



**For Immediate Release
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Two Long-Time Hospice Agencies Sign Merge Agreement

Hospice of Rutherford County (HORC) and Hospice of the Carolina Foothills (HOFC), two of the oldest non-profit hospices in North Carolina, signed an agreement to merge resources today. The merger will be effective no later than May 1. Both agencies will continue to operate with no interruption in care for hospice and palliative care patients and their families. In addition, all donations to each organization and sales from HORC's two Resale Shops and HOFC's Thrift Barn before and after the merger will be designated to the service area determined by the donor and the location of the stores.

Sherril Wingo, Board Chair of Hospice of the Carolina Foothills stated that, "We have found the most qualified partner who shares our vision to provide the best possible end-of-life care for the communities we serve. By combining our resources, we will be better equipped to address the complex challenges of the current and future health care environment." Bonnie Bittle, Board President of Hospice of Rutherford County further reiterated that, "This is an exciting time in our more than three decade history. This merge will ensure that two successful organizations can maintain state-of-the-art standards for future generations who will need our help at a critical time in their lives."

Currently, Hospice of the Carolina Foothills serves Polk County in North Carolina, and Cherokee, Greenville and Spartanburg counties in South Carolina. The organization operates the 12-bed Smith Phayer Hospice House in Landrum, SC. Hospice of Rutherford County serves Rutherford and McDowell counties in North Carolina and operates the 18-bed SECU Hospice House in Forest City, North Carolina. Both Hospice Houses will remain in operation, and all North and South Carolina communities will be cared for through the hospice and palliative care home care programs after the merge.

After May 1, the merged non-profit organization will continue under their respective names until a possible new, regional name reflective of the service area can be determined or another decision is made. Jean Eckert, President and CEO of Hospice of the Carolina Foothills, will retire after 34 years having served as that organization's leader since 1989. A retirement party to celebrate Eckert's legacy will be held in April. "I am grateful to have been able to meet the needs of our neighbors for so long, and with this merge, I am confident that everyone who has come to trust our care will benefit from an expanded range of options and services," Eckert said.

Rita Burch, CEO of Hospice of Rutherford, will serve as CEO of the merged organization. Burch has served as CEO for HORC since 1988. She holds a Bachelor's of Social Work degree from Western Carolina University, a Master's of Business Administration degree from Gardner-Webb University, and she has been a Certified Fund Raising Executive since 2003.

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