

## North West

# She plays music to ease passage out of this world

By Cynthia Cantrell  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**B**EDFORD — When Joan Ux of Pepperell was a young girl, she recalls, her mother made sure she and her sister took voice and piano lessons.

“She wasn’t musically inclined herself,” Ux said, “but she made sure music was part of our lives.”

So as 100-year-old Ellen Houghton lay dying in July in the skilled nursing facility at Carleton-Willard Village in Bedford, Ux made sure that music was a part of her mother’s final days.

She took advantage of a service offered by the retirement community and asked to have guitarist and singer Marcia Guntzel Feldman play soothing music for her mother.

“My mom wasn’t able to communicate that well, but the nurses told us they saw quite a difference in her relaxation,” Ux said. “The last week with Mom was very traumatizing; I never saw someone die before. We were zoned into making sure she was comfortable, and we do think the music was helping Mom. Anything that can be done to make someone’s last days more peaceful is very much appreciated.”

Feldman, who lives in Dedham, has been playing music and singing for dying people for 13 years. While she will play for people who are not in the Bedford nursing home, she is on call at Carleton-Willard Village, where staff members know to ask the families of dying residents if the resident would like music to ease them through their final time.

If the resident and family members agree, Feldman visits the resident for about a half-hour at a time for days, weeks, or months. She takes requests for religious, jazz, and other music selections, or just softly plays classical pieces when that seems more appropriate.

“Music can speak to the spirit of a person, regardless of whether they’re reli-



BILL POLO/GLOBE STAFF

**Marcia Guntzel Feldman comforts dying people with music.**

gious or not, and can serve as a way to help them move on,” said Feldman. “The end of a loved one’s life is a delicate, emotional time, and music can be a nonverbal way for a family member to be together with a loved one. You don’t have to worry about having just the right thing to say. You can just sit together and be.”

David Ball, a spokesman for the Massachusetts Extended Care Federation, said many facilities that care for the elderly provide music, though more commonly in the form of a big band or other group performing for all its residents gathered in one place.

He said Feldman’s one-on-one approach