

WEYMOUTH NEWS

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Stephanie Veeder peers out at her mother's garden.



Kathy Agudelo pets Patches. She can see her garden out the window.

Hope blooms in a garden

By Melissa Kavanaugh
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Plants have always inspired and encouraged Weymouth resident and gardener Kathy Agudelo. When a windblown tomato seed took root in her driveway and began to grow Agudelo saw it as a sign of strength. Agudelo was later diagnosed with Stage IV breast cancer and given six months to live. That was four years ago.

Agudelo, a 57 year old mother and grandmother has been a gardener

for decades. As a single parent with several jobs, Agudelo had little spare time. Her daughter, Stephanie Veeder remembers waking up in the middle of the night to find her mother out in the yard planting by flashlight. For Agudelo gardens are more than a passion, they are a source of "energy and what helps her go on," said Veeder.

This planting season has been particularly difficult for Agudelo. Her cancer has progressed and forced her to move in with her daughter and her family. With Agudelo unable to enjoy her own garden and/or plant a new one, Veeder contacted the Newton based nonprofit Hope in Bloom.

Hope in Bloom provides five gardens at the Massachusetts homes of men and women undergoing treatment for breast cancer. Each garden is customized to fit the recipient's lifestyle, personal preferences and gardening abilities. The organization installs indoor and outdoor container and outdoor in-ground gardens. Hope in Bloom offers a soothing and colorful escape to combat the effects of radiation and chemotherapy.

A Hope in Bloom garden provides more than just beauty. According to a recent Harvard University study women who were anxious, nervous or worried, common reactions to radiation and chemotherapy were happier and perked up after looking at flowers. Other research shows the calming effects of nature increase serotonin, which boosts energy levels and helps ward off depression, another common side effect of breast cancer. In time these healing benefits elevate morals allowing recipients to be more receptive to medical intervention.

Veeder sees the joy the garden brings her mother on a daily basis. "I ask her if she wants me to turn on the TV or turn up the music but she just replies 'no, I just want to sit and watch my garden,'" said Veeder. Veeder describes Agudelo as being more "animated and alive," since the garden was installed in June. It has become a source of enjoyment and pleasure in Agudelo's life. I can see it from the minute I wake up; it helps me get on with my day," Agudelo said. "It brings, as they say, hope in bloom and that's important."

"Just like a diagnosis of cancer changes someone's life forever, Hope in Bloom has changed mine. Every time we install a garden and I see the joy on a recipient's face and later learn about their surges of inner strength (after spending time in their gardens), I know we are making a difference," said Founder Roberta Dehman Hershon.

Agudelo's life has been brightened, she was overcome with emotion when she expressed her gratitude, "I can't even put it into words; I just want people to know how much I appreciate my garden."

Local businesses rallied to help Hope in Bloom in its efforts to create Agudelo's garden. Peter Cherubini of Quincy Adams Garden Center in Weymouth donated several plants and containers. Cape Way Florist of Weymouth also contributed to the cause with a decorative planter. Thayer Nursery in Milton discounted plant material and donated flower pots to Hope in Bloom.

Hope in Bloom currently has over 100 garden requests for this season, a quarter of which are on the South Shore. The organization is seeking funding and volunteers to design and install gardens. To learn more about about Hope in Bloom or to make a tax deductible gift visit HopeinBloom.org or call 617-467-3214.