

LOOK HOMEWARD

*A publication for the supporters of
Visiting Nurse Health System*



The Gifts
of
Hospice



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Friends –

Five hundred twenty five thousand six hundred—the number of moments in the year of a life.

As we think about our hospice program, that number is especially meaningful as “moments” are what our staff and volunteers focus on when caring for patients and their families; making their moments together count.

We have set a goal to raise one dollar for every moment: \$525,600. We kicked off this campaign at our annual fall gala and are pleased to report that we now have just \$268,000 to go to reach our goal.

How can you help? If a third of our Look Homeward readers make a gift of \$105, we will hit our goal. Can we count you as one of those committed to our mission?

This annual campaign effort is targeted specifically to our hospice program to support our work today and to build a sustainable program for the future. *We are committed to keeping our doors open to the Atlanta community—but we need your help.* Your gift will help us care for those patients and their families with the greatest need.

Our year-end issue of Look Homeward is about the “gifts” of hospice. We’ve highlighted personal stories from our staff and from those who have had loved ones in our care. We hope you will be moved by what you read in the pages ahead and will take a moment to give a gift of \$105, to ensure the cycle of giving back can continue.

From all of us at Visiting Nurse Health System, we wish you and your family a joyous holiday season. We hope you, too, are making moments count as you create special memories with friends and family.

Thank you for your support of our critical work.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Oshnock". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark Oshnock
President and CEO
Visiting Nurse Health System

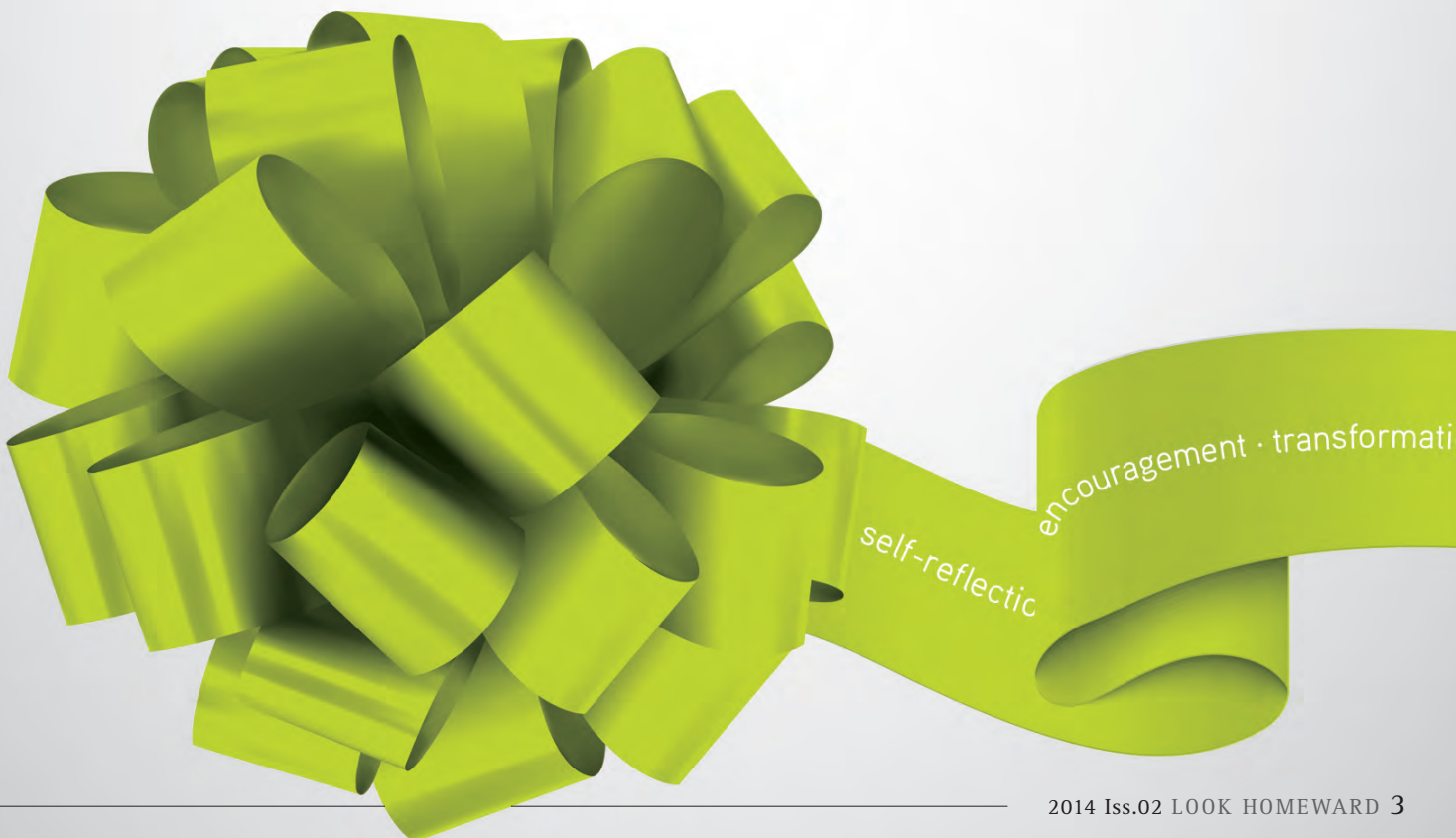
Unwrapping the Gifts of Hospice

The Cycle of Giving Continues

A gift can be defined as something given willingly to someone without payment in return, usually in the form of a material good or an experience. Some gifts are imperceptible, and may not make themselves known until well past the time they are bestowed. A powerful gift can change the giver and recipient in ways profound or subtle. Givers are enriched by the act of giving, recipients become inspired to give to others, and the cycle continues.

At Visiting Nurse Health System there are many ways in which our staff, volunteers and donors provide hospice “gifts.” All patients and their families receive comprehensive care coordination so they are relieved of stress and free to cherish final moments. Our community’s uninsured population

receives donor-supported care that assures their dignity during their final days. And, future hospice patients and their families receive gifts in the form of knowledge, encouragement and compassion from experienced hospice family members and our volunteers who are inspired to give back.



FEATURE

“Being able to provide care to patients, regardless of their ability to pay, has been one of the greatest gifts I have received during my time at Visiting Nurse.”

Mary S.
Visiting Nurse social worker

A Gift of Care for All Who Need It

Visiting Nurse’s nonprofit mission is to provide care to all who need it, regardless of their ability to pay. During this time of increasing healthcare costs, an aging population, and poverty affecting one in six Americans, the numbers of medically and financially vulnerable persons in our community are staggering. Georgia has the third-highest number of uninsured residents of any state in the nation¹. There are more than one million² uninsured people in our 26-county metro Atlanta service area alone.

It is these uninsured people who make the headlines when healthcare and health insurance is in the news, but what about those who are unable to afford dignified care at the end of life? The gift they receive in the form of compassionate hospice care is just as important, even if only in the form of a safe and peaceful environment for family members to come together during their loved one’s final days—free of financial worry and anxiety.

One such couple, Marie M. and her husband Michael, were a generous couple who struggled financially after they began raising their two grandchildren when their son and his wife were not able to do so. One night last August when Marie and Michael were dining out, she began to exhibit stroke-like symptoms. Michael took her to the local emergency room, but

□ Visiting Nurse social worker Mary delights in providing care to all who need it



after suffering cardiac arrest and an anoxic brain injury, she was placed on life-support. Following much discussion and prayer, Marie’s family made the decision to take her off life-support, opting to transfer her to the Hospice Atlanta Center. Our hospice team provided compassionate care to Marie despite her inability to cover her expenses with insurance. Our RNs and LPNs managed her symptoms so that she was comfortable, which reassured her siblings who came from out-of-state to support Michael and their grandchildren and to create final family memories. Volunteers provided respite to Michael, allowing him time to return home to rest. Social worker Mary S. listened to Marie’s sister share her feelings and memories as she came to terms with Marie’s death. “Her sister told me Marie truly loved everyone unconditionally,” said Mary. “She did not judge others and accepted people for who they were. She expressed a wish that she could be more like Marie.”

Her sister’s observation about Marie’s character echoes the care provided for the vulnerable in our community by Mary and the rest of our hospice team. “These patients and their families are affirmed for who they are and supported in their decision to have hospice care, rather than judged for their lack of financial resources,” said Mary. “Being able to provide care to those patients, regardless of their ability to pay, has been one of the greatest gifts I have received during my time at Visiting Nurse.”

affirmation · serenity · dignity · love · growth · healing · peace
closeness · memories · support · inspiration · self

□ Volunteer Yuri gives back in the form of administrative support



“Charles was comfortable here. His pain management was a gift to him. His relief was a gift to me.”

Yuri D.
Visiting Nurse volunteer

A Gift of Volunteering

Numerous family members who have been given the gift of hospice support, in turn, offer to help others.

Many volunteers work behind the scenes to free up time for clinicians and other staff to have more interaction with patients and their families. One such volunteer is Yuri D., whose husband Charles was a hospice patient at the Hospice Atlanta Center in 2011. Yuri and Charles chose the Center because they were struck by the high-quality facilities, staff and care regimen. “I was impressed that profits weren’t the number one consideration; the patient’s needs come first,” said Yuri. “Charles was comfortable here. His pain management was a gift to him. His relief was a gift to me.” During Charles’ final days, and for 13 months after his death, Yuri spoke with Visiting Nurse’s bereavement counselors and read books in the Center’s library to help guide her through the stages of grief. Without family nearby, Yuri attended counseling outside of Visiting Nurse but preferred our bereavement counseling so much that she volunteered “because the Hospice Atlanta Center gave me such a big gift that I wanted to give back.” Yuri began assisting the bereavement counselors with administrative work, and has recently expanded her service to help in the library and to coordinate Remembrance Services. As an extension of the bereavement process, Yuri attends a weekly meditation group at the Center, which gives her the unexpected gift of inner peace.

Other volunteers find rewards providing the gift of comfort to current hospice patients and their families. Pat A. is a volunteer who hosts one of the daily afternoon tea times that give families a break and allow them to meet other families at the Center in

similar circumstances. As a young girl, Pat frequently had tea parties with her English mother, so hosting these teas puts a smile on her face, and on the faces of patients and their families. “One patient smiled widely and exclaimed ‘China cups!’ when he saw I wasn’t using Styrofoam. It’s the extra special touches, the small things that become big things that help take the pain away,” said Pat. She recalled another woman “who was transported back to her own teas in England, which took her mind off of her problems. The woman’s sister said she hoped she could give back like this too.”

Pat’s inspiration to give back to Visiting Nurse began in 2009 when her husband, Richard, was the first long-term residential patient at the Center. Coming from a small town in Alabama, the couple of 45 years valued their solitude. Pat remembers, “The Center gave us a serene feeling. It was like being in a home, not a hospital. The staff embraced us as a family, and gave us the gift of privacy.” Pat learned there can be dignity in death, and Richard’s time at the Center removed most of her negative associations surrounding death. “His level of care, and the respectful treatment he received as if he were the only patient here, was a gift to me,” she said. These are some of the gifts she likes to pass on as a volunteer. “Seeing a patient or family member smile makes it all worthwhile. It makes you feel good to help others,” beams Pat. After Richard’s death, Pat moved permanently to Atlanta and spends her holidays volunteering in other ways at the Center. In her humble manner, Pat added, “Thank you for allowing me to serve in a small way. I can’t improve upon the Center, just give back to it.”



“(My husband’s) level of care, and the respectful treatment he received as if he were the only patient here, was a gift to me.”

Pat A.
Visiting Nurse volunteer

□ Volunteer Pat hosts tea times to offer relief and camaraderie

FEATURE

▣ Volunteer Tracy cares for a hospice patient's pet



"I'm lucky I get to do this. It's as much a gift to me as it is to them."

Tracy D.
Visiting Nurse volunteer

A Gift of Care for Every Family Member

Just as Pat's lifelong passion is tea, Tracy D.'s long-time passion is animals. "Animals give and get unconditional love," said Tracy. So, it only made sense for Tracy to volunteer for our Pet Peace of Mind program, caring for pets of terminally ill patients and finding homes for them after their owner dies. She says she relates to the healing aspect of pets and their bond with humans, and also understands patients won't let go until they are assured their pets will be cared for.

Carlton K. is a hospice patient and the proud "father" of three dogs and a cat for which Tracy cares. Carlton's pain from late-stage prostate cancer became so unmanageable at home that he was recommended for care at the Center, but he agreed to go only under the condition that someone cared for his pets. Tracy goes to his home once a day to feed his pets, and is currently working on finding them good homes. The importance of this simple gesture is not lost on Tracy. "The pets have kept Carlton going. We step up when they don't have family or friends," she said. Viewing her work from a higher perspective, Tracy adds, "The hospice experience has a spiritual component, a healing aspect to it that goes beyond the medical. It's a heart-centered connection, like an embrace or hug. You can treat symptoms with meds, but hospice is recognition that there's a soul component that goes beyond the physical." This awareness, and the gift of offering pet care to her patients, has made Tracy's life much richer. "I'm lucky I get to do this. It's as much a gift to me as it is to them. It's an honor to be there to help with something as sacred as caring for something they love deeply. My soul grows and receives the gift. I get more than they do."

"I felt strongly that I wanted other families to enjoy the garden, sitting in nature, in a peaceful environment, reflecting."

Robert T.
Visiting Nurse donor

A Gift of Peaceful Moments

Robert T. is a Visiting Nurse donor who also knows about the gift of soul growth. He watched his terminally-ill father, Frank, soothe his own soul as he played a guitar on the patio outside his hospice room at the Center. This awareness moved Robert to transform a grass field there into a garden dedicated to his father, as a gift of serenity for quiet reflection to other hospice patients and families.

When Robert first brought his father to the Center, he was impressed with the compassionate care there. "It was like a home away from home," he said. He liked "how the staff maximizes the remaining moments of life to the fullest." After his father's death, Robert wanted to give something back in a big way. "I felt strongly that I wanted other families to enjoy the garden, sitting in nature, in a peaceful environment, reflecting," he added. Even now, when Robert returns to the garden he feels a special closeness, "which brings me back to the time we had here, in a good way. We were able to enjoy that moment." In addition to remaining a strong supporter of Visiting Nurse, Robert gave a generous gift to St. Joseph's Hospital of Atlanta ... in the form of another garden, inspired by his gift to Visiting Nurse.



▣ Robert in the Hospice Atlanta Center's peaceful garden

A Gift of Community Support

Sharing gifts of comfort, encouragement and healing throughout the greater community is another way family members of our hospice patients give back. Marcia G.'s adult daughter, Megan, was a Visiting Nurse hospice patient in 2008. To help Marcia cope with her daughter's sudden terminal illness, Marcia chronicled Megan's condition and her own pain through weekly articles submitted to a blog. After Megan's passing, Marcia's newly-found voice was channeled into her book, *When God Comes Near*. "Suffering can be transformed into honey for others," she has written. "We can receive as a recipient of hospice, but we have to recognize the gift and pay it forward to others," Marcia recently remarked. She witnessed her own transformation after writing the book: she could see from a larger perspective, recognized life

as more precious with every passing day, and made herself available to others for an encouraging word. "Writing became a vehicle to watch me and my family try to breathe during this difficult time," explained Marcia. "After a while I finally let go and didn't have to watch anymore."

After the book was published, Marcia held small grief support groups in her home open to anyone. "People in similar situations need a little pause to reflect, remember and encourage someone else," Marcia added. This experience evolved into hosting small groups on St. Simons Island consisting of 20-25 mothers who lost children, which then developed into a career as a public speaker and retreat leader on topics such as hope, gratitude and faith. Marcia embraces the idea that people can move through their grief when they go through exercises that promote remembrance of their deceased loved one, gratitude for life and reaching out to others. Those exercises provide a "new understanding and a fresh vision for our future. We become transformed and show others the way," she said. Marcia's experience with hospice was truly a gift, not only to her in the form of a new career but to others needing to read and hear her words of comfort.

"We can receive as a recipient of hospice, but we have to recognize the gift and pay it forward to others."

Marcia G.
author and speaker

□ Marcia offers words of comfort and encouragement



love · growth · healing · peace

closeness · memories · support · inspiration · self-reflection · encouragement · transformation

FEATURE

The Gift of Strengthened Bonds

Many families who have suffered a loss receive the gift of compassionate hospice care provided by dedicated professionals, selfless volunteers, generous donors and other caregivers who have taken the same hospice journey. But some families still find their structure fractured by the death of a loved one. These families find solace in Camp STARS, a bereavement camp hosted by Visiting Nurse's hospice program. It is held on two weekends: one in the spring and one in the fall. Showing families the way to grieve in emotionally healthy ways after the death of a loved one is one goal of Camp STARS. Families who attend camp often find sharing a weekend of hope and inspiration with like-minded members of the community strengthens the weakened family bonds. This unintended gift of hospice was given to Maelene C. and her close-knit family. Maelene was a volunteer

at a nursing home and had a friend who went into hospice, so when her own sister Rosa entered hospice she understood its positive attributes. Rosa's daughter Tanglea had difficulty coping with her mother's death, so the extended family took Tanglea to Camp STARS in March 2011 to "heal as a family and reconnect with each other," said Maelene. "Camp STARS helped us bring the family closer, share feelings, and get restored to go on in life without Rosa."

In December 2013, Maelene and her family suffered an additional loss as her mother succumbed to a stroke. Once again, the family turned to Camp STARS to heal. Maelene cites creating the Remembrance Banner at the camp as a particular point of transformation for the entire family. "It clicked mentally and spiritually in our hearts that it's ok that our loved one is gone. It was a moment for us as a family to take those precious moments of remembrance and move forward," recalled Maelene. "The Goodbye Candle Service was also helpful. It was special because we were given rocks which forever connect us to the camp."



□ Maelene and her family heal and bond at Camp STARS

"Camp STARS helped us bring the family closer, share feelings, and get restored to go on in life without (my sister) Rosa."

Maelene C.
Camp STARS attendee

unity · dignity · love · growth · healing · peace · closeness · memories · support · inspiration · self-reflection · e



□ A gift of Remembrance from Camp STARS

A Gift for All

Each of these special people received an unexpected gift from their experiences: the realization that hospice care was a positive experience. Volunteer Yuri had knowledge of the hospice process but didn't have any preconceived opinions about it. "I hope hospice is always there for people, and if they are open to that experience then the patient and the family will be better off. I go around telling people how wonderful a gift hospice is." Perhaps the gift of rocks from Camp STARS given to Maelene's family symbolizes the hospice experience best. Hospice can be the "rock" upon which patients and families depend during one of life's toughest times.

In this season of giving, we hope these stories will inspire you to give a gift to our hospice program to continue the cycle of giving. ■

Footnotes:

1. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 11/15/2014
2. 2010 U.S. Census

encouragement · transformation · understanding · connection · comfort

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

July 1 – September 30, 2014

The following people were thoughtfully remembered with a gift in their name:

In Honor of:

Mr. Paul Bodner
Mrs. Eula C. Carlos
Dr. Sherry McHenry
Ms. Barbara Moore
Mr. Jonathan Quillen
Mrs. Ann Serrie
Visiting Nurse Health System Employees

In Memory of:

Mr. Harold Abrams
Mr. James Adams, Jr.
Ms. Joni Affatato
Ms. Melissa Affatato
Mr. Fazlollah Afghanrahmani
Mr. Isiah Allen, Jr.
Mr. Mark Arnold
Mr. Noam Ayal
Mr. Donald Ballard

Mr. Louis Berlin
Mr. J. Walter Berry
Mrs. Margaret Betz
Mrs. Nguyen Thi-Nam Rosa Brin
Ms. Marsha Brinkley
Mr. Sidney Brown
Mr. Charles Burrows
Mr. Gary Buyers
Mr. Emilio Cabrera
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Mr. Thomas Davison
Mrs. Charlotte Demetriades
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Mr. Joe Dye
Mrs. Mary Eckert
Mr. Emil Ferber
Ms. Megan Gaddis
Mr. Paul Hawkins, Sr.
Mrs. Nancy Heflin
Mrs. Barbara Jean Henry
Dr. James Hipkens
Mrs. Virginia Hood
Mr. Barnett Jacobskind
Mr. Eric Jacobson
Dr. Brian “Doc” Jefferson
Ms. Jackie Johnson, PhD
Mr. James K. Johnson
Mr. Walter “Even” Jones
Mr. Ben Jordan
Mr. John Kelley
Ms. Marilyn Krutz
Mr. William Lee, Jr.
Ms. Lois Leonard

Engraved Pavers to Remember a Loved One



Remember the life of someone dear to you and provide much needed funding to the Hospice Atlanta Center by placing a memorial paver in the Center’s garden.

A memorial paver is a lasting tribute to a friend who loved nature, a favorite relative whose personality brought light to your life, or someone with whom you shared special memories. Pavers may be placed with a gift of \$1,000 or more to Visiting Nurse Health System.

Additional memorial opportunities are available and range from teak furniture for patient patios to naming patient rooms or public spaces in the Center. All larger memorials include a plaque engraved with text honoring your loved one.

For more information or to make a memorial gift, please visit www.vnhs.org/pavers or call the Office of Advancement at 404-215-6010.

Mrs. Cecilia Locker
 Mrs. Margaret Maynard
 Mr. James McCoy
 Mrs. Marilyn McGlynn
 Ms. Ruthie M. Montgomery
 Mr. F. Barry Mulligan
 Mr. Leon Murray
 Mrs. Martha Murray
 Mrs. Rebecca Nelson
 Mr. John Nichols
 Ms. Lucy Otto
 Mr. C. Scott Parker
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 Mr. Richard Robertson
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 Mr. John Rusnak, Sr.
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 Mrs. Mary Louise Shadix
 Mr. Leonard Sims
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 Mrs. Evelyn Smith
 Mr. John Soubliis
 Ms. Shari Stoddard
 Mr. James T. Strain
 Mrs. Doris Swaim
 Mr. Francis Tollon
 Mrs. Deloris Wallis
 Mr. Julius Wallis
 Mr. James A. Williams
 Mr. James E. Williams
 Mr. Gregory Winton
 Mrs. Patricia Yeager

.....
 For a complete list of the generous donors
 who contributed honorary and memorial
 gifts visit www.vnhs.org.

525,600 MOMENTS IN A YEAR OF A LIFE

Visiting Nurse is launching a campaign to increase our donor base and raise \$525,600 to support our hospice services. Why such an unusual number? In one year of every life there are 525,600 minutes. Most of us take those moments for granted, but for patients and their families in our hospice program, each and every moment counts. It is our mission to help those in our care cherish these precious moments.

We are asking 5,000 people to donate at least \$105 to reach our goal of \$525,600: one dollar for each of the moments in the year of a life. Please consider making a gift of \$105 in the donation envelope provided in this issue or by visiting our website at vnhs.org/525600. While you're on that webpage, we hope you will watch our three minute video, *Making Moments Count*. In touching vignettes, it illustrates what our hospice program means to our patients and their families throughout the greater Atlanta area.



We thank you for the contributions you have already made this year! Your additional gift of \$105 or more will help provide hospice care to those who cannot afford it and make a difference in the moments of our hospice patients and their families this holiday season. Happy Holidays!



VISITING NURSE HEALTH SYSTEM

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Look Homeward

Caroline E. Moise
Board Chair

Mark Oshnock
President

We welcome your comments and suggestions.
Please address all correspondence to
Mary.Norman@vnhs.org.

404.215.6000
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