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Regional Hospice is a calling

Michael Kling

Published 1:00 am, Saturday, September 13, 2014



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Regional Hospice and Home Care CEO Cynthia Roy walks through their new building which is under construction at 30 Milestone Road in Danbury. Regional Hospice and Home Care was named a Top Workplace in Hearst Connecticut's fourth annual survey. Photo: Autumn Driscoll Buy this photo



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dying would be depressing. Instead, employees at the Regional Hospice and Home Care of Western Connecticut find their work hopeful and inspirational, says Cynthia Roy, the Danbury-based nonprofit's president and CEO.

Something about working with them, especially children, reveals a "clarity about life," she said. "We learn a lot more from patients and families than what we teach them."

It takes a special kind of person to work at the hospice, named third in the Top Workplaces small-business category in its third consecutive time on the list. Most importantly, they must be comfortable with death and dying, Roy said. Believing their work is a calling, many nurses say they've always wanted to do this kind of work. "A lot of people really have a gift for working with the dying."

"First and foremost," she added, "employees that self-select themselves have got to be comfortable with their own thoughts of life and death." Many employees previously worked at nursing homes, caring for the very sick. Typically, they've seen a sibling or parent die.

"If you've been through that experience, it changes your life outlook," she said. "You become a stronger person." Nurses often previously worked in intensive care units or emergency rooms. They also tend to be more mature in their careers, as opposed to new graduates.

Many of its patients are children -- the hospice has no age restrictions on patients it serves and has even counseled parents of babies expected to die at birth.

"You have to be a certain kind of person to care for a 4-year-old who's dying," she said. "Those

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are some of our best nurses."

Although caring for people who are dying is difficult, the hospice has little turnover in its clinical staff because of its positive, supportive environment, according to Roy. The nonprofit strives to support its staff by providing social events, team-building opportunities and special recognition.

A therapist regularly visits the hospice every six weeks to offer relaxation techniques like meditation, guided imagery, yoga and deep-breathing exercises that help employees unwind and work through their emotions.

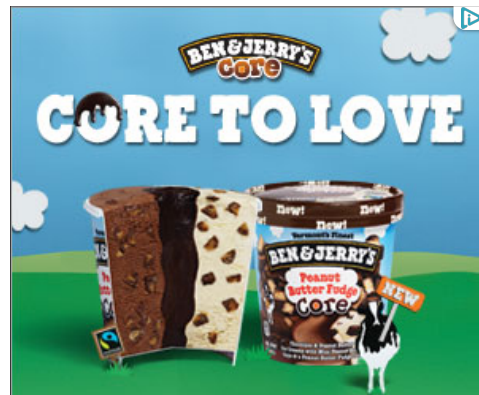
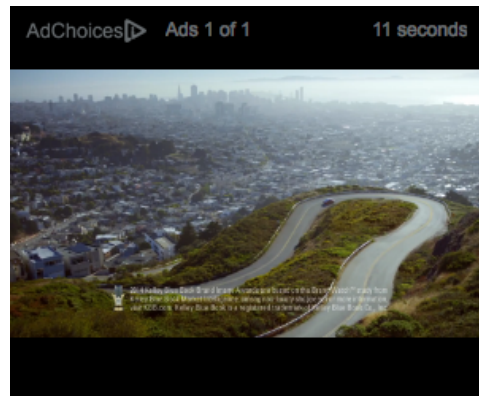
The nonprofit also offers tuition reimbursement and recognizes outstanding employees through its Reward Our Wonderful Employee program, as well as other, smaller awards.



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The hospice now serves patients living at home or in nursing homes or assisted-living facilities as well as families visiting its bereavement center. But it plans to open the state's first private-room hospice at 30 Milestone Road in Danbury by the end of the year. With living rooms and other home-like amenities, it will be the first in the state to provide hospice care in a residential setting. More than 1,000 patients are expected to come to the new 36,000-square-foot hospice where they will be helped by more than 100 certified caregivers. Its offices and bereavement center will move into the building, bringing all services under one roof.

"We're getting a lot of recognition because it's a best-practices model," Roy said. "We're the only one where everything is under one umbrella."

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