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Community March 6, 2009 Search Archives:

High school student strives to help others with end-of-life issues

By Sylvie Belmont belmond@theacorn.com

A young Moorpark woman is working toward establishing a free hospice home in the Conejo Valley because she believes every person should be able to face death with dignity.

Chaya Turrow and other local residents are planning to host a Friend-Raiser event in Moorpark on Fri., March 20 to introduce the concept of Our Community House of Hope, a free hospice facility that would serve residents in the entire region.

The Conejo project was founded in 2005 by a group of Conejo Valley healthcare professionals who wanted to help the growing number of terminally ill in their communities.

"The goal is to establish a loving home for isolated or lowincome individuals in the community needing care in their final days," said Chaya, a junior at Moorpark High School.

Despite her busy schedule at school and her involvement in several extracurricular activities, Chaya said, she was inspired to promote the local House of Hope effort because her mother, Kerrin Turrow, has been involved with hospice organizations for a long time, she said.

"Death is frightening for most, especially if people are alone and they don't have enough resources to pay for hospice, but caring people could make (a difference)," Chaya said. "A good death comes with proper care and a lot of love."

Even young people facing death can come to terms with it and embrace it if they have the right support, she said.

Our Community House of Hope is needed in Ventura County to serve the growing number of people dying without proper care because there are no free facilities here, said Theresa Wolf, president of the organization.

Each month, about 50 to 80 people in the area die alone at home due to the lack of affordable options in the county.

All services provided by the local hospice would be free for patients and their families. Funding would come from individuals, corporations, community groups, fundraising events, grants and foundations, Wolf said.

Chaya's use of her Miss Ventura County 2008 Outstanding Teen title to promote Our Community House of Hope has helped to raise awareness for the project, Wolf said.

"It's a cause that people don't take into consideration, but it means a lot to me," said Chaya, who received the Moorpark Chamber of Commerce's 2008 Youth of the Year award for her efforts.

The upcoming Friend-Raiser is not a checkbook event but an opportunity to enjoy food and drinks while learning about the epidemic facing seniors and others who are coming to their end of life, Chaya said.

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The House of Hope organization plans to open a small hospice in Thousand Oaks within the next few months to begin serving people in need. The operation will be expanded when funds become available for a larger facility, Turrow said.

For more information about the local House of Hope, visit www.ourhouseofhope.org. To attend the Friend-Raiser event, call Kerrin Turrow at (805) 7960820.



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