**“Feelie Hearts” from Boston community comfort Village Shalom**

***By Linda Salvay,***

***Village Shalom Communications Manager***

**May 29, 2014 (Overland Park, Kan.)** — In times of adversity, people and communities often connect heart to heart. That is what Village Shalom and Boston’s Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly (JCHE) have done – literally.

Upon learning of the tragic shootings in Overland Park on April 13 that resulted in three deaths, JCHE reached out to Village Shalom with a tangible demonstration of love and support: “feelie hearts.”

JCHE residents, staff members and volunteers stitched the palm-size, heart-shaped pillows of red fabric by hand, producing enough of them for every resident and staff member of Village Shalom – more than 400 in all. That’s a lot of fabric, thread, quilt batting – and time. But the needleworkers who fashioned the tiny mementos did it as a labor of love and empathy.

“Please accept these ‘feelie hearts’ as our expression of care and solidarity with your team,” reads the letter from JCHE President and CEO Amy Schectman that was enclosed with the shipment of hearts to Village Shalom. “We are acutely aware of the trauma you all experienced in the recent tragedy there, and we want you to know that you are in our hearts.”

JCHE initiated the “feelie hearts” project about 10 years ago to help medical students at Harvard and Boston University to remember “the humanity of their work, and to be kind to themselves” while devoting so much of their time to learning their profession. Since then, JCHE has expanded its reach by making the hearts for cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy and for individuals in rehabilitation after the Boston Marathon attack that so intensely affected their own community.

In its outreach to Village Shalom, the JCHE community wanted to be certain that every “feelie heart” recipient understood the sentiment behind the gift. A message pinned to each heart said: “The residents and staff at JCHE send you this heart as a token of our thoughts and prayers for you and your community.” Also included with the shipment to Village Shalom were photos of JCHE’s residents and staff seated around tables participating in a modern-day sewing bee to assemble the hundreds of hearts.

Village Shalom residents and staff were visibly moved by the personal expression of comfort and consolation that the “feelie hearts” represent. As members of the Programs staff handed out the hearts one by one, residents were heard to say “How thoughtful!” and “This kindness is so appreciated!” One resident remarked, “They’re sharing a loving heart.”

“The employees were truly touched by this as well,” reported Eileen Miller, Village Shalom’s Director of Resident Services, who made certain the hearts found their way to everyone across the campus. “When our staff saw the pictures of the residents in Boston actually making the hearts – expressing the generosity of their own hearts, gathering the resources, taking the time to make more than 400 of these by hand – it really made an impression on them. It’s a very personal gesture of caring.

“It reminds us that there’s so much good out there. And I think it must be as helpful for the people who did the sewing as it is for us.”

-30-

**PHOTO CAPTIONS:**

**(JCHE ‘sewing bee’)**

**Residents, staff and volunteers at Boston’s Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly hand stitched more than 400 “feelie hearts” for Village Shalom – enough for every resident and staff member.**

**(Box of ‘feelie hearts’)**

**Pinned to every palm-size heart was a note expressing JCHE’s thoughts and prayers for the recipient.**

**(Receiving hearts)**

**Programs Coordinator Zenette Kearney (center) helped to distribute hearts to Village Shalom residents. Gerry Salvay (left) and Hortense Haith took a moment to read the message attached to their “feelie hearts.”**

*Village Shalom is a not-for-profit, continuing-care retirement community located in Overland Park, Kansas. In 2012, the organization marked a century of providing the highest-quality care to seniors throughout the Greater Kansas City area. At its current location since 2000, Village Shalom has provided hundreds of seniors with a wide range of services including independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing and specialized Alzheimer’s care. In addition, community members benefit from the Spa and Wellness Center, the Great Days Social Club day-stay program (for those with dementia or Alzheimer’s disease), the Epsten Gallery of Art and outpatient rehabilitation services.*

*Sponsored by the Kansas City Jewish community since its inception, Village Shalom maintains its commitment to providing resident-centered care that values each individual’s quality of life as well as quality of care. The retirement community provides services to meet the physical, social and spiritual needs of senior adults from diverse cultures and economic backgrounds, and has won regional and national awards for its innovations in senior living and care. For more information about Village Shalom, call (913) 317-2600 or visit www.VillageShalom.org.*