

## Bellingham Herald

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### Make A Difference: Pumpkin Provider Sal Vacca, Bellingham

*Tony Stasiek*

*Staff*

TEXT BY TONY STASIEK, PHOTOS BY PHILIP A. DWYER

Forget what the almanac says.

Every day in October 2001, Sal Vacca says, it rained. From the first day he sold pumpkins for charity on the site he dared Talbot Investment Co.'s John Arrigoni not to turn into another Barkley District bank until Halloween. When he presented Whatcom Hospice with a check for \$16,000 in profits from pumpkins and dahlias sold.

So he dried off. And stayed, spending 70 unpaid hours a week sowing and reaping pumpkins and dahlias at the corner of Barkley Boulevard and Woburn Street.

This year, his third, the retired US WEST employee wants more. More helpers. More pumpkins - 5,000 he planted by seed in the ground plus 20 tons worth hauled from Bob Small's farm. More money for the hospice: With help from sponsors, Vacca hopes to raise \$50,000 after the patch sells out, in addition to the \$5,000 the dahlias pull in annually from donations at a nearby Starbucks. For his work, Vacca is chosen as one of six who "Make a Difference" in our community.

#### WHY WHATCOM HOSPICE?

"I became aware of it as a board member for the Whatcom Horticulture Society (Vacca also volunteers for the Birchwood Garden Club). A board member, Stephanie Feeney, was diagnosed with breast cancer. She died about three months later. Before, though, she did an open house one Saturday in July and asked me to park cars. They took in more than \$1,300 for the day, and all I heard was, 'Write a check for \$50,' 'Write a check for \$100.' That was my initiation into the hospice."

WHERE HE DRAWS THE LINE: Despite volunteering for Whatcom Hospice donations, Vacca never has worked within the hospice. "I hate being around people who are dying. I'd go into a hospital when I was younger, and I'd just faint."

WHY PUMPKINS? "I grew up on a farm in Italy. We didn't have any flowers or pumpkins or anything. But I did have relatives who grew pumpkins every year since the 1940s on Des Moines Way in Burien. That's why the idea was so close to me, I guess."

FOR THREE YEARS? IN THE RAIN? "It was one of those ideas that took on a life of its own. I couldn't say, 'I don't want to do this anymore' when there are so many people out here, so many sponsors. No way I could abandon them."

A-HA MOMENT: "Everyone has a story about the hospice, and they tell. I find notes in the dahlia boxes - 'Great idea, great cause.' On Sunday, I found one with a \$200 check."

MOST FRUSTRATING MOMENT: "None. People always talk about how bad the world is. Well, if you do something good, you'll find the right people."

HOW TO HELP: "Awhile back, I met this woman - a beautician - who told me she also volunteers for hospice. Turns out, she goes into places, talks to ladies who might have two weeks or so before they die, and she does their hair, perms their hair real nice, so they feel good.

"So people ask me what to do to do what I do. I says just do what you normally do, tie it into something else."

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To help with Sal Vacca's pumpkin or flower patches, call 676-0109 or e-mail [pumpkinpatchone@msn.com](mailto:pumpkinpatchone@msn.com).

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