

February 4, 2012

Hospice Community Mourns the Loss of Mary Labyak

*HAN Founding Board Member, Chair of National Hospice Foundation
and Recipient of the 2011 Healthcare Architect Award*

The hospice community mourns the death of a trailblazing leader in the field of hospice and palliative care, Mary Labyak. Mary died peacefully at home on February 4 under the loving care of her colleagues at Suncoast Hospice where she served as President and CEO.

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, the Hospice Action Network and the National Hospice Foundation honor Mary Labyak for her service to humanity and extends condolences to all those who cared so much for her.

In recognizing Mary with the National Hospice Foundation's Healthcare Architect Award in 2011, President and CEO J. Donald Schumacher said, "It's difficult for me to think about advancement and innovation in this field without thinking of Mary. When we all began working to improve care for the dying in this country, decades ago, we were facing challenges that seemed insurmountable. During those daunting yet hopeful days, there was a woman whose courage, passion and dedication inspired many of us – and that was Mary Labyak."

Throughout her career Mary's passion and skill were greatly admired and she graciously shared her expertise and knowledge openly with others throughout the field. As a teacher, a leader and a tireless advocate, Mary was admired by her peers, supported in her community and loved by many.

Mary's professional background was in social work where her skills as a patient advocate helped inform her future life's work. In 1977, a time when hospice was still considered an innovative, grassroots movement, Mary began her work with a small hospice organization in Florida as a volunteer. By 1980 she was the leader of the program that grew into Suncoast Hospice, one of the most recognized and respected end-of-life care organizations in the country. Under her leadership, Suncoast Hospice became an agent of change for the advancement of end-of-life care in the nation. And throughout her career, Mary emphasized the need to keep the patient and family as the most important aspect of this work.

Under Mary's leadership, Suncoast Hospice has led innovation in the field of end-of-life care. From caring for people with HIV/AIDS in the early stages of the pandemic, to developing a highly specialized pediatric palliative care program, to reaching out to communities underutilizing hospice care, Mary was committed to compassionately caring for all individuals who might benefit from the care hospice provides. From partnering with the department of public health to create a mobile health clinic, to developing a robust and award-winning teen volunteer program, Suncoast Hospice has often charted new courses in previously uncharted seas.

"Of the many skilled and accomplished leaders in our field, Mary rises to the top for her longstanding commitment to end-of-life care. The numerous innovations she has implemented in her own program make Suncoast Hospice one of the most admired hospices in the country," added Schumacher.

Labyak's leadership extends to the national level. In 2007, Mary was among the hospice community leaders that helped found the Alliance for Care at the End of Life, now the NHPCO Hospice Action Network. At the time of her death, in addition to her spot on the HAN Board of Directors, she was the chair of the NHF board of trustees and co-chair of the Capital Campaign for the National Center for Care at the End of Life. In the past, she

chaired NHPCO's board of directors and has served on many NHPCO committees and task forces – including the Public Policy Committee.

“Her work demonstrates that you can be creative and innovative, taking programs in new directions and be successful,” reflected Schumacher.

She is a recipient of the NHF Healthcare Architect Award, the Heart of Hospice Award presented by NHPCO's National Council of Hospice and Palliative Professionals, and the NHPCO President's Award given to Mary and the entire Suncoast staff for their dedication and commitment throughout the Schiavo media focus.

“On behalf of NHPCO, HAN, NHF, our boards and affiliate organizations, I extend my sympathies to all those who are grieving the loss of this innovative leader – and dear friend,” Schumacher said.

As part of NHPCO's Legacy Project, Mary shared the following thoughts:

I think hospice is the greatest single honor that has ever occurred in my life. To have the opportunity to be a part of building something that makes such a difference to society. And I think what is really important is that hospice is a dream that's come true, and a dream that's grown beyond all of our expectations.

In terms of values, it's a dream that didn't come out of academia, it didn't come out of research, it didn't come out of organized medicine. It was the dream of people themselves that had lost a loved one and simply wanted to reach out and see if they could make that path different for others. And it was above all about human dignity, no matter how long life was.

And I think it has grown so much not because we were smart in building it, but because we had the capacity to listen to what our patients and communities needed and to build that for them.

- Mary Labyak



NHPCO would like to share some of Mary's remarks when she received the Healthcare Architect Award in April 2011.

http://youtu.be/Oq_FVXwfGMs

Suncoast Hospice has created a legacy page online in Mary's honor. To learn more about Mary or leave a message in her memory book, please visit the [Suncoast Hospice legacy page](#). A service in celebration of Mary's life will be Saturday, February 18, at 10 a.m., Ruth Eckerd Hall, 1111 McMullen Booth Rd., Clearwater, FL.