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## BUSINESS NEWS

# Healing Garden in Sudbury

By Carole LaMond / DAILY NEWS STAFF

SUDBURY — On a warm May morning that held the promise of summer, Debbie Sartori watched volunteers transform the neglected area around the pool at her Sudbury home into a garden bursting with flowers and ornamental grasses.

Sartori is the recipient of a garden from Hope in Bloom, a Dedham-based nonprofit group that provides indoor or outdoor gardens at no charge to anyone in Massachusetts undergoing treatment for breast cancer.

Debbie Sartori, 51, was in the check-out line at the grocery store in November 2007 when her cell phone rang displaying her doctor's number.

"I just knew," said Sartori. "She said, 'Deb, you have breast cancer.' It's automatic, when you hear that, the tears come."

Sartori blurted the news to the startled cashier, quickly paid for her groceries and fled the store.

While coping with surgery and treatment Sartori also nursed her terminally ill mother, Adeline MacKenzie, originally from Lincoln, who had come to live with her. MacKenzie died in Sartori's arms in March.

"She would have loved this," said Sartori as she watched the gardeners at work. "I learned about flowers from her. She always had cut flowers from her garden and she would have loved to see this."

The garden is one of 60 planted by volunteers since the initial garden in Sharon in July 2007 and the first in Sudbury.

Founded by Roberta Hershon in memory of a dear friend, Hope In Bloom gardens are a living tribute to Beverly Eisenberg who died from breast cancer in 2005. Friends since they were young girls growing up in Sharon, Hershon and Eisenberg shared many interests including a passion for gardening.

"When she got sick I wanted to make her better. I couldn't make her better, but I could make sure her garden looked spectacular and that she always had fresh flowers in her house," said Hershon. "It was something that made her feel better, and I said, 'Wouldn't this be great to do this for somebody else?'" Inspired by a quote from Lady Bird Johnson, "Where flowers bloom so does hope," Hershon named the volunteer-run organization Hope In Bloom. Volunteers provide the garden design, plants and mulch, labor and maintenance for the first season free of charge. An outdoor garden of about 12 square feet can run as much as \$3,000.

"Each garden is different and tailored to the person receiving it," said Hershon. "The response has been overwhelming. Funding is the issue. We have over 100 people on the waiting list and not much money."

Weston Nurseries in Hopkinton provided plants for the Sudbury garden at a discount.

Sartori's friend, Beth Hayes, put her name on the list for a garden over a year ago, and rallied other friends from the class of 1976 at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School to donate to Hope In Bloom.

"Beth was hoping to get it planted last year when I was going through chemotherapy and radiation, but they have so many people they couldn't get here until now," said Sartori. "I was so sick then that I think it's better now. The garden is here and I'm almost at the end of everything. I just have one more (reconstructive) surgery to go."

Another friend, Liz Morrison of Elizabeth Morrison Garden in Concord, designed the garden to include five grasses of different heights and textures as well as coreopsis and liatris, perennials that will add purple and yellow. The garden also incorporates existing irises, day lilies, black-eyed Susans and hostas.

"Deb's a wonderful person, so strong and so resilient, and she's come through some tough times in the last few years. I just admire her tremendously," said Morrison who designed the garden using Sartori's favorite plants. "I really wanted to help her out. A garden is so soothing and so comforting. You come outside on a beautiful day and you feel so much better."

Hope In Bloom has about 600 volunteer gardeners, but more are always needed for its gardens from Beverly to Cape Cod.

"I love gardening, and the fact that I can combine it with helping someone else is a win-win," said Bridget Loftus of Marlborough, a volunteer on Sartori's garden. "I think it's important for people to have support groups in times of need, and I'm happy to build a space for Debbie to come out and enjoy while she takes the time to heal."

The gardens are low-maintenance and have the added benefit of providing healthy outdoor exercise when patients have the energy to work in the garden.

"The minute you hear those four words, 'You have breast cancer,' your life changes. People who are sick don't have a lot to look forward to," said Hershon. "We bring color back into people's lives. Gardens are like lipstick for their souls."

It was difficult for Sartori, a self-described "doer" who volunteers at Emerson Hospital and as a driver for F.I.S.H., a group that provides rides to medical appointments, to stand idle while the gardeners dug beds for dozens of plants.

"It's hard not to be able to get up and help because I'm a doer, not someone to sit back," said Sartori. "I know this is going to be beautiful."

To make a donation, volunteer or apply for a garden, go to [www.hopeinbloom.org](http://www.hopeinbloom.org) or call 781-381-3597. Tax-deductible donations may also be mailed to 202 Bussey St., Dedham, MA 02026-2512.