

## **Kieselbach Helps the Dying Get to the Next World**

by Mark Morelli, from "Portage Volunteers: People Helping People" column, *Record Courier* daily newspaper

Tennyson wrote, "God's finger touched him, and he slept."

But death is not always so simple and poetic. Often, for every life taken, there is an equally heavy toll on those left behind who took care of the terminally ill loved one.

Such people, called caregivers, are given assistance by the Portage County Hospice, a volunteer group functioning through the Visiting Nurse Association chapters of Ravenna and Kent.

Millie Kieselbach of Kent has been the hospice volunteer coordinator since the group's inception in 1983. She adjusts the schedules of 26 volunteers who donate four hours a week in the homes of the terminally ill.

Hospice volunteers do whatever is needed. They talk to the sick.

We ask the patients about anything -- sports, books, politics -- reassure many of them that their minds are still strong."

Mrs. Kieselbach said that while terminally ill people are usually bedridden, what is worth is that the healthy caregivers also become trapped and housebound, and they desperately need breaks that hospice volunteers can provide.

"Volunteers have driven to pick up prescriptions, thereby saving the mailing time," she said. "Volunteers have driven blood to be tested in a lab, or have provided rides to those who can't drive."

"It's just whatever the need might be and we provide it the best we can," said Mrs. Kieselbach.

Mrs. Kieselbach said it takes a special persona to become a hospice volunteer, because death is a delicate subject.

"Yes, there's sadness when someone is dying," she said. "But the beautiful part is you're getting someone through it, helping a family stay together and rested enough so they can provide a comfortable home environment for the patient."

Volunteers are required to finish 18 hours of training. But Mrs. Kieselbach, who retired in 1981 from a long career in social work, said the most important criteria comes with the volunteer before any training begins.

"In order to do this, you must have a good understanding that we are mortal," she said. "It takes a wonderful, caring spirit."

"We also do bereavement follow-up with families after the death of a loved one," she said.

Mrs. Kieselbach urges anyone who wants to be a hospice volunteer to find out more by calling 673-8902. A new hospice program volunteer training program begins October 19 and will last six Saturdays, ending November 23.

Through the efforts of Millie Kieselbach and the Portage County Hospice Volunteers, so many families are given comfort.

"You come into the world alone and you go out alone. Our job is to them get to the next world," she said.