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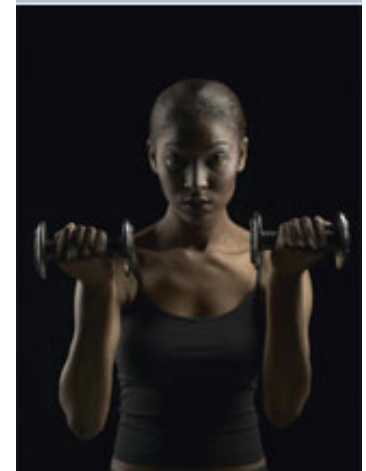
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Robin Buckson / The Detroit News

**Steven Haines, left, a patient at Arbor Hospice in Ann Arbor, has found a new mission: comforting fellow patients such as Larry Krantz.**



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**Neal Rubin**

# Sharing a cup of comfort

The ultimate hospice volunteer is a patient, too



If these people weren't supposed to die soon, they'd be somewhere else, so Steven Haines always approaches

them with care.

Nothing forced, nothing gregarious, no false cheer. Just a simple, "Would you like some company?"

Often enough, as he makes the rounds at Arbor Hospice in Ann Arbor, the answer is yes. He'll sit there in his jeans and long-sleeved shirt and the purple-printed badge that marks him as a volunteer, and at least at first, they'll talk about inconsequential things.

Hobbies. What's on television. The day's activities. The food. The tiny particles of life, not death.

Then, at some point, his shirt cuff will ride up, and whoever he's sitting with will see the yellow plastic bracelet around his wrist, and things will change. There will be an

understanding, a realization that Haines is not going home later to a family and a dog and a

future.

He *is* home. He lives here, which is to say he's dying here, in the comfortable 30-bed center with the hardwood accents, the floral borders on the walls and the plaques at the bases of the trees outside: "In loving memory of Ray Heath."

The staff at Arbor has never seen anyone like Steve Haines, a resident who has become a volunteer who has become an inspiration. And that's not just because he's still around, almost 10 months after he moved in.

Syndicated columnist Art Buchwald made news this year when he lived large in a Washington-area hospice for five months, then went home. The norm, nationally, is for 30 percent of

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hospice residents to die within a week. The median stay is 26 days.

Only 10 percent of residents live more than six months, and 10 months is rare enough that the National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization doesn't even track the figure.

In Haines' case, chalk it up to a fundamentally contrary nature. At various points in the 12 years since his heart began to malfunction, doctors have given him six months, a year and most recently three months to live. "Give me an incentive to stay alive," he says, "and I will."

What astonishes the people around him is how, at this point in his life, Haines has managed to focus outward -- and how the process has helped him get to know himself.

### **His hero always tries**

Haines will turn 52 on Monday, probably. In hospice, you can hope, but you never assume.

He's sitting in the armchair near his bed with a pillow at the base of his spine. He's tilting forward at the waist and back at the shoulders, as though his muscles were tensed; at this point, it's the most comfortable pose he can find.

It's a ship-shape room with a checkered flag bedspread and a Mark Martin banner on the wall. There's a Martin mouse pad near the computer on a side table, and behind it on the window sill, a scale model of the NASCAR driver's No. 6 Ford.

Martin has started 616 consecutive races. He has long been Haines' favorite -- not because he wins, Haines says, but because he always tries.

Haines, most recently of Howell, has short, carefully parted hair, a neat blond mustache, narrowed eyes, shaky hands, cardiomyopathy and esophageal varices. The first condition is an inflammation of the heart muscles. The second announced itself with internal bleeding and has now started to pillage his liver.

When he worked -- until the fainting and falling sent him home -- he rode herd on computers for large companies. One of the first things he did at Arbor Hospice, well before he became an official volunteer last month, was help rig the building for wireless Internet.

"When I go to get cremated," he's saying, "they'll open up my chest and take the pacemaker out."

Live on the brink as long as he has, you get blasé about that sort of thing. No one takes a pacemaker to eternity, he explains; there are too many nasty chemicals in the battery.

### **Helping out**

A doctor switched off Haines' implant with a magnet before he came to Arbor, where the non-profit's mission is to manage symptoms but not treat the causes. About the same time, another doctor told him to give up his Newports.

"Listen," said Haines, a smoker since he was 16, "am I going to die from cancer?"

No, the doctor conceded.

"Then leave me alone," Haines said -- which, indirectly, is how he became a volunteer.

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Another resident likes to go outside for a smoke, but needs an escort because he tends to fall asleep with a lit cigarette in his mouth. Haines offered to take him.

For reasons of liability and responsibility, a resident can't do that but a volunteer can.

Haines was already helping out, pushing the 2 p.m. ice-and-water cart through the facility. "We did a cost-benefit analysis," says his social worker, Richard Dutton, and decided that the emotional lift was worth the physical wear and tear.

Volunteer services coordinator Kappy Pennington put Haines through accelerated training, focusing on things like privacy, confidentiality and basic health issues. Another training session certified him in a program called By Your Side -- designed, at its base, to make sure no one dies alone.

Now, with a badge on his chest, he makes the rounds: "Would you like some company?"

Haines insists the pin is no big deal, Pennington says, "but he wears it with such pride."

### **Finding a purpose**

Haines says he has two grown sons in Troy, along with a wife from whom he is separated. "If I call them and say come out, they will," he says, "but that's a lot of mileage."

So he spends his days with the people whose days are dwindling, "getting to know them, getting them to trust me."

Again, matter-of-factly, he says he died once, one of the eight or nine times it took paddles and an electrical jolt to restart his heart; he saw nothing, felt peace, and doesn't fear going through it again.

"It's not going to be bad," he has told his new acquaintances. "It's not going to hurt." And in the telling, he's found a purpose.

"He needs something to love," says Dutton, the social worker, "something to do, something to look forward to. This is part of his legacy, that he's opened up a role no resident has done before." No resident anywhere, in fact, at least not that the national organization has heard of. Pennington marvels that Haines can sit with fading contemporaries and focus on their problems, ignoring his own. "Then," Dutton says, "he comes and talks about it: 'This is about me!'"

### **Making amends**

Yeah, Haines concedes, maybe it is.

It's about doing something valuable, and in a way, making amends for the things he didn't do before. He could have been a better husband. He could have made more time for what was important, or less time for things he now realizes weren't so vital after all.

He could have been a volunteer, back when he had a healthy heart to put into it. Then, with a clear conscience, he could have checked everything off his want-to list. Like jumping out of an airplane.

Skydiving always seemed like fun. Strap on a parachute, take that leap of faith, float to Earth. He takes a sip of water, hand shaking as he finds his lips with the straw. Maybe, he says, he'll try skydiving next summer.

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