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A weekly splash of color

Kindness in bloom

Flower shop's leftovers cheer hospice patients

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

CIRCLEVILLE, Ohio -- Every Monday, two volunteers at Berger Hospice Care spend their afternoon turning one florist's trash into treasure.

Plucking from buckets of week-old flowers, Linda Keller and Rosemary Crabtree artfully arrange coffee-mug bouquets for each of the hospice's 14 patients.

Yesterday, inside an office-turned-workshop, the women snipped and mixed an array of fall-colored daisies, mums, lilies and sprigs of leatherleaf into cheerful creations.

The donated flowers are a small luxury that brightens moods, even when the outlook is far from optimistic.

"I enjoy doing it for the patients," Crabtree said.

"Their days are numbered, and they really enjoy



ERIC ALBRECHT dispatch photos

With flowers in hand, Rosemary Crabtree visits Mabel Harrison, a 92-year-old Circleville woman with terminal cancer. Every Monday, Crabtree and fellow Berger Hospice Care volunteer Linda Keller make bouquets and deliver them to the hospice's 14 patients.

the flowers."

The deliveries give hospice volunteers an excuse to visit with patients, some of whom are independent or prefer to be alone, said Jill Landis, a medical social worker with the nonprofit hospice, a department of Berger Hospital.

The program began about a year ago, after a couple of volunteers read about a similar program in North Carolina that provided patients with freshly picked garden flowers every month.

"It just goes with us being a little hospice," Landis said. "We couldn't do this if we had 50 people."

Crabtree delivered a mug of orange and yellow daisies yesterday to 92-year-old Mabel Harrison, a terminal cancer patient. She moved a teacup filled with lilac-hued mini carnations, alstroemeria and daisies that she brought last week to the kitchen table, and displayed the new mug of flowers in the living room.

"It's beautiful," Harrison said of the new bouquet.

When Crabtree told her that she looked beautiful, Harrison joked, "You need glasses."

"She always has a smile," Crabtree said.

At noon on Mondays, a delivery van from Annie & Friends Flowers and Gifts in nearby Ashville drops off the flowers to the hospice office, where Keller and Crabtree work their magic.

"We clean our coolers every Monday, and you hate to throw things away," said Cheryl Wheeler, who owns the flower shop. "I won't sell things that are older, but



Annie & Friends Flowers and Gifts of Ashville donates the flowers, which are too old to sell but still full of life.

they're just too nice to throw away."

Some of the lilies she sent yesterday were so fresh they still had buds on them.

Wheeler had first considered giving her leftover flowers to a nursing home, but that was before Crabtree asked her to help out the hospice patients.

"I just like to see them go to somebody that can appreciate them," Wheeler said.

And she knows the recipients do. She has received thank-you notes from some of the patients and their families.

The flower varieties vary each week, depending on what Wheeler has left over, so Crabtree said she usually doesn't pay too much attention to the colors she sends each patient.

But after receiving yellow sprays three weeks in a row, one man said he'd like another color.

They took note and, the next week, sent him purple instead.

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