



Photo by Roz Cox

St. Joseph Hospice Certified Nursing Aides enjoyed an appreciation breakfast held in their honor Thursday, Aug. 6, 2015. CNAs in front row, from left, are Joyce Winzer and Kimberly Scott. Shown is center is Jackie Moore and on back row are Kathy Haynes, Shelia Whitmore, Pat Mitchell, CEO, Susie Powell, Cynthia Wessinger, Terri Cummings and Dovetta Carter.

St. Joseph Honors the Heart of Hospice

By Rae Anne Firmin

St. Joseph Hospice hosted an appreciation breakfast Thursday, Aug. 6, in honor of the Certified Nursing Aides who lovingly devote their careers to caring for the terminally ill. Ursula Solomon, Darlene Hayes and Jackie Moore have been with SJH-Baton Rouge since its start in 2002.

“This job has brought me closer to God,” says Jackie, “because death and dying is not a scary thing for me.” Most who work in hospice agree that there are many comforting, spiritual elements that come into play when a patient is nearing the end of life, but Jackie says it’s also the one-of-a-kind and sometimes even supernatural connections she is able to be a part of that keep her loving what she does.

The veteran CNA of 19 years recalls one patient that stands out from the rest. Jackie says, "I can't explain the instant bond we shared, but it was as if we had known each other all of our lives." She describes this "grandmotherly" figure as some would describe a kindred spirit, two souls destined to cross paths.

This special patient had but one wish: For Jackie, her hospice CNA and treasured friend, to stay the night with her. "This lady never wanted me to leave! And, I really enjoyed spending time with her," says Jackie. So on her own time, she spent a quiet Friday evening in her new friend's old wooden home on a rural dirt road. Jackie baked chocolate chip cookies, and together they watched the patient's favorite movie, "A Bug's Life."

Jackie had the pleasure of caring for her friend for a couple of months before her health took a turn for the worst. On her deathbed, surrounded by her children and grandchildren, the declining patient was coaxed time and again for some sort of reply to their words and presence. She remained unresponsive despite their efforts, but when Jackie placed her hand on the woman's head and whispered what their relationship had meant to her, the patient's eyes opened! She stared at Jackie for a moment and then closed her eyes once more. Jackie wasn't 15 minutes down the road when she got the call that her dear friend had indeed passed away.

Terri Cummings has been employed with SJH since 2011 and like many of her fellow CNAs, treasures most the opportunity to regularly pray with her patients if they so choose. She says, "It does my heart good because no man can anticipate when God will receive the last breath out of a person's body."

Though caring for the dying can be taxing on both mind and body, Terri says it's the satisfaction of a job well done that motivates her to continue. "To me, it's knowing you really reached the heart of a family that gives me the strength to press on."

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-Terri Cummings, CNA

CNA Coordinator Kathryn Allen, LPN, says, "To these women, what they do is not a job. Each one of them feel it's their calling and they go out of their way to be there for our patients." While treating patients with the utmost dignity is a fundamental goal for all SJH team members, the CNAs have the unique responsibility of respectfully caring for patients' most personal needs; therefore, SJH CEO Pat Mitchell believes, "Your organization is only as good as your CNAs, because those are the souls who interact with the souls of our patients on a daily basis."



Jackie Moore, CNA, displays a gift left to her by a very special patient after her passing. The patient requested that after her death, her family members collect a petal from each of her flower arrangements and compile them as a present for Jackie.