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LIFE

Harp
soothes
the sick,
dying

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WINSTON-SALEM — Tyra Somers still remembers getting her first harp during one of the most difficult moments of her life.

Eleven years ago, she faced the possibility of a lung transplant in a sterile unit of a St. Louis hospital when someone brought her harp music. She recovered and did not need the transplant, but her love remained for the sound of the harp and what it could do to soothe the spirits of the sick and dying.

After studying the instrument in New York, she began playing in hospice, nursing homes and hospitals through The Harps of Healing Project, a program she created.

"When I was in the hospital, I just enjoyed the music so much myself and I had a vision that I would be back there and besides being a patient, I would be able to play for other people," she said.

Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center and the North Carolina School of the Arts in Winston-Salem run a joint project that brings art into the hospital. The program hired Somers to play in the lobby, cafeteria and other public places.

Last week, she set up in front of the Christmas tree in the waiting room for Cancer Support Services. As people drifted through the room, many stopped to listen to the Christmas carols that carried from Somers' harp in soft, clear tones.

"I've had cancer for six years, and when I come out here I see other cancer patients and they don't look very happy," said James White of Mayodon, who was at the medical center for a doctor's checkup. The music helps, he said, by letting him feel as happy as he can in those circumstances.

For the past four years, Somers has even taken her harp to the bedside of dying patients. She said she believes the harp is capable of opening people's hearts.

"My friend called and said, 'Would you play for my mom?' and I did. These are both strong-headed, intelligent women and both kind of hardheaded. I don't know how much either one was the kind that would express emotion freely. What happened was that tears began to flow freely, which happens often," Somers said.

Somers chooses her music based on what the patient needs. For example, she sometimes uses a slow, steady beat for those suffering from heart problems, or more unmetered, random music for people who are restless and distracted by pain.

Dealing with sickness so much does not wear on Somers like people expect it to, she said.

"It's not as upsetting as you would think, even when it's something awful like a sick child. I think the saving thing is usually when you go into an environment like that one you feel helpless," Somers said.

"This time you are going in with something in your hand that can help."

SISTA

Gonna work on AIDS education



By Artellia Burch
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SISTA stresses the importance of sisterly love in reducing the risk of contracting AIDS. Its motto: Sista love is strong! Sista love is safe! Sista love is surviving!

The national outreach organization aims to reduce sexually-risky behaviors by informing women on topics related to AIDS. The goal is to increase proper and consistent condom use. Since its inception, SISTA worked to improve risk reduction skills and behaviors by combining the theory of gender and power with social learning.

SISTA has a local branch that uses five sessions to discuss the impact of HIV on the black community, particularly women, learn facts and debunk myths about HIV/AIDS, self assertiveness training, behavioral self management and coping skills.

The Rev. Gwen Curry of Present Day Cares Inc., presides over the Charlotte branch of SISTA. Since July, SISTA has been helping women through the housing authority, substance abuse treatment centers and shelters.

"We give information to the directors of programs with women who are sexually active," she said.

Once women join the group, they attend intervention sessions and after completing the project each woman receives \$20.

"More than 50 percent of women with AIDS are African American women," Curry said. "There's a 30 percent increase among heterosexual women and in Mecklenburg County 77 percent of all cases in the county are African Americans."

"Our community lacks information on preventative measures. When AIDS was very prevalent in the white gay community, there was a massive education process that took place. The same is going to have to take place with us."

Curry says part of the black community's ignorance is a result of the black church remaining silent about sex and HIV/AIDS.

"The church, the agency for social change hasn't gotten involved in spreading information on preventative measures," she said.

"The church has been silent because in order to talk about sex you have to talk about it from a biblical perspective. The church doesn't have a language that tells a person to use preventive methods. It only tells us fornication is a sin. The church has a disconnect between theology and sociology. Churches are concerned with saving souls versus saving lives. It's choosing spiritual health versus physical health. I want people to live and be healthy. I want to help the total man spirit, mind and body. My perspective is you

can't clean a fish until you can catch it. And to do that you have to talk about prevention and to do that you have to talk about sex. If you talk about sex, you have to talk about all kind of sex and all kind of people like the gay, lesbian and bisexual."

Curry says women need to take more control when dealing with their well-being and have more candid discussions with their mates about sex.

"Because of men on the down low, bisexual men and infidelity women don't know the men they are sexually involved with," she said. "We want to teach black women how to be proud of the body God gave them. And learn how to manage their own behavior."

"The most encouraging testimonies are from women who say prior to the project they didn't have the confidence or self-esteem to talk about sex with their mate about using condoms every time. Most of the women wanted to be tested."

Here are some tips from Curry to help improve sexual communication:

1. Make sure you understand what your mate believes sexuality is all about.
2. Talk about why you and your mate are having sex in the first place
3. Talk about your feelings.

Rev. Gwen Curry will speak at United Methodist at 3545 Beatties Ford Rd. on Sat. at 6 pm.

Survey finds parents, teens drawn closer by driving together

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A six-year old law requiring teenagers to spend a year driving with an adult has had an unintended consequence, with some reporting in a new survey that the time they spend together driving had improved their communication.

The survey by the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center found that about 44 percent of teens and adults said their communication had improved. About a quarter of each group said the activity had made them closer.

Michael Riera, author of several books on parenting teenagers, says the findings make sense, because the car is the perfect place for parents to converse with teenagers.

"It's a side-by-side relationship, which makes it much less vulnerable than face-to-face," he says.

Roswell Ramseur and his son, Kendall, 17, say they'd agree with that.

"I do talk a little bit more when I'm driving," Kendall Ramseur said.

The conversations center on Kendall Ramseur's college plans and his music. He plays cello in the Charlotte Symphony Youth Orchestra.

Katie Wood and her mother, Betsy, said Katie's recently completed year of supervised driving also provided time for good talks.

Conversations during their first weeks together usually focused on the driving itself, Betsy Wood says.

"At first, it's like, 'You're

going too fast! Watch that car! You're very uneasy at first."

But as Katie Wood gained experience and her mom relaxed, conversations turned to school, friends and clothes.

"I think it was really good. We really spent a lot of time together," Betsy Wood says.

"Nobody can walk away when you're in the car," Katie says.

Under North Carolina's old licensing system, a 16-year-old could drive alone after completing a driver's education course.

Now, teenagers may drive only with a supervising adult for their first year. After that, they get second-level licenses that let them drive without

supervision but prohibit recreational night driving.

After six months at Level 2, teens with clean records get unrestricted licenses.

North Carolina was the second state, after Michigan, to enact a graduated system. Now, nearly 40 states have adopted such systems.

Numerous studies have found that graduated licenses reduce crashes and save lives. In North Carolina, fatal crashes involving 16-year-old drivers fell 57 percent the first year after the law was enacted. Overall crashes fell 23 percent.

Researchers didn't predict the new rules would improve some family relationships. Some might expect the closeness to result in irritation. Sometimes, it does.

The center's survey found 16 percent of teens and 8 percent of parents agreeing "we get on each other's nerves more than usual."

But many more teens and parents reported positive interactions. North Carolina is the first state to explore whether driving together can improve parent-teen communication, said Rob Foss, senior research scientist with the Highway Safety Research Center.

He says he believes this inadvertent result of graduated licensing is important.

"In virtually every behavior risky for teens — drinking, drugs, premarital sex — a protective factor against that is parent-teen closeness," he says.