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By SIERRA SHAFER
Staff Writer

From a tiny corner office at her home in the Highlands, Susan Whitmore is busy at work doing a job no one would envy. Surrounded by achievements and photos of her daughter Erika, she pours herself into the lives of grieving parents around the world.

Whitmore has worked to provide a variety of support all in one location– and all provided by professionals who have themselves experienced the loss of a child. Whitmore says, “You’re never going to have your normal life back, but it doesn’t mean it won’t be a good life. It will be a different life, a new life. With love and hope you can turn their hearts around again and live happy and fulfilling lives.”

In 2008, she met with Dr. Rich Schmitt and began planning to open a fully operational center in the fall of 2008. According to research used by griefHaven, the right kind of support for grievers is part of the positive process for them and helps them be able to deal with their grief better; conversely, the same research shows that the wrong kind of support makes the journey harder and adds another layer of stress on the griever, making the journey even more painful and difficult.

“Grief is a highly misunderstood experience in society, with most people either thinking they understand it and acting from that perspective or admitting that they don’t, yet not educating themselves,” Whitmore said. “Platitudes can sometimes exactly what these parents need in their lives with new meaning, and understanding is what makes the foundation so unique.”

Today, she oversees the Whitmore Godwin Foundation, named for their daughter, to support parents around the world. As well as siblings who lose a parent, Whitmore is hoping for the day that grief will be dealt with in the same way that cancer or diabetes is dealt with. “I pray that one or more people will want to help fund this very important study,” she said.

“It’s amazing to see all of the loved ones in the audience forward to support what we’re doing,” Whitmore said. “There is so much more to do and we need people to help us do it. I can’t imagine doing anything else.”

Whitmore said she is committed to remaining the heart and soul of griefHaven for as long as she can, but it is clear that her primary role, first and foremost, will always be as Erika’s mom. Visit griefhaven.com. Call (310) 459-1789 or email hope@griefhaven.org.

GriefHaven Offers Hope for the Journey
Palisadian Susan Whitmore, “Erika’s Mom,” Supports Families After the Loss of a Child

Whitmore said years can pass before parents feel there is hope again and years after that before they are ready to embrace life and feel its joy. A great deal of the needed support comes from friends and other family members who can come alongside grieving parents on the journey. The foundation offers materials for those support groups as well.

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