

Flowers help deal with life's hard times

Blooms benefit hospices, home

By **Cynthia Schultz**
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The beginning of 2006 was a low point in Mary Fletcher's life.

She struggled with the loss of her mother and two beloved pets, and those who cared about her wondered how to lift her spirits.

Then a neighbor showed her a magazine article about a Greensboro, N.C., florist who donated flowers to a hospice unit.

"I just love flowers — roses in particular," said Fletcher, 58, who lives in Louisville and is a member of the Louisville Rose Society.

Fletcher's sister, who lives in Raleigh, N.C., sent her another article about a similar flower project there.

"One thing led to the other," said Fletcher, who by last August was checking with the hospice units of hospitals and with funeral homes to see if there was interest in starting a similar project in this area.

After getting positive feedback, Fletcher called on longtime friend Donna Norman, 58, of New Albany, Ind., and The Flower Buds was born.

"Donna came up with The Flower Buds," Fletcher said of the name of the volunteer group that meets each Monday at Third Lutheran Church in Louisville to arrange bouquets.



By Kylene Lloyd, The Courier-Journal

Mary Fletcher was fighting depression when she helped start The Flower Buds to encourage hospice patients and children.

The flowers are donated and picked up from retail and wholesale florists, Kroger, and from funeral homes when the families of the deceased want to donate flowers from services. Some fresh-cut flowers also come from individuals' gardens.

After three or four hours of rearranging the flowers, 45 bouquets are delivered to the hospice units of two Louisville hospitals and one in La Grange. Bouquets displayed in plastic buckets and sand pails are sent to the Home of the Innocents in Louisville to put on the dining room tables for the children.

For several months, Fletcher and Norman ran the operation with the help of a woman who delivered the flowers. Now The Flower Buds has 23 volunteers, all of whom have different roles. Some arrange flowers; others pick them up or deliver them.

Fletcher, meanwhile, went from someone in despair to a woman who found a way not only to lift her spirits but those of others.

"It's a God thing," she said.

Fletcher knew The Flower Buds was meant to be when she learned from a hospice nurse the impact a bouquet of carnations had on the daughter of a woman who had died.

"Her father brought her mother carnations," Fletcher

said. "Yep, we are supposed to be here."

Norman said she is struck by the beauty of the flowers each week when she arrives at the church.

"When you walk into the basement, it takes your breath away," she said. "... We are doing something to promote goodwill in a world that is so full of tragedy and fear."

Sandy Frederick, director of the 12-bed hospice unit at Baptist Hospital Northeast in La Grange, said the flowers add a lot. "We make every attempt to make the rooms homey, light and bright," she said.

Gordon Brown, president of Home of the Innocents, said the goal is to provide a home-like environment for children who are there because of traumatic events.

"Obviously with fresh flowers, it softens the environment and helps us with that goal. ... We are grateful to The Flower Buds for making that happen," Brown said.

Fletcher envisions expanding the effort.

"We would like to tap into banquets and weddings" to recycle flowers, she said.

But more volunteers are needed, she said.

To find out more about The Flower Buds or to volunteer, call (502) 291-0860.