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Vice President Joe Biden puts his hands on the shoulders of Gerry Smith, his mother's best friend, and she puts her hand on his, as they meet to dedicate the family room Monday in the hospice at St. Francis Hospital.

Biden's mom remembered with family room at hospice

Vice president pledges bond with mother's caregivers

By WADE MALCOLM
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WILMINGTON — Tom Taylor has a vivid memory of his first meeting with Catherine Eugenia "Jean" Finnegan Biden.

He crouched down to get close to the Biden family matriarch and as he spoke to her, she squeezed his cheek.

"You know you're cute," he remembered her saying.

"At that moment, I knew she had a love of male nurses," joked Taylor, the director of Compassionate Care Hospice.

And moments like that, Taylor said, left an enduring impression on the hospice staff at St. Francis Hospital in Wilmington, who cared for Biden in the final months of the 92-year-old's life.

The hospice dedicated its "family room" to Biden on Monday in a small, brief ceremony attended by her son Vice President Joe Biden and 11 other members of the family.

"Those who cared for Mrs. Biden during the most precious time of her life, during that last few weeks of her journey, were privileged to hold her hand and look deep into her blue eyes,"

Taylor said, choking up a little.

The family room typically serves as a place of relaxation for family members of patients receiving end-of-life care in the sixth-floor wing of the hospital, as Jean Biden did before dying at home in January.

The room is an important part of the hospice's work, said Dr. Dan Pietropaolo. He emphasized the significance of the dedication by teasing the vice president about a remark he made on an open mike about the health care bill: "This is a big [bleeping] deal."

"To paraphrase an expression you used a few weeks ago, Joe, for Compassionate Care, this is a big deal. I'll leave out that other word," he said, drawing a laugh from the vice president and the rest of the room.

Biden, Taylor and the other speakers at the event addressed the room from a lectern situated in front of a grainy black-and-white picture of a younger Jean Biden. Beneath it, a plaque dated "Mother's Day 2010" read: "Affectionately known as Mom-Mom to her family and friends, Mrs. Biden was a firm believer in family. This family room is dedicated to her memory by

those who cared for her at Compassionate Care Hospice."

Aside from a handful of hospice workers and vice presidential staffers, the event was attended almost entirely by Bidens, and it had the relaxed feel of a family get-together.

While they waited for the vice president to arrive, the rest of the family made small talk and discussed Mother's Day plans while 4-year-old Hunter, son of Attorney General Beau Biden, toddled between rows of chairs, showing off his Batman figurines. When Joe Biden's wife, Jill, entered, he said, "Hi, Nanna," and offered her a piece of blue bubble tape.

Joe Biden emphasized the family theme when concluding his remarks with a promise to hospice members.

"I say this without fear of contradiction and with my word as a Biden and every Biden in this room," he said. "If any of you ... in your personal lives ever need anything at all a Biden can help you with, I give you my word, a Biden will be there the way you were with my mother."

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