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Hope blooms for East Walpole family

By Keith Ferguson
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Brenda Cooke is helping to change the landscape for local cancer patients — literally.

She is a landscaper who has donated her time to a nonprofit organization called Hope In Bloom, which plant & gardens in the yards of people fighting cancer.

Last Friday, Cooke, a Walpole resident, replanted gardens around the pool of breast cancer patient Lynne Bean of Ponderosa Lane.

Cooke said the flowers serve as powerful symbolic inspiration. The perennials that are planted show cancer patients that they, like new flowers, can bloom again. They encourage people to stick it out through difficult times, as the flowers do in winter, because spring is inevitable.

“Fresh cut flowers are an expression of love,” she said. “It’s a gift of life.”

Bean was diagnosed with breast cancer in December 2005. While she was being treated, a former coworker contacted Hope In Bloom about Bean.

Bean said she is “deeply grateful for (Cooke’s) willingness to donate her time.”

Bean calls herself a survivor, but she said she still, needs to make regular visits to the hospital for treatment. The new garden, she said, will surely help her continued recovery.

Cooke met with Bean about a month ago to discuss themes for the garden. After looking at catalogs and various sketches, Bean decided on a beach theme with a pink and lime green color scheme.

Cooke then went to work finding flowers and tall grasses to make the vision a reality.

Her work doesn’t stop with planting flowers.

By weeding, clearing out space in the garden, tending to window boxes, rearranging furniture and building a lattice to hide pool equipment, Cooke worked to create a “clean, brightened space to enjoy” as well.

“Plants are very therapeutic,” she explained. “When the landscaping goes astray, it affects you emotionally and psychologically.”

Straightening out a yard, she added, brings a patient “back into emotional balance.”

A yard can fall into disorder because keeping it neat is not a priority for a patient undergoing treatment.

Bean said survival was the top priority. when she was diagnosed with cancer. She only tended to the “bare necessities” of life.

Along with being weak with illness, a cancer patient tends to spend time with family and devotes financial resources to children and costly treatments.

“It’s, a family situation,” Cooke said. “It’s a home situation.”

As a cancer patient, you don’t “have time to enjoy your landscaping, let alone make it enjoyable.”



Brenda Cooke plants Zebra Grass around the pool of the Bean family’s Ponderosa Lane home.

Bean is married with three children: Lauren, 9, Danny, 11, and Steven, 13.

Hope In Bloom has given her more than just a landscaper. Bean has found a confidant in Cooke.

The landscape designer became involved with Hope in Bloom after losing her mother to breast cancer. Her mother, she said, taught her everything she knew about gardening. Cooke said it was an especially difficult time toward the end as the two looked out the window to a yard that had fallen into disarray since they had last devoted time together gardening it.

Cooke’s father is currently in a battle with cancer.

She also started a company, Gardens With Spirit (gardenswithspirit.com), that creates gardens with the aim of cultivating the mind and the soul.

Roberta Hershon started Hope in Bloom last year when she lost her best friend, also a gardener, to breast

cancer.

Fifty plus gardens have been installed, but there are more than 100 requests from all over Massachusetts to tend to.

Today, Cooke and others in the organization are looking for volunteers, especially men, to help with the landscaping and for donations to purchase flowers and plants from nurseries. Donations can be made by consulting the group’s Web site, hopeinbloom.org.

“People need to know. they can make an impact,” Cooke said. The impact they make is personal as well. Money isn’t being given to a faceless organization. Like helping the Beans in East Walpole, she said, one would be “making a donation to your neighbor.”