

Reunited and It Feels So Good - Families reconnect at facility's 'hugging station'

By Sarah Cavacini scavacini@palatkadailynews.com October 17, 2020 Publication: Palatka Daily News (FL) Page: A1 Word Count: 769

Whispers of "I love you" and plastic-protected hugs were how one couple celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary Friday at a Palatka nursing home.

William Hines wasn't able to celebrate the moment with Ann Hines, a resident of Windsor Care & Rehab, on July 7, their actual anniversary date, but he said seeing his best friend and life partner for the first time in months brought tears to his eyes.

"She's my everything," William Hines said.

Under state law, long-term care facilities, such as nursing homes and hospitals couldn't have visitors from March through September because of the coronavirus pandemic. Windsor Care and Community Hospice & Palliative Care teamed up to bring families back together Friday.

Employees set up a "hugging station" on Windsor Care's front patio, where residents could reach through a plastic sheet wearing arm-length gloves to hold loved ones once again.

William Hines pressed his face against the plastic separating him from his wife, who he used to see two or three times a day before coronavirus. He reached through and handed her two Payday candy bars – Ann Hines' favorite treat.

"Honey," Ann Hines said describing her husband.

Windsor Care, which was formerly Crestwood Nursing Center, changed ownership at the beginning of the month. The Florida Agency for Health Care Administration required the change after reports of patient mistreatment and nursing problems.

Bruce McCorkle, administrator of Windsor Care, 501 S. Palm Ave., joined the new staff and said last week the facility is headed in a more positive direction. Being in health services for more than 30 years, McCorkle said seeing families reunite Friday was wonderful.

He said he knows how hard it is for families to be apart during the pandemic and was glad the facility could help reunite residents.

"(For) the family to be able to see family and give them a hug even with the restrictions is wonderful," McCorkle said.

John Dix drove from Welaka to see his sister, Wendy Wilkinson, for the first time in more than two months. He took his sister sugar-free cookies and held her hands as they caught up on life.

"It was great to see her. It's been a long time," Dix said.

Billie Adkins, Community Hospice's regional director for North Central Florida, said it was a privilege to host reunions such as the one at Windsor. She said Community Hospice is all about connecting families and loved facilitating new memories Friday.

"We just had to find a way," Adkins said. "... Love has legs and we're going to make it come to life."

Visitors were not allowed inside the facility because Windsor Care reported eight coronavirus-positive residents and five positive employees as of Thursday. McCorkle said residents are improving and he hopes to have families back to visit as soon as possible.

Facility resident Burcell Donoho, who turns 99 on Oct. 25, had a large party who wanted to see him. Seven family members came to hug him through the plastic divider.

For son Jim Donoho, it had been five months since seeing his father face-to-face. Although he didn't get to do their usual activity, playing blackjack, Jim Donoho said it meant a lot to see his father.

"I'd do anything to keep seeing him," Jim Donoho said.

As Burcell Donoho cracked jokes with each family member, his granddaughter, Julie Byers, brought her grandfather in as tight as she could for a hug. Through tears, she described Burcell Donoho as the soul of the family, saying she gets her sarcasm and humor from him and wouldn't know what to do without her grandfather.

"He's the light of our family," Byers said.

Copyright 2020 by Palatka Daily News -all rights reserved.