

120 clients served each year VON Hospice in need of volunteers

A weekly visit by a VON Hospice volunteer has been a welcome relief for Jacquie Schuessele of Georgetown.

Schuessele, 25, has adrenal cancer and is the mother of an active two-year-old son, Tylor. While coping with the effects of the disease she's found it difficult to keep up with her son, and her VON Hospice volunteer Ollie Darcie, has been a real help. Darcie comes to Schuessele's home for about two hours a week and spends time with both her and her son.

"It's something I needed for myself to just keep going," said Schuessele. "She's like a friend for me. She talks and listens to me and helps out with Tylor. She senses what I need. She understands what I'm going through."

"Whatever I ask, she'll do. It's great, I know I can just focus on recovery," said Schuessele.

"They (volunteers like Darcie) are very compassionate and empathetic people," said Lori Millie, co-ordinator of the VON Hospice Volunteer Visiting Program, which serves about 120 clients a year who have life-threatening illnesses.

Volunteers, who Millie said come from all walks of life, provide emotional and practical support for the ill people, relief for caregivers, support in times of crisis, assistance in arranging community services and bereavement follow-up. They are screened to ensure they would be suitable as volunteers and take a 10-week training session before they begin to see clients.



LORI MILLIE



OLLIE DARCIE

Darcie, who has been a hospice volunteer for nine years, says it is very rewarding.

"It's just as satisfying for me as the person in need," said Darcie who was introduced to the program when her husband was dying of cancer.

Darcie, whose new husband Lou is also a hospice volunteer, said she enjoys being with children, so visiting Schuessele and her son has worked well for her.

"It's a bonding," said Darcie of her relationship with her clients. "Sometimes the bonding is instant." She said she still sees families of former clients years after her role as a volunteer is complete and thinks of them as friends.

"There's moments when you will cry with your client, it's not personal grief, it's letting them release theirs," said Darcie.

It can be tough for the volunteers knowing that many of their clients are dying.

She said she's able to separate her feelings. "Personally, I feel I've been gifted by the Lord," she said.

VON Halton Branch is currently looking for new volunteers, who can commit to three to four hours a week, for the Hospice Volunteer Visiting Program. Volunteers available through the day are especially needed. Candidates will be interviewed to ensure they are suitable.

The next 10-week training session begins Thursday, September 28 in Oakville. Anyone interested should call Millie at 1-800-387-7127 ext. 2312.

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

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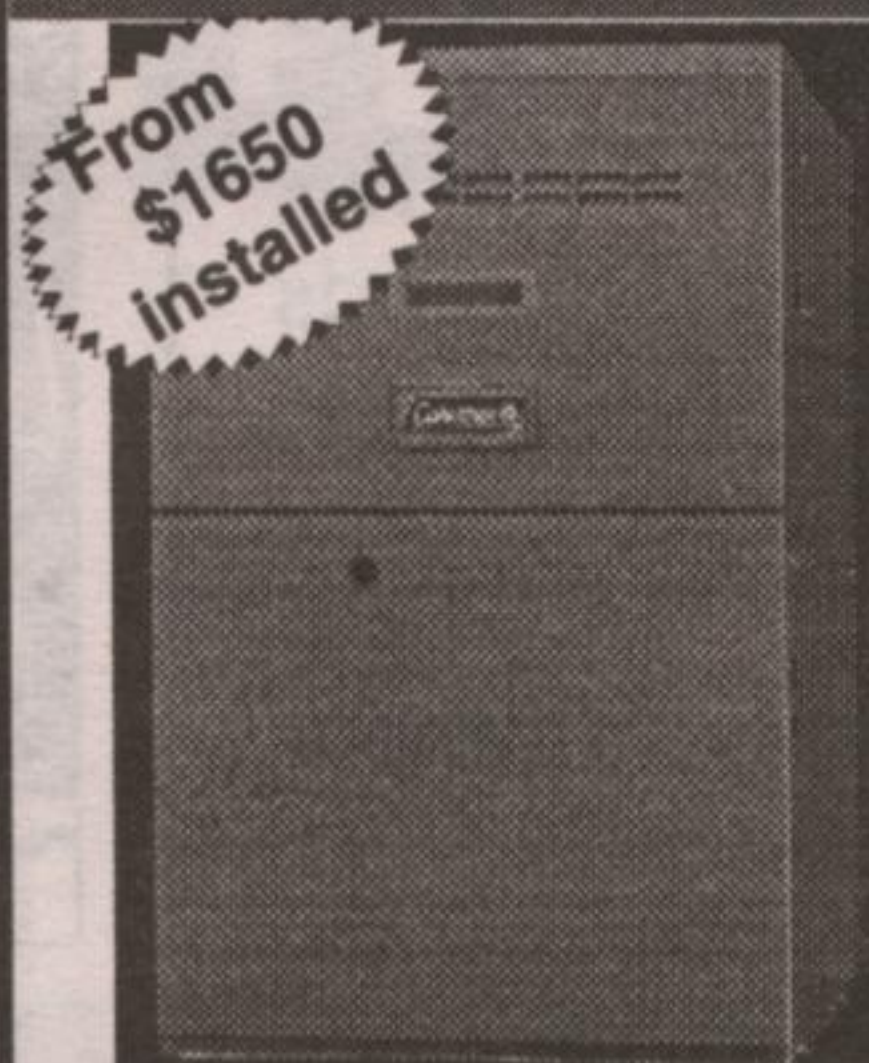
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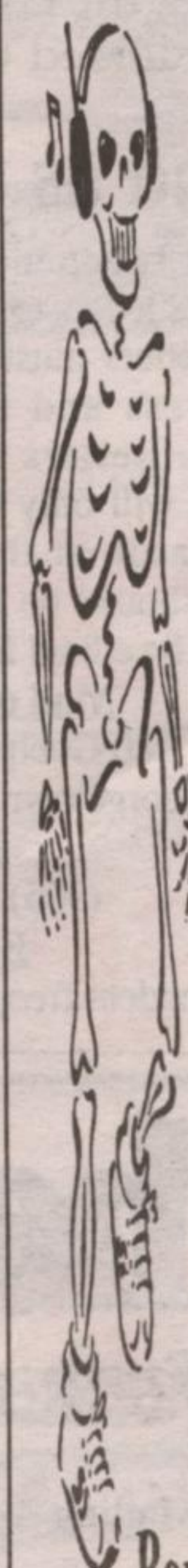
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