REALTORS ON CALL

MELANIE RICE
GUEST COLUMNIST

A Realtor's story of giving

As a Realtor serving the community and building a business from that community, I feel a need to give back, as do my peers. And from my experience, Realtors are a generous group, both corporately and individually.

But there are times when we shed our work titles and give back as individuals without thought to how it might help us build our business or generate a referral.

I had that opportunity years ago and continue it today.

All of us have been affected by cancer in some way – as a survivor or as the friend of someone who has suffered this disease – too often with tragic outcomes.

Certainly, there are great organizations with a high national profile doing great work, like the Susan G. Komenfor the Cure. But what I've discovered is that individuals can have an impact, too. The scope and scale are not as important as simply getting involved and knowing you've contributed.

About 13 years ago, my friend, Buff Taylor Koch, passed away from breast cancer. She was a 41-year-young mother of two small children. I built a garden called Buff's Garden, located at the 47th Street public access to the beach. The garden has had a very quiet, but profound, effect on the community. This special spot is in honor and in memory of those who have fought their battle with cancer.

I formed the Buff Foundation, for which I serve as executive director, along with five board members and a steering committee. Our foundation not only maintains Buff's Garden, but also administers a scholarship fund to provide school supplies to children whose lives have been touched by cancer.

To provide a way for people to honor the memory of loved ones and to raise the money necessary to maintain the garden, we sell engraved bricks that form the walkway through the garden.

Twice a year, in April and October, we have a "Blessing of the Bricks" at the site prior to their installation.

We also reach out to teenage girls in the area with a DVD, entitled, "The Real Deal: The Truth About Breast Cancer." We produced this Parent's Choice award-winning DVD in conjunction with Coastal Technologies. We spread the word about the importance of breast cancer awareness (self breast exams and healthy lifestyle habits), hoping to capture their attention at an early age.

More and more young women are being diagnosed, so our goal is to get the word out early.

We have donated our video to many high schools across the nation. We may be small, but we are spreading an important message.

The garden is a most peaceful place to reflect on the circle of life. So next time you are planning a day to enjoy the Virginia Beach Oceanfront, please consider taking a walk down this beautiful path to to the sea. I hope you will visit and help plant the seeds of awareness.

For more information on Buff's Garden and how to support it, please visit www.buffsgarden.com.

Realtor Melanie Rice is an accredited buyer's representative and senior real estate specialist with William E. Wood & Associates's Oceanfront Office. She is also a former president of the Beacon Circle of the Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters and is a sustainer with the Junior Virginia Beach Garden Club. For more information on the Hampton Roads Realtors Association, visit www.centerforrealestate.com.