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Honored volunteer leaves a legacy of generosity

Ruth Kay Andersen, winner of the Leader of Volunteer Excellence Award, died before she could accept it

MONTPELIER — Ruth Kay Andersen, known to many in the Bear Lake Valley for her volunteer spirit, upbeat personality and beautiful soprano singing voice, will be posthumously recognized next week for the countless hours she gave to Bear Lake Memorial Hospital.

“If she wasn’t here, she was serving somewhere else,” said Judy Van Deren, director of volunteer services at BLMH. “She volunteered here for more than 20 years. She just had a life of service.”



Van Deren said Andersen was selected earlier this summer as the winner of the Idaho Hospital Association’s Leader of Volunteer Excellence (LOVE) Award. Andersen was told of the award as she battled cancer at the Huntsman Cancer Institute in Salt Lake city.

“She was tickled when she heard,” Van Deren said. “She was so amazed, and had to tell all the nurses and doctors and other patients.”

Steven Millard, president of the IHA, said Andersen left a legacy of generosity.

“Year after year, the recipients of this award inspire me and Ruth Kay is no exception,” he said in an email. “The list of activities, programs, and organizations she has shared her time and

talents with is long, but you only have to talk with a few of the people who were grateful to call her friend to know the true nature of this kind woman.”

The LOVE Award is usually given to the winner at the IHA’s state convention in October.

But because of Andersen’s failing health, plans were made to give her the award at a special ceremony on Sept. 16 in Montpelier at the Bear Lake Memorial Hospital’s nursing home cafeteria.

Unfortunately, Andersen succumbed to her illness on Aug. 18. The ceremony, however, will go on as planned at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday.

Van Deren said Andersen was nominated for the LOVE Award by those she worked with at the hospital.

“Ruth Kay exemplifies all that is wonderful about volunteerism. She is kind, compassionate, hard working, always cheerful, and has been a key player in establishing a legacy of volunteer service for Bear Lake Memorial Hospital and our community,” was written in the nomination letter.

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Andersen began volunteering for BLMH shortly after the establishment of the hospital's auxiliary in 1985. Van Deren said the auxiliary has a thrift store to raise funds to purchase equipment for BLMH. She said Andersen was a fixture at the store every Thursday.

“There were customers who would only shop there on Thursdays so they could see her,” Van Deren said. “She was always singing while she was working and so happy.”

When not at the auxiliary thrift store, Andersen could often be found at the hospital answering phones and greeting people at the front desk.

“She was an amazing lady,” Van Deren said. “She has left such a legacy of service throughout Bear Lake Valley.”