The day started out foggy and cool. It had rained lightly enough during the night to make the surface of the exposed clay under the trees a little slippery. Soon, a glorious Sunday morning burned through the gray, and the Hospice/Trail Steward Workday began.

Plenty of planning, phone calls, and meetings went in to this collaborative event on October 11, 2015. Small donations from individuals, as well as contributions from Los Bagels and Safeway, added to the day’s success. Twenty kind souls gave a portion of their Sunday to help heal the forest around the newly constructed Ida Emmerson Hospice House on Timber Fall Court in Eureka.

The facility is a specialized end-of-life center where hospice patients who can’t stay in their homes will be able to spend their last days. A combination of volunteers from Hospice of Humboldt, the Humboldt Trail Stewards, VCOR/RSVP, and interested community members worked to restore the surrounding forest floor.

Dennice Stone, Volunteer Manager at Hospice, started the workday by thanking everyone for their participation. She explained how important the surrounding environment is when facing the end-of-life experience.

“We thank you and appreciate you. You are a part of history in Humboldt County.”

Stone said the plan is for the first patients to start using the facilities by spring of 2016. She is looking for permanent volunteers to help with the grounds keeping of over 13 acres of new property and hopes volunteers will take on a specific area to maintain regularly.
Four singers from the Arcata Threshold Choir were on hand to set the tone and inspire volunteers by singing two songs they often sing at the bedsides of dying patients. “So Many Angels” and “We Are All Just Walking Each Other Home” floated through the hearts and minds of all who were present.

Dennis Houghton, an experienced Natural Resource Field Manager, directed volunteers in addressing the temporary impacts on the forest because of construction. Volunteers filled several large bags with invasive plants removed from the forest. Others moved branches and redwood duff, coating the ground and diminishing the exposed clay surface.

Truckloads of redwood leaves from the gutters in the newly paved parking lot were transported to areas in need. Other erosion protecting logs and old roots were positioned to interrupt downhill flows of water during heavy rains. After several hours of steady work, lunch was provided by Volunteer Center of the Redwoods for all who participated.

Houghton described the workday as “quietly satisfying” as he observed the results accomplished by volunteers, many with whom he has worked before.

“It shows how, in a short amount of time, a lot can get done with volunteers,” said Houghton. “It’s great community spirit assisting Hospice in the final stages of making the grounds beautiful once again. The community came through. We went to work and got it done.”

Rodney Ward is the Grounds Manager for the entire new facility and surrounding acreage. “The amount of work done and the effort that was put into the land was remarkable. I cannot thank the volunteers enough for their hard work.”

“My heart was over flowing with appreciation and awe for all the hard work and the beauty at the end of the day,” adds Stone.

For a quick view of the activities of the day, go to YouTube and search for “So Many Angels Video.” For more information about volunteering with Hospice, contact Dennice Stone at 267-9813 or dstone@hospiceofhumboldt.org.