



Benton
Hospice
Service

A PASSION FOR HOSPICE

Caring Times, Fall 2004
By Marie Oliver

It was 1979 when Dave Connell first heard the word *hospice*.

“Someone came to me and said, ‘Hospice needs a lawyer,’ ” recalls Dave. “And I said, ‘Hospice? What’s hospice? I don’t know what that word is.’ ”

What he learned about hospice intrigued him, so he attended the first organizational meeting of Benton Hospice Service, led by Dave and Jean Kliewer. Dave was an oncologist at the Corvallis Clinic and Jean was a registered nurse. The Kliewers had been “doing hospice” on their own for some time without benefit of an organization to support them. He says the Kliewers’ dedication is what initially attracted him. “After getting to know Dave and Jean Kliewer and hearing their passion—that fire caught on with me,” says Dave. And that passion has never wavered.

Dave prepared the legal documents to incorporate Benton Hospice Service and helped to make key decisions that gave the organization a firm footing in Corvallis. “Those were the best of times and the worst of times,” he says of the early days. “It was the best of times because it was new and exciting and everyone was dedicated. But it was a challenge to get an organization started and to find its niche.” The organization struggled financially for the first few years until Medicare funding became available. “We wanted to earn Medicare certification in order to expand the number of services we could provide,” he explains.

As a co-founder of the organization, Dave has been responsible for setting the parameters that have enabled hospice to operate in a manner that is legal, effective, and fiscally and organizationally responsible. He is the only hospice board member who has served on the Board of Directors for three six-year terms.

Throughout Dave’s 18 years on the board, until his appointment as a Benton County Circuit Court judge in August 2004, he has provided pro bono legal counsel for the organization as well as for occasional homebound patients. He has guided the organization through ethical and legal dilemmas such as the implications of physician assisted suicide.

“Dave has been an extraordinarily available advisor,” says Lucy Noone, executive director of Benton Hospice Service. “That hospice is a personal priority for him is always evident. He occasionally laughs and says, ‘Now remind me again why I always call you back before my paying clients?’ Dave honors his commitments, and he has made a commitment to hospice.”

Since becoming a judge this past August, Dave is no longer allowed to offer legal advice. As someone who has practiced law in Corvallis for 30 years, he finds that “a very odd thing.” Dave’s term on the board ends in November. Because of the term limits he wrote into the bylaws at the time of incorporation, he must step down from board membership, at least for a time.

“It’s been a real pleasure being associated with hospice all these years because the people I’ve met are wonderful,” says Dave. “I’ve worked with other organizations over the years, but my heart has always been with hospice.”

Dave says he used to have a plaque of appreciation from Benton Hospice Service hanging on the wall of his law office (it now hangs in his judge’s chambers). That plaque has elicited numerous stories from people about their positive experiences with hospice.

“Hospice has a direct positive impact on people’s lives,” he says. “It’s not theory, it’s hands-on direct. The people are so thankful that hospice was there to help the family out, and they express that. Hospice makes a difference every single day in Benton County. That’s what keeps people enthusiastic about it and supporting it: every day they’re doing wonderful things in the community.”

Dave emphasizes how impressed he is with those who work for hospice. “It’s emotionally tough work,” he says. “We have a dedicated, hardworking staff. You can’t over-emphasize their dedication because of the circumstances they work under. I think being a judge is easy compared to that.” That’s saying something, since Dave’s new position has him working 16-hour weekdays and many hours on weekends.

Even though he must soon leave the board, Dave says hospice probably hasn’t seen the last of him. “I may still wander over to hospice events,” he says. “I’m going to miss it—I’ll miss the people a lot.”