

## *True Commitment*

Can the depth of a person's commitment to people or a mission be measured? Not easily, but it is revealed in a variety of ways. For example, if a dietary manager born with diabetes ignored an infection until she could complete a state survey, and wound up losing her foot – would that show she was extraordinarily bound emotionally and intellectually to her residents and fellow workers?

You bet it would. And that was the kind of person that Becky Flynn, the dietary manager at The Oakridge Home for 12 years, was. I use the past tense of that verb because Flynn's life was tragically cut short by a cardiac arrest on Valentine's Day, February 14. Her departure on a day devoted to love was most appropriate, because her life and her career were love in action.

On April 3, Maryann Dubyoski, executive director of The Oakridge Home, and her staff conducted a memorial tribute for Flynn. It included music – *How Great Thou Art*, *On Eagles' Wings* and the ever-popular *Amazing Grace*, all performed by Bill Boomer and guests; and *Tears in Heaven*, a vocal selection by Mary Sue Ellison, director of environmental services – scripture reading by Bobbi Knoepp, director of social services, memories from co-workers, and an address by the Rev. Chuck Behrens, spiritual care coordinator of Hospice of the Western Reserve. The program drew past associates and vendors who had worked with Flynn.

The ceremony "made the family happy and put the staff at peace," Dubyoski reported.

And making people happy was what Flynn was all about. "Just as the kitchen is the heart of a home, Becky made sure that her kitchen was the heart of The Oakridge Home," Dubyoski said. "Home cooking, personal choices, hearty helpings and special treats; Becky's kitchen, Becky's meals, Becky's holidays. This is how Becky showed the residents that she loved them, and wanted them to feel dignified, whole and at home."

Flynn's commitment to the people at The Oakridge Home did not stop with the residents. Not only were residents part of her family, but so was her staff. "Becky was very gifted at welcoming the 'troubled' or 'challenging' associates into her dietary department. Once there, Becky would mold them, teach them, mentor them, always bringing out the best within each person. The results show in the loyalty and longevity of the staff – some of whom have stayed with the center for more than 23 years," Dubyoski said.

In 2001, Flynn worked through an entire state survey with an infected foot. She canceled a physician appointment so as not to abandon her duties. She never

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complained, and didn't even tell her co-workers. She achieved a deficiency-free kitchen – and then lost her foot.

Flynn served the facility as safety officer, JCAHO and OSHA contact, and worker's compensation representative. But it was in private conversations, Dubyoski said, that Flynn revealed her true passion. "I really think she would like to be remembered as an artist. An intelligent, skilled professional? She definitely was. Becky derived a lot of energy from being able to create beautiful food displays, wonderful tables, elaborate recipes, etc. She was energized by the opportunity to use her special gifts and talents to entertain and dazzle a crowd. Becky lived her whole life serving the needs of every one around her. Becky loved what she did, and she did it well.

"We are all better for having known her. We will miss her. We will always remember her. And I can confidently state that her spirit will be forever with us at The Oakridge Home," Dubyoski added.

At the end of the memorial tribute, Ken Sliva, director of maintenance, presented a memorial tree to associates. It hasn't been planted yet, because of the cold weather, but it will be placed in the ground in the backyard outside of the conference room of the rehab addition, clearly visible through the big windows.

"That way, Becky will still be part of our management team meetings," Dubyoski said.

--Beecher Hunter