

# Honoring vets runs in the family

By Carole LaMond/Staff Writer

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SUDBURY -



SUDBURY - A Marine's daughter who understands the importance of saying 'thank you' to veterans will be honored for her hospice work at Sudbury's Memorial Day ceremony.

Christina Finelli, Volunteer Coordinator at Old Colony Hospice in Randolph, is the founder of the Volunteers for Veterans program which gives respect and comfort to dying vets by recognizing and honoring their contributions.

Finelli, who is a 1973 graduate of Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School and daughter of Kay and Patrick Finelli, the Memorial Day Parade Marshal, founded the program in 2004 to ensure that no veteran would die alone.

Specially-trained hospice volunteers who are veterans from all branches of the military, provide visits to dying vets. Their common service bond often triggers memories that their loved ones have never heard.

"A patient will feel more comfortable being with a comrade who has shared an experience," said Finelli. "Sometimes the family doesn't know the stories, the vet never talked about it. One vet's daughter called and said, 'Thank you, now I know what it's all about, now I understand.'"

In addition to the volunteer visits the hospice presents each veteran with an individualized

certificate which commemorates his service. Each veteran is also given a soft flannel blanket with the specific insignia of his unit.

"Most of the men say it's the first time they have been thanked," said Finelli. "Most of them cry."

Her work is supported by the Sudbury Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8871 whose sales from poppies fund the purchase of certificates and blankets.

"You don't realize the power of a poppy. Those funds provide certificates, blankets and volunteers," said Finelli. "As one of the vets said, 'It's worth a million dollars to me.' They all want to touch the patch. It brings back memories and it honors their service. The VFW understands how important that is."

"I think I do it because of my father and I understand how meaningful it is because of him," said Finelli a Stoughton resident. "We always knew how important the Marine Corps was, and we knew about his medals, and that he had been injured. He was always so proud of his service. We grew up respecting that, and respecting him, but he's the quietest darn guy when it comes to talking about what he did."

Finelli had the idea for the hospice program about the same time that her brother, also named Patrick, decided to visit the island of Peleliu where their dad had seen battle and earned a Purple Heart. He later wrote about his trip in "Worlds Away, Following My Father's World War II Footsteps."

Today the whole Finelli family supports the program. Her sister Susan Bradley even sews the patches on the blankets.

The Volunteers for Veterans program, first of its kind in Massachusetts, is now available to veterans in local VA hospitals and the project is in the process of being replicated nationally.

The VFW Post 8871 will be selling poppies at CVS in Sudbury through this weekend.