and volunteers discuss the opening of the Catskill Area Hospice Thrift Shop at a round-table meeting with Director of Development for Catskill Area Hospice Huemac Garcia, third from right, on Friday.

'I had never even heard of hospice. I made that phone call, and it changed by life.'

— Bernadette Cannon, whose husband was diagnosed with cancer in 2001 and died in 2003

In 1983, its budget was \$7,000. In 2007, its budget was \$11 million. Huemac Garcia, director of development, said Catskill Area Hospice raised just more than \$1 million last year.

"We're really fortunate to have tremendous support,"

Garcia said. Other revenue comes from insurance and Medicare reimbursements, he said, and all the income goes toward expenses to run the local programs.

In the early 1980s, some local residents met to discuss caring for terminally ill

patients and their families, and Catskill Area Hospice was established in 1983. Today, administrative offices are at 1 Birchwood Drive in Oneonta, with other offices in Oneonta, Delhi and Cobleskill. In 1988, Catskill Area Hospice became a state-certified Medicare hospice eligible for reimbursement.

The "Palliative Care" name was added in 1998 to reflect an expansion of services to patients outside the Medicare definition of hospice. Patients do not have to have a limited prognosis to have palliative care.

Now celebrating 25 years,

the not-for-profit organization has many programs focused on enhancing life for patients and their families.

Catskill Hospice provides nurses, social workers, counselors and others to help with care. Hospice volunteers can help with household chores, errands and companionship.

Catskill Area Hospice and Palliative Care has provided more than \$5 million in unreimbursed direct patient care, according to the spring 2008 newsletter "Connections."

Since 1992, Hospice volunteers have provided more than 90,190 hours of services.

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