

Healing through the harp

HARP

From Page A1

because everyone was so welcoming and receptive to the music. I could tell that I was really brightening the residents' day."

This month, Anderson began volunteering her time at the Pat Roche Hospice Home in Hingham, run by NVNA and Hospice.

"Harp is one of the main instruments for therapeutic music because it has really good resonance, it has mellow sounds, and we learn to play a style of music that keeps the technique very simple," Anderson said. "We learn to observe the patient and play music based on what we feel they need to enter a better state."

Anderson said music has been proven to have many positive effects on individuals, from de-stressing and relaxing them to easing pain and helping patients who are feeling discomfort and mental distress enter a state of peace. Therapeutic music has also been shown to lower blood pressure and stabilize heart rates.

"The science is astounding of how music has these effects," Anderson said. "There are theories on it being evolutionary and something that's just an innate response to us to have music affect us in this way. It's an extraordinarily important addition to a lot of clinical settings and I think more and more staff these days are realizing that having music as integrative therapy is actually very beneficial.

The effects of music are boundless."

Anderson said she receives a warm welcome from residents at the home, who engage with her in different ways.

"The patients that are awake and alert, they smile and some will applaud," she said. "Even before I play, you can feel the mood shift and brighten a bit. I start playing and it's so wonderful to see the patients just be able to sit back in their chair. They can listen, they can close their eyes, they can rest. Whatever they want."

Patients understand that Anderson's service is not entertainment, but she is there to work with them to help them find more comfort and relaxation.

"It's their meditative moment at that point in time," she said. "They can tune in and let the music wash over them. I hear a lot of them taking deep breaths and sighing, and that for me is a really good indicator that what I'm playing seems to be working. We want them to start breathing more deeply and getting that oxygen in. That, as a bodily response, is really good."

Anderson's own response to her shift in career has also been positive.

"It was meant to be," she said. "In a lot of ways, I feel like it really was."

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continuously freelancing in the music space.

"Psychology and music have always been these parallel roads for me," she said. "I knew that I wanted to merge them in some way, so I had thought about getting my masters in music therapy or doing something in that realm, but there was something in my gut that told me that wasn't the fit."

She put off this merger for a few years, continuing to freelance while also working as a counselor and life coach.

"Then last year, I had this pivotal moment where I realized that I was being stretched too thin," Anderson said. "I had two full-time jobs, and they were both businesses. My entrepreneurial spirit was about to explode, and while I still wanted to be self-employed and do my own thing, something needed to shift."

The answer, she realized, was therapeutic music. She enrolled in a program, Harp for Healing, to become certified in bedside therapeutic music.

"Starting off, I decided to volunteer a lot of my time in nursing homes to get my feet wet and get used to performing on harp," she said. "It ended up being such an amazing experience for me

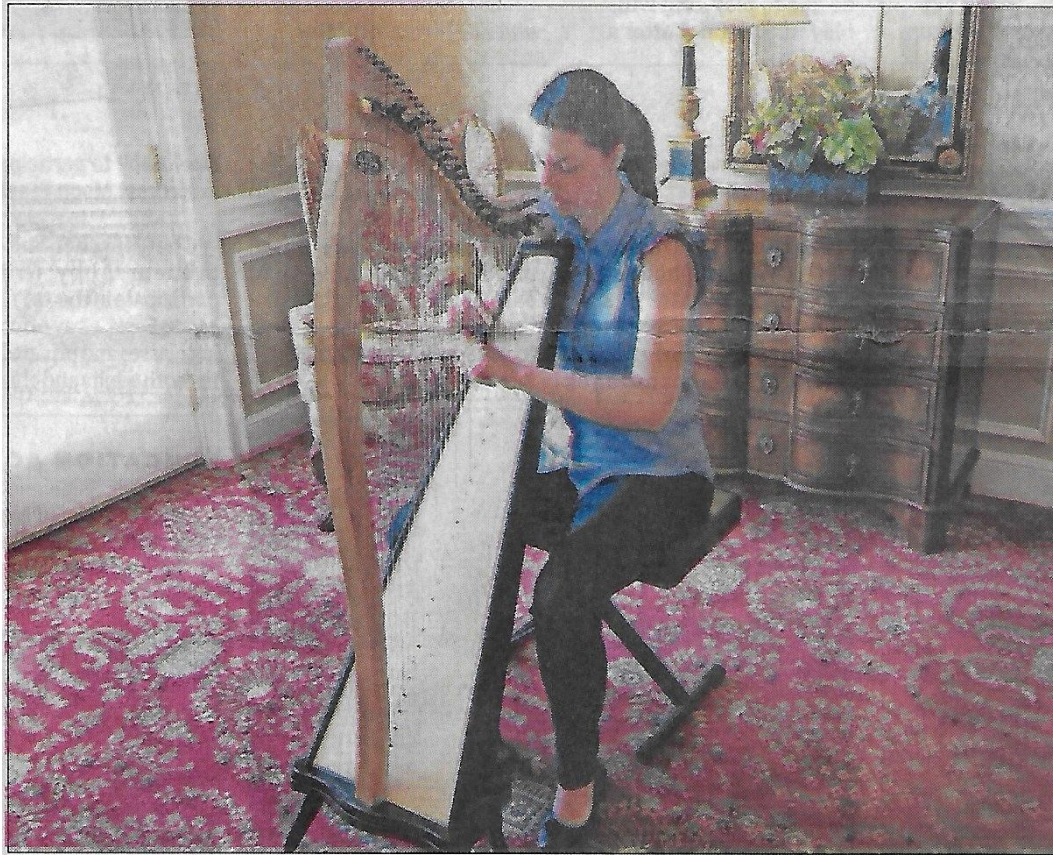
piano and harp professionally for over a decade. As an undergraduate at Boston University, Anderson majored in psychology and minored in music, and she later received her master's in psychology from Northeastern University, all while

See HARP, A5

Anderson found a natural way to combine her passions, which she is now putting to good use helping local hospice patients.

"Merging psychology and music was always a goal of mine," she said. "That's how I really started to become involved in therapeutic music."

A musician since the age of 7, Anderson has played the



Nicole Anderson plays her Celtic harp in the lobby of the Pat Roche Hospice Home in Hingham. [COURTESY PHOTO]

Local musician brings talents to Pat Roche Hospice Home

By James Kukstis

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After years of working in two very different industries, Marshfield native Nicole