

Philanthropy beat: A holiday treat for hospice patients

Article by: Jean Hopfensperger , Star Tribune

Updated: December 5, 2011 - 5:37 PM

Terminally ill patients and their families typically can have a tough time over the holidays. But a "Lights & Limo" program offered by a Twin Cities hospice program has been helping to brighten the season for them.

For the fourth year, Minnesotans who are fragile and in failing health are stepping into limousines with their families and touring the glittering lights of the city.

For those who can't get into a limo, colorfully decorated buses are also available for tours.

Nearly 500 patients and family members from Hospice of the Twin Cities joined the tour last year.

"It had an interesting start," said Linda Debner, of Hospice of the Twin Cities, the Plymouth-based organization behind the service.

"The daughter of one of our patients was deciding how to make memories for her family. She thought of renting a limousine, bringing in her nieces, having champagne and treats, and having a light

tour."

It was a magical evening. After her mother died, the daughter approached the executive director of Hospice of the Twin Cities about doing the same for others, she said.

"It was a no-brainer," Debner laughed.

Seven limousine companies donated cars and drivers that first year. Volunteers made lap blankets for patients. A photographer documented the night. A caregiver went along to deal with any medical issues.

It was a huge success, Debner said. The second year, the Transit Team, a Minneapolis-based transportation service for people with disabilities, donated two buses so people in wheelchairs could participate. Suddenly, nearly 500 patients and their families were cruising in limos and buses, enjoying a simple pleasure of Christmas.

The service is available for Hospice of the Twin Cities patients only. It runs from Thanksgiving to Dec. 15.

The nonprofit also is sponsoring a holiday concert at the Mall of America on Dec. 18 at 4 p.m., where visitors can stop by and learn about the program.

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