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Intelligencer

Steel
July 10/04
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Sheryl Bakewell spent many precious moments with her dad during his last days: holding his hand ... treasuring each spoken word between them.

She vowed to help others going through life's final journey.

"That was a very fulfilling experience and I saw the need to help people at this most vulnerable time," said the 55-year-old Rednersville Road resident.

So the former certified medical secretary became a Hospice Quinte palliative care volunteer shortly after moving to the Quinte area in the spring of 2000. She has since assisted 10 terminally ill clients — ranging in age from 39 to the mid-80s — and their families.

Bakewell contributed 300 client care hours last year — the highest single year total ever by a Hospice Quinte volunteer. The United Way agency's 87 client care volunteers provided more than 4,000 hours of care to 99 clients during 2003-04.

Bakewell's dedication to the dying and their families has earned her Volunteer of the Year laurels for 2004. The announcement was made during Hospice Quinte's 20th annual volunteer appreciation dinner and general meeting held in late June.

Based upon Bakewell being recipient of the local award, she will automatically receive the June Callwood Award for Outstanding Hospice Volunteer. The former Toronto Star reporter/columnist will present the various regional recipients with their awards at the Hospice Association of Ontario's annual meeting in Alliston in mid-October.

"I am truly honoured to have received the Volunteer of the Year award and I was shocked to discover that I had put in 300 hours over the past," said Bakewell.

"I am also grateful that my interaction with these people may ease the way through their final journey."

Bakewell said clients often find it easier to talk to a hospice volunteer "as it may

relieve some of the burden that their own family already carries.

"When we meet, we both know the purpose of why I'm there and this makes it easier for the client to discuss and share their feelings."

She has spent almost two decades in the health care field after leaving a career in computers.

Born in Windsor, Bakewell was nine years old when she moved to King City with her family. After graduating from