

RONNIE

by Mary Brown

Ronnie, a 48-year-old man, was a member of Gardiner Community Church for two years before we became aware that he had lung cancer. Ronnie captured the hearts of the congregation with his beautiful smile, his loving spirit and his gentle nature. When his illness became apparent, because of his unrelenting cough and weight loss, he never wanted to talk about it. When asked how he was feeling, he would always answer, "Fine."

Ronnie's family lived in a different state, so when the time came and his prognosis was *a few months*, his many friends at Gardiner Community Church became his caregivers. VHOCC was called and things were put into place for his comfort and care. Church members were scheduled for four-hour shifts and a private care-giver was hired for the night shift. Volunteers from VHOCC brought in a hospital bed and set it up in his small apartment. Oxygen was brought in. The nurses came in and set up Ronnie's meds and gave instructions to the caregivers. They told everyone involved to call them 24/7 whenever there was a question or a problem. They visited Ronnie several times a week, bringing medical supplies when needed and reevaluating his condition. Since most of Ronnie's caregiver friends had no background in the medical field, it was very reassuring to know that the hospice nurses were always available day and night to answer questions, bring supplies, or just "be there" for us.

Ronnie's voice gave out so all he could do was whisper. He never failed to whisper "*I love you*" and "*Thank you*" to every person who came to stay with him or visit him.

When Ronnie's condition deteriorated and it became impossible to continue daily shifts for the caregivers, the decision was made to transfer him to a local care center where he lived for another month. Even during this month, VHOCC nurses continued to "be there" for Ronnie and for us. After Ronnie's death, calls were made from VHOCC grief support volunteers to the caregivers, telling us that if we needed them, they were available.

Without the involvement of VHOCC, Ronnie would not have been able to stay in his home as long as he did. He continually told us how much he loved his nurses and appreciated their care and concern. Because of the professionalism and the quality of care that my friend received during his last months on earth, I have become a volunteer at VHOCC.