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Highlands County Hospice House ground-breaking ceremony planned for January 7

Good Shepherd Hospice will make a major fundraising announcement at ceremony

SEBRING, FLA. – The community dream of additional end-of-life care services for residents of Highlands, Hardee and Polk counties will be one step closer when Good Shepherd Hospice holds a ground-breaking ceremony for its new Highlands County Hospice House on January 7 at 10:30 a.m. in Sebring.

In addition, Good Shepherd Hospice will make a major fundraising announcement at the event.

The ceremony will be held at 1110 Hammock Road, the site of the future facility. Federal, state and local dignitaries have been invited to attend. The event is open to the public and refreshments will be served.

“Good Shepherd Hospice staff, volunteers and supporters are thrilled to start the New Year with the Hospice House groundbreaking,” said Becky McIntyre, Good Shepherd Hospice regional director. “The Highlands County Hospice House will be a tangible example of Good Shepherd Hospice’s mission to provide outstanding hospice and palliative care in our communities.”

In August 2008, the state approved Good Shepherd Hospice’s certificate of need application to build the Hospice House. Since then, the organization has completed the purchase of the property, selected Stevens Construction as its contractor, gained city and county approval and finalized architectural plans for the Hospice House. Good Shepherd Hospice anticipates that construction will take approximately one year.

Funding for the new Hospice House will come from financing of the project and community donations. “The need for a stand-alone Hospice House in

Highlands County is so great we couldn't wait," said McIntyre. "Good Shepherd Hospice knows that we have a great deal of support for this project. The finished Hospice House will be a testament to the community's dedication, and we are grateful for their help in every step of the process."

When it opens, the Good Shepherd Hospice House will be an acute care, inpatient facility that is specifically designed to address the requirements and requests of patients facing the end of life. Healthcare professionals will provide pain management, symptom control and medical procedures in a safe, home-like setting where families and friends are encouraged to visit.

According to attorney Jim McCollum, a long-time Good Shepherd Hospice supporter, people might be unfamiliar with the concept of a Hospice House but truly come to appreciate its value when a loved one is facing a life-limiting illness. "Currently, if patients require this type of care, they must travel nearly 50 miles to access the nearest Hospice House, the Good Shepherd Hospice George C. Forsythe Hospice House in Auburndale," said McCollum. "Families are reluctant to transport medically fragile patients such a distance and don't want their loved ones so far from home. Terminally ill patients now will have the opportunity to receive care, specific to their unique needs in a serene setting that's close to home."

The philosophy surrounding hospice care is to focus on the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of patients and families as they face the challenges of end-of-life issues. Good Shepherd Hospice healthcare professionals and trained volunteers deliver a vast majority of this care in patients' home, whether that is a private residence, an assisted living facility or a nursing home. However, between 40 to 60 percent of terminally ill patients require some type of inpatient care during the course of their hospice experience. A Hospice House setting permits hospice professionals to address patients' health issues or concerns without patients having to undergo unnecessary – and unwanted – tests and treatments.

The Good Shepherd Hospice House will be built in an old-Florida style that includes private rooms with private baths, comfortable beds and sofa sleepers for family members to stay with patients. The new facility will also feature:

- Spacious common areas
- Screened lanais
- A spiritual retreat room
- Family laundry facilities
- A play area for children
- Computer terminals with Internet access
- State-of-the-art commercial kitchen

“The state of Florida does not require Good Shepherd Hospice to make hospice house-type care available as a necessity for our license,” added McIntyre. “But in Auburndale, we have seen the remarkable benefits a Hospice House setting can provide our patients’ quality of life, and we are committed for this community to have this type of care available and nearby.”

The finished building will also house the Good Shepherd Hospice Community Resource Center, which is “home-base” for the interdisciplinary teams that provide care for patients across Highlands, Hardee and Polk counties. The center will also have additional space for staff meetings, volunteer training and bereavement support groups.

About Good Shepherd Hospice

Good Shepherd Hospice is a community-based, not-for-profit organization that supports and serves more than 700 patients each day in Polk, Highlands and Hardee counties as they face the challenges of life-limiting illnesses. Healthcare professionals and trained volunteers embrace the Good Shepherd Hospice mission to make the most of life by relieving the suffering of patients and their families affected by end-of-life issues. The organization has been a part of the community since 1979 and is a 2008 recipient of a Circle of Life Citation of Honor Award. Good Shepherd Hospice is the only local agency offering hospice programs accredited by the Joint Commission, the nation’s premier healthcare accrediting body. The United Way of Central Florida partially funds the community programs offered by Good Shepherd Hospice. For more information, please visit the website at www.goodshepherdhospice.org

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An artist’s rendering of the future Highlands County Hospice House.