

THE GARDEN WHERE GIVING GROWS

◆ **Londonderry:** Shirley Visnor received help with her beloved perennials thanks to the United Way's Day of Caring program.

By APRIL GUILMET
Union Leader Correspondent

LONDONDERRY — Shirley Visnor greets her garden each morning as she would her dear friends.

"She really loves the sun," Visnor said, motioning to a towering pink Rose of Sharon tree.

A retired intensive care nurse, Visnor has many such friends in her one-acre perennial garden. These days, Visnor also relies on other friends — the ones who help her with certain garden projects.

Help arrived Wednesday morning in the form of three Liberty Mutual employees, all volunteers with the United Way's 20th annual Day of

Caring event.

Visnor receives weekly services through Community Caregivers of Greater Derry, which is one of 40 area partner agencies with Granite United Way.

As a partner agency, the Caregivers receive United Way funding and are regular participants in the Day of Caring, Caregivers Executive Director Cindee Tanuma said.

► See **Caring**, Page B2



Liberty Mutual employee Janelle Leavitt lends a helping hand to Londonderry resident Shirley Visnor on Wednesday as part of the United Way Day of Caring program.

APRIL GUILMET

Caring

Continued from Page B1

The projects vary, Tanuma said, noting that this week's volunteers were assisting Caregivers clients in Londonderry, Sandown and Derry, as well as helping with some office tasks at the organization's Derry office.

But the true essence of the Day of Caring lies in the lasting human connections that often result from a day's hard work.

"It's really about breaking up isolation," Tanuma said, noting that Visnor had found common ground with the Liberty Mutual volunteers, who, like Visnor, have nursing backgrounds.

Carrying a watering can in one hand and a basket of teacups in another, Visnor guided volunteers Janelle Leavitt, Nikki Faucher and Sarah Henson around her Litchfield Road

garden, offering them a cup of her favorite refreshment.

"Earl Gray is just magical when you're outdoors," she told the ladies.

Visnor has lived in her home for the past 15 years and retired from her job at Catholic Medical Center about a decade ago, after working there for 42 years. With the years have come many challenges. Visnor's husband of 53 years was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease a while back, and up until several months ago she cared for him at home.

These days, Visnor visits her husband at a Bedford nursing home each day, arriving just in time to serve him his dinner.

She prefers to focus on the positive.

"Back when we were first

dating, you'd get all dressed up to go meet each other," Visnor said. "It's sort of like that's happening all over again."

Reflecting on their years together, Visnor said "he was an inside man and I was out in my garden. They say opposites attract."

With a little help from the Caregivers, Visnor remains in the home she loves, visiting her garden whenever she can, though sometimes a bit of help is needed.

Last year, Day of Caring volunteers helped her reseal her windows for the winter months and clean off her deck, while Wednesday's project focused mostly on lawn and garden care, such as weeding, pruning and removing brush that had been scattered about during the Sept. 4

tropical storm.

"When they asked me what I needed, I told them 'just help me beautify my garden,'" Visnor said with a grin.

Motioning to her tidy rows of tall tomato plants, Leavitt marveled at how Visnor used recycled milk jugs to keep the tomatoes from toppling over and old roof shingles to line her garden path.

Later, the volunteers were charmed by Visnor's herb garden, lovingly labeled to show each herb's medicinal properties, such as spearmint for indigestion and sage for memory loss.

"This has always been my dream," Visnor said of her colorful garden. "And I never throw anything away."

"I definitely want to come back next year," Faucher said.