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New CAP-aided, locally-produced documentary examines Hospice

"Beets and Beans: Living and Dying with Hospice," a locally produced documentary, will premiere Thursday, Jan. 27 at Cinemapolis.

The brainchild of filmmaker Sue Perlgut, of Ithaca's CloseToHome Productions, "Beets and Beans" examines the lives of patients, family members and caregivers at Hospicare and Palliative Care Services of Tompkins County as well as at Providence Hospice, a pediatric facility in Seattle, Wash.

Perlmut was inspired to do the film after her parents' experience with hospice care. "It was great for my mother," she said. "I was there for last two weeks of her life. My father and I were taking care of her, with the help of a hospice volunteer and some other people. It was such an amazing experience that I always wanted to give back. But I never felt ready, never felt I could be that volunteer that was sitting in my parents' house. That's why the idea of a movie came to me."

She worked with film editor Nils Hoover, a recent grad of Ithaca College, and director of photography Christopher Julian, with whom she had worked with on a previous film project, "101 Ways to Retire - Or Not!" (Julian now lives in Seattle, where he was able to shoot the scenes with the patients from Providence Hospice.)

They started working on the film in 2007; their first interview was with Nina K. Miller, who had just announced her retirement as executive director of Hospicare. Over the next couple of years, they interviewed several patients, their family members and several caregivers at the facility on East King Road in the Town of Ithaca.

Perlmut herself is featured in the documentary at one point; her stint as a volunteer at Hospicare doesn't go quite as expected. Miller is also interviewed again, after her husband unexpectedly becomes a patient at the facility now named in Miller's honor. And several patients, who range in age from very young to elderly, also give their thoughts on their hospice experience.

"With hospice, people often come for the last couple of weeks or even days of their life," Perlmut said. "So we were never able to film someone at the beginning of their journey to the end. That was a challenge for us."

A 2010 recipient of a \$1,000 Community Arts Partnership (CAP) grant from the Fellowships for Artists program, Perlmut also obtained support from many other sources, including the



Ithaca-based filmmaker Sue Perlmut in her home, sitting in the room where she conducts many of the interviews that wind up in her projects. Perlmut was the recipient of a \$1,000 grant from the Community Arts Partnership, which helped fund the project, in addition to funding from the Park Foundation, the Legacy Foundation, the Hospicare Foundation, Ithaca Rotary and several individuals. (Photo by Rachel Philipson)

Park Foundation, the Legacy Foundation, the Hospicare Foundation, Ithaca Rotary and several individuals. "This community has supported me so beautifully," she said.

The DVD also includes a special feature that compiles scenes from "Peaches and Bird," an original play by local author Carol Kammen. "Carol has written many plays, and I've directed most of them," Perlmut said. "She had a friend who was diagnosed with lung cancer and died. They had hospice, and Carol was one of the caretakers. After her friend died, Carol wrote this one-woman play about the experience of taking care of a friend. We did the play at the Kitchen Theatre in the mid-90s with Leigh Keeley, and we filmed it. In the special feature, Carol talks about writing the play, and we show some of the scenes of the play. I think it's very moving."

Perlmut hopes that her documentary will bring more attention to hospice. "It

does make the quality of life better for everyone concerned in the end," she said. "I'm hoping that since it's a half-hour film, that the DVD would be something that hospices could hand out to people who want to learn more."

Cinemapolis will host two showings of the film, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., on Thursday, Jan. 27. The event will feature a showing of the film, a talkback with Perlmut and Hospicare staff members, and a screening of the "Peaches and Bird" special feature.

Tickets will be available at the door, with a suggested donation of \$10. For more information, visit www.BeetsAndBeans.com or www.CloseToHomeProductions.com. ■

— JIM CATALANO