

## Debra's Story

"I love everyone; but I don't like everyone." These were the first words Debra spoke to Nancy Hanahan, manager of volunteer services for Silverado Hospice. At 56, Debra was a unique member of the Silverado Senior Living community in Encinitas, CA. She moved into the community because she suffered from COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) and although she had no dementia, she needed the personal, physical and emotional care provided by Silverado's team. When she was admitted to Silverado Hospice, she was angry and skeptical. A former TV anchorwoman, flight attendant and social activist married for 21 years, Debra was deeply resentful of the condition that was taking her life away. She filled her room with elegant furnishings, wore beautiful clothes, but kept her door closed all the time. She fired her Silverado At Home caregivers and made hurtful remarks to young Hospice volunteers. Yet the Silverado team continued to show her their most compassionate consideration.

One by one, Silverado associates from Hospice, At Home and the Encinitas community gained her trust and turned her attitude from hostility into acceptance and love. They became her extended family. They learned about her special

needs and were determined to make her feel safe and comfortable. After a few weeks, Debra had turned a corner. She decided she wanted to have a "victory party" with a peaches theme. She invited her Silverado team to join the party in her room. Silverado's Hospice Case Manager, social worker, chaplain and Nancy prepared dishes and desserts featuring peaches and decorated Debra's room. At the end of the party, Debra exclaimed, "I've never felt more loved in my life."

Debra shared with Nancy about her work with the homeless. She believed she was supposed to serve humanity and that she had about a year to do her work. As time passed and she became weaker and shorter of breath, she finally began to talk about her impending death. One of the first things she decided to do to prepare for it was to give most of her personal belongings to the Alpha Project, a homeless advocacy group. She asked that a magnolia tree be planted on the grounds of Silverado Encinitas in her memory. "When the wind blows and the leaves flutter, it will be me waving at all of you from heaven," she told Nancy.

Four months later, Debra passed, with her husband and Hospice nurse at her bedside. Silverado planned a memorial service for her. On a



Debra's tree at Silverado Encinitas

beautiful and sunny winter afternoon, 25 people gathered in the gardens near the Encinitas community's gazebo; some were family and some were Silverado family. And everyone had been touched by Debra's strength and beauty. They planted the magnolia tree, everyone taking a shovel to place dirt around its base. Finally, they watched as the wind came up causing the tree leaves to flutter. Debra "waved," as she had promised, and everyone felt comforted knowing they had given LIFE to a very special person.

*We give LIFE to those we serve*

*Love • Innovation • Family • Engagement*