

Stephy's Place will be there to support those with loss and grief

By **KAYLA J. MARSH**
Staff Writer

Three years ago, Sheila Martello met Stephy Hardman Kaminoff, who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Despite the fact that Stephy knew she was going to be leaving her young children behind to deal with the grief of losing their mother, Martello was amazed at the resolve Stephy showed. That form of courage led Martello to recall her own loss that she had suffered a decade earlier.

"After I spent a little time with her, I realized that it wasn't so much the grief that she was feeling, because she always seemed so hopeful, but it was the grief I realized her family would have to suffer when she died," Martello said in an interview Aug. 18.

Martello, who lost her husband James during the attacks on the World Trade Center, where he was working as a partner and equity sales trader for Cantor Fitzgerald Securities, said she felt her loss paled in comparison to what Stephy was going through, but was thankful that she had a place where she could go to deal with her grief.

"I realized that we were given such a gift with a place to go, that I knew that one day, I wanted to give people that same place," she said.

Several months after bringing Stephy's story to the members of the New Life Support Group, which formed for those who lost a loved one on Sept. 11, Martello's dream is becoming a reality.

Stephy's Place, a new life support center for grief and loss, will open its doors on Sept. 1 in Suite 209 of the Swede Chevalier Building at 210 West Front St. in Red Bank.

"As my sons got older I didn't know whether I wanted to go back to work, whether I wanted to volunteer ... and every time I went to do something, I hit a dead end, but I knew I wanted to do something," Martello said.

"You know as 9/11 families ... as much as we suffered, we feel we received such a gift with New Life Support Group and we want to be able to share that gift with others and to pay it forward and to be a resource to others to give them the support that we received."

The new grief support center will offer free one-on-one and group bereavement support meetings as well as meditation sessions for anyone struggling with the loss of a loved one.

"Our mission is to offer support, peer support, meditation and kindness to anyone suffering from loss – whether due to death, divorce, suicide or any other kind of loss," Marion Fitzgerald, a facilitator for Stephy's



KAYLA MARSH/STAFF

Stephy's Place will offer free support meetings and meditation for anyone struggling with the loss of a loved one. (L-R) Kevin Keelen, facilitator; Elaine Chevailier, New Life Support Group Founder; Sheila Martello, director; and Marion Fitzgerald, facilitator.

Place, said.

In an interview on Aug. 18, Elaine Chevalier, who lost her son Swede during the Sept. 11 attacks and who is a New Life Support Group Founder, said she is proud to be a part of Stephy's Place and hopes it can bring the same healing to others as the support group gave her.

"We found a great part of our healing was being able to share with each other and we realized that people who lose others now are often isolated, so we want to make them part of a group and to share in some of our experiences and resources," she said. "It doesn't matter how long ago your loss happened, the grief can still come ... it is a learning process. What I have discovered is that it can take a lifetime to work out your grief."

Before doors open on Sept. 1, Stephy's Place facilitator Kevin Keelen will be giv-

ing a talk entitled "The Roller Coaster of Grief" on Aug. 31 at 7 p.m. at the Knights of Columbus, 200 Fair Haven Road in Fair Haven.

"We're very holistic mind, body and spirit," Keelen said Aug. 18. "This talk will address grief in general, how grief is like a rollercoaster and that we're on a ride that we basically don't want to be on but are."

Support groups will be held each Tuesday from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. and each Thursday from 7 to 8 p.m.

Monthly adult meditation class will be held the third Thursday of each month beginning at 9:30 a.m.

The center will be staffed on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"As people come we will add groups to different times of the days, different days of the week ... but we're a process, we are something in growth," Fitzgerald said.

"We're starting something that is extremely new and very rare because there are very few places like this."

According to Fitzgerald, support groups are short lived and she said she has found that many feel that a short-time frame such as six weeks isn't enough to help with the healing process.

"What we have discovered is that long-term support systems are really needed so we're going to be offering ongoing support and I think that is important."

Martello agreed, stating that the newness of Stephy's Place allows for room and growth.

"It's a needed thing and we are willing, to be flexible to change it to make it work and I think that's the beauty of it," she said.

For more information, visit www.stephysplace.org or call 732-614-1142.

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