



For Immediate Release

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**Hospice of Michigan Launches Traverse City Memory Bear Program,
Seeks Volunteers with Sewing Skills**

Traverse City, Michigan, June 4, 2014 – Sifting through the belongings of a loved one who has recently died can be overwhelming for a grieving family member, but the Hospice of Michigan Memory Bear program can help ease the pain.

In an effort to help the bereaved cope, HOM is launching its popular Memory Bear program in Traverse City. The program provides patient's families with a bear made from the clothing of their loved one. The bears, which are eight inches tall and made in a patch-quilt style, are created by volunteers using cotton, wool, fleece or flannel clothing that help the bereaved recall happy memories with their loved ones.

HOM is currently seeking skilled volunteers in Traverse City to support the Memory Bear program and help family members of HOM patients capture – and preserve – a keepsake they can cherish as they move through the grieving process.

Traverse City resident Sue Frye began making memory bears for HOM in other areas of the state more than a year ago.

“When my father died, my Mom had bears made from his clothes and gave one to each of his children and grandchildren,” Frye said. “The bear means a lot to me – it brought my dad home. It made me feel like his presence was still around me.

“As a volunteer in the Memory Bear program, I’m honored to create these bears that help the bereaved preserve the memory of someone they loved and lost.”

When the bereaved bring in articles of clothing to HOM, a grief support services manager will meet with person to learn more about the life of the deceased. HOM also asks that when possible, a photo of the deceased is provided.

“A lot of thought goes into how these bears will be put together,” Frye explained. “I study the clothes and photos and try to get a sense of who the person was. I try to embellish different things on the bears so it in some way captures the essence of the deceased.

“The entire process is very moving – from the moment I pull the clothes out of the bag.”

HOM began its memory bear program in select communities a number of years ago. After seeing the positive impact the bears have had on those grieving, HOM has sought volunteers to help expand the program around the state.

“Memorializing loved ones who have passed can be a healthy way to cope with grief,” said Kathryn Holl, grief support services manager at HOM. “It allows the bereaved to remember happy times and keep the essence of their loved one alive in their daily life.”

Prospective Memory Bear volunteers are invited to contact Holl at 231.929.1557 for additional information about becoming involved with the program. Volunteers must have the ability to travel to their local Hospice of Michigan office for appointments and to pick up and drop off materials.

“The most committed volunteers have a passion for helping others,” Holl explained. “If you have a few hours to spare every week or month, you can help someone work through their grief. This is a very special, hands-on way seamstresses and crafters can make a difference. Everyone who volunteers gets something out of the experience.”

If you would like to learn more about volunteer opportunities for Hospice of Michigan or sign up as a volunteer, visit https://www.hom.org/?page_id=1239.

For those who have experienced a loss, HOM encourages a waiting period of one year before becoming a volunteer in order to allow for the processing of grief.

About Hospice of Michigan

A nationally recognized leader in end-of-life care, Hospice of Michigan is the original – and largest – hospice in the state. The non-profit cares for more than 1,400 patients each day in 56 counties across Michigan, raising more than \$4 million each year to cover the cost of care for the uninsured and underinsured. HOM offers a broad range of services to enhance the quality of life at the end of life, including At Home Support™, our advanced illness management program, community-based palliative care and pediatric care programs. HOM provides grief support and counseling, caregiver education and support, and education programs for physicians and healthcare professionals through its research, training and education arm, the Hospice of Michigan Institute. For more information, call 888.247.5701 or visit www.hom.org.

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