

# FAMILY *to Family*



*Volunteers  
are Family*

**INSIDE:**

Educating Future Nurses • Gifts at Work •  
Thank You to Our Supporters



Family Hospice  
Part of UPMC

Dear Friends,



Though the experience of loss is universal, at times we may feel alone in our grief. That's why Family Hospice strives to create welcoming, warm spaces for the bereaved. Everyone deserves access to a space to honor, reflect, and cherish their departed loved ones.

A space to grieve can take many forms. It might look like a Saturday at the Moonshot Museum, where children participate in activities that explore their feelings and the concept of space. It could mean honoring a loved one by volunteering at a Family Hospice Golf Outing, surrounded by a community that understands the touch of loss.

Grieving together may mean attending a community event hosted by daughters who have lost their mothers or joining a Cooking for One class to bond with peers over a shared meal.

Reflecting on the stories in these pages, the "Educating Future Nurses" piece particularly resonated with me. Our staff grieves alongside our patients' families. Educating them on how to support themselves is a core part of ensuring we are never alone in our grief.

No matter where you are in your grief journey, know that Family Hospice is with you.

Gratefully,  
Jennifer Vennare

President, UPMC at Home Services



## EXPLORING SPACE WITH GRIEVING CHILDREN

**Grieving children need a time and place to enjoy the wonder and fun of being a child. Family Hospice, part of UPMC, wanted to give children a safe place to explore and play. In September 2025, Family Hospice hosted children and parents at the Moonshot Museum to learn about space with hands-on activities and experiences.**

The Moonshot Museum on Pittsburgh's North Side provided a fun time for children to engage in interactive exhibits, use virtual reality to land a lunar rover and tour a space station, design their own legacy patch, and many other activities.

This private event was exclusive to 40 children and families who participated, so they had the entire museum to roam.

"It was a fun day, and the parents were so appreciative for the support and recognition of how families struggle through grief. The kids really loved making memorial pictures that are going to be sent to the moon, literally. We hope everyone enjoyed the day as much as we did. It was nice to see families coming together to have some fun," said Elizabeth Schandelmeier, LCSW, APHSW-C, FT, senior bereavement counselor, Family Hospice.

This event was made possible by a generous grant from the Hospice Support Foundation.

To learn more about bereavement resources, visit [UPMC.com/FamilyHospiceBereavement](https://www.upmc.com/familyhospicebereavement).



Virtual reality activities helped children build confidence.

Did you know that Family Hospice was founded in 1980 by a group of volunteers from four different organizations? Connected by a common interest in bringing expert, compassionate end-of-life care to individuals and families in the South Hills community, they formed a consortium whose legacy continues.

To this day, volunteers are inseparable from Family Hospice's identity, and they are among our best ambassadors. One of these is Krista Amato.

Krista comes from a large family in the Brookline neighborhood of Pittsburgh. Parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, and grandparents are all part of a system of support. "We pick each other up when needed," says Krista. This is what defines family for her.

This proved so important when Krista's young niece, Bella, fell seriously ill in 2024. Family Hospice became involved in Bella's care. During this difficult experience, Krista came to a new understanding of hospice.

"What I realized is that hospice is not just end-of-life care," says Krista. "It is helping the family to adjust to a new scenario. When the worst happened, they were with us, and they took care of us at the hardest time."

Since Bella's death, Krista notes, she can sense when her niece's spirit is exerting her influence in the best possible way. "I know Bella is helping me," says Krista.

So, when a chance meeting with Family Hospice staff at a local Chamber of Commerce holiday luncheon presented itself, Krista took the opportunity to learn about volunteering in support of other families. She has since become a pillar of a volunteer corps that assists with special events, raising awareness and funds in support of enhanced resources, programs, and services for individuals and families navigating end of life.

Dianne Whetsell, special events coordinator, describes Krista as big-hearted and someone who appreciates and dedicates herself to hard work. Along with her exceptional organizational skills, Krista's talents are put to good purpose at Family Hospice's annual golf outing.

Some 30 volunteers are on-site that day to create the best possible experience for the golfers. Krista has recruited colleagues from Dollar Bank, where she has worked for more than 13 years, to help meet that need. Together, she and her co-workers bring wonderful energy and enthusiasm to the occasion, and they are up for any task.

This past year, Krista was stationed at the volunteer registration table where she helped to ensure the day's events ran smoothly. Krista partnered with Dollar Bank's Volunteer Program, which grants every employee two paid volunteer days annually, and 11 additional Dollar Bank colleagues raised their hands to join her. "Being on the course itself opens up the whole experience," recalls Krista. "I meet great people. We share stories. It is such a fun environment, and seeing people arrive early and eager to donate towards a great cause puts you in a wonderful mood."

Family Hospice holds several events and campaigns throughout the year in support of enhanced patient and family experiences, and people like Krista play an important role in these efforts. If you would like to learn more about this type of volunteer opportunity, contact Dianne Whetsell at **412-639-4975** or [whetsell@upmc.edu](mailto:whetsell@upmc.edu).

**Support for the Family Hospice Foundation impacts daily life for 3,200 patients and families in western Pennsylvania annually who are navigating end of life with the expertise and compassion of our multidisciplinary team.**

**We are pleased to share a summary of how that support is applied to enhance care.**

# Gifts at Work

## Patient and Family Support

Contributions from individual donors (including the Heart of Gratitude program) and businesses, along with event income, helped to fund a wide array of services in 2025. In our mission to provide compassionate comfort care, our team of physicians, nurses, social workers, spiritual counselors, and volunteers attended to patients and families wherever they called home. During these vulnerable times, our teams administered customized care plans catered to special needs groups such as veterans, and provided other services and support items to ease the journeys of patients and families.

Care plans for many coming onto hospice service included cardiac medications, radiation, chemotherapy, and dialysis that insurance would not cover. Infusion pumps were purchased so that patients could receive medications in the home setting. Art therapy, equine therapy, massage therapy, and comfort music were made available to enhance the psychological, physical, and emotional well-being of patients.

Furthermore, donor support funded adult bereavement programs such as memorial services and the “Cooking For One” classes that taught meal planning, cooking, coping strategies, and life skills. Families were also offered heartbeat printouts of their loved ones to have as keepsakes. A special event at the Moonshot Museum was held for bereaved children, giving them literal and figurative space to explore their grief through interactive exhibits and activities. Throughout the year children also received tote bags with age-specific books on grief and activity sets, memory boxes, photo frames, and toys.

## General Donations

As we look ahead to 2026, a total of \$122,867 will fund the following:

### Bereavement:

- Memorial Walk/Community Event to honor loved ones, connect with others, and receive bereavement support. Benefits 1,000 bereaved.
- Stationery for comforting notes, community memorial services in spring and fall, grief support groups. Benefits 4,000 bereaved.
- Cooking for One Classes to accommodate 30 people.
- Grief totes for children containing activities and items that promote healthy habits and age-appropriate books covering grief. Benefits 100 children.
- Children’s equine therapy to bring peace, healing, and life balance. Benefits 20 children.

### Clinical and Complementary Care:

- Treatments not covered under the Medicare Benefit. Dialysis, oral chemotherapy, radiation, and specialized formulas for patients transitioning to hospice. Benefits 25 patients.
- Art, massage, and pet therapies and comfort music to alleviate pain and stress and enhance physical and emotional well-being. Benefits 375 patients and families.
- Caregiver toolkit for patients at home. Includes bed pads, x-long fitted sheets, pill crushers, and pill minders. Benefits 300 patients.
- Neck pillows, blankets, chargers for personal electronic devices, notebooks, pens, lip balms, and tissues for patients in the hospital setting. Benefits 250 patients.

### Lawrenceville Inpatient Unit:

- Bladder scanner, upgraded thermometers, dinamap for vital signs, and glucose analyzer to provide quicker assessments and interventions and increased comfort. Benefits 800 patients.
- Meals and fresh baked cookies for patients and loved ones at the bedside. Benefits 250 people.

### Specialized Support Programs:

- Overnight stays, counseling, and therapy at Hope Grows Respite House for fatigued caregivers. Benefits 24 caregivers.
- Recognition and honor guard ceremonies for veterans. Presentation of pins, certificates, and blankets to veterans who have served their country. Serves 250 veterans.
- Keepsakes for loved ones including patients’ heart rhythm printouts and fingerprint cards, plaster hand cast kits, photo books, memory boxes, and suncatchers. Benefits 550 people.



Cooking for One

## Carol Sayers Vockel Fund

In 2025, the Carol Sayers Vockel Fund for Community and Volunteer Education provided more than \$1,370 in learning opportunities. A community event was hosted by Family Hospice bereaved family member April Y. Cunningham, who, along with contributing authors, wrote the book *Daughters on the Journey: A Tribute to Our Mothers*. The event offered support through sharing grief stories, learning coping skills, and honoring the legacy of mothers. The fund also covered a volunteer “lunch and learn” event, which educated volunteers on the role of a hospice social worker.



April Cunningham and panel of authors



A family enjoys HALLOWBOO! at Idlewild Amusement Park

## Imagine Harmony Fund

Funding is for final life experiences and is provided as requests are submitted.

In 2025, the Imagine Harmony Fund fulfilled requests exceeding \$5,400, some of which included:

- Thanksgiving meals served to patients and their families to alleviate their stress and to help them enjoy the holiday.
- Family trip to Idlewild Amusement Park.
- Wheelchair transport for patient to visit wife’s gravesite.
- Yoga for patient to relax body and mind and control pain.
- Birthday and anniversary parties.
- Gardening kit to bring joy to a patient who was missing her garden.

## Angels On Call Fund

Funding is for resources for patients with financial limitations and is provided as requests are submitted.

In 2025, the Angels On Call Fund fulfilled requests exceeding \$3,900, some of which included:

- Electric wheelchair repairs.
- Robotic companion dog for patient with dementia.
- Payment of rent preventing patient’s eviction.
- Refrigerator for patient’s groceries.
- Hotel stays and ride share gift cards for family members.
- Clothing and specialty bedding for patients at home.



Patient Ruth enjoys companion dog



# EDUCATING FUTURE NURSES

**Nursing students juggle demanding classes and clinical hours as they learn how to help patients get better, but what happens when getting better is not an option? Recognizing this gap in instruction, Family Hospice has partnered with the McElhattan Foundation to provide vital training for nursing students on hospice services and end-of-life care.**

“I try to educate them on how hospice fits into the modern model of care being delivered — the right care at the right time at the right place,” says **Steve Jackson, RN**, clinical nurse liaison, Family Hospice. For nursing students who opt for a hospice rotation for their community-based clinical hours, the experience is eye-opening and invaluable.

“Students seem surprised to learn the timing and scope of hospice services,” Steve shares. “It is not just for those actively dying to receive morphine until they die. It’s allowing patients to live to the fullest for the time they have left with a focus on their comfort.”

As students are paired with a Family Hospice preceptor, they get to see various aspects of hospice in action. They witness

goals of care conversations with patients and families in a hospital setting facilitated by Steve and other liaisons. They also observe the interdisciplinary team’s coordination of services and the compassionate care offered at the patient’s bedside in the inpatient unit or at home.

“This is not just about clinical management of a sick end-of-life patient. It is about seeing the whole person and supporting an entire family,” explains **Erin Bernhardt, MS, BSN, RN**, senior manager, clinical operations, Family Hospice. “In hospice, we manage every aspect of the patient’s well-being.”

Some students have only five to six hours for hospice learning, and that time is used to introduce resources funded by a generous grant from the McElhattan Foundation.

**“We want new nurses to go into their first roles having been exposed to hospice with some tools in their toolbox.” Erin expresses.**

“We can say, ‘Put this folder in your locker. At some point, you’re going to have a patient who is dying in the middle of your shift, and you’re going to feel really alone. These resources can help you.’ They may not feel as frightened as they would without them. Part of our role in hospice is helping patients and families know what to expect. That knowledge is powerful to alleviate fear. We want to do the same thing to empower new nurses to care for patients at any stage in the continuum of care.”

## THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Donations of \$500 or more are recognized in print. List reflects donations made in 2025.

### ANGEL’S CHOIR \$5,000+

CentiMark Foundation  
John R. and Margaret S. McCartan Charitable Fund of The Pittsburgh Foundation  
NiSource Corporation  
Estate of Susan Sheap  
Snee-Reinhardt Charitable Foundation  
T. R. Paul Family Foundation  
V. Wayne and Cordelia Whitten Barker Fund

### DISTINGUISHED DOVES \$1,000-\$4,999

Stephen F. Andolina  
Anonymous  
Katharine Brunkhorst  
Carol Sayers Vockel Fund of The Pittsburgh Foundation  
Laura M. Deger  
Patricia J. Dimmock  
Michael Earley  
Ferguson Perforating Company  
Renée A. Holmes  
Hospice Support Foundation  
JD Cleveland M&A  
Katie Kean Gratitude Fund of the National Philanthropic Trust  
Mechanical Contractors Association of Western PA  
Milton Burkart and Patricia Crumrine Charitable Trust  
Janet L. Misko  
Pittsburgh Pirates Alumni Association, Inc.  
Sally Vockel Poling  
Dorothy J. Pozar  
James and Pamela Rogers  
Rotary Club of Upper St Clair Bethel Park

Siciliano Family Fund of the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies  
Patricia Thomas and Terry Aldridge

### FAMILY FRIENDS \$500-\$999

Michael Anderson  
William A. Boyd  
Nancy G. Brownell  
Kathy A. Crump  
Dennis J. Duryea  
Peggy A. Fitzpatrick  
Ruth G. Foltz  
Daniel Frazier  
Jones Day  
Becky Kelber  
Scott Kistler  
Saundra E. Lumish  
Frederick P. McLuckie, Jr.  
Walter L. McNew, Jr.  
Deborah B. Neuhaus  
Donna M. Pecovich  
William C. Ries  
Sandra R. Tomlinson  
Nancy Wagner  
John A. Wall  
Michael and Janice Woshner

### EVENT SPONSORS

84 Lumber Company  
Action Supply Products, Inc.  
Affordable Fence & Railing, LLC  
All Ways Safe and Fuel Required  
Ambulance and Chair EMS, Inc.  
American Bridge Company  
BAW Plastics Inc.  
Blackburns Physicians Pharmacy, Inc.  
Chris Blass  
CAPTRUST  
Chartwell Pennsylvania  
Clearview Federal Credit Union

Coen Markets  
Community Life  
Compati Home Care  
Coyle Auto Body, Inc.  
D. B. Root Company  
D’Alessandro Funeral Home & Crematory LTD  
David J. Henney Funeral Home  
Sharon K. DeMilo  
Denillo Heating & Cooling Inc.  
Dialysis Clinic, Inc.  
Dana and Julie DiVecchio  
Dollar Bank  
Donte’s Pizzeria  
Dragonfly Health  
Encompass Health  
Epic Systems Corporation  
Fahringer, McCarty, Grey, Inc.  
First Commonwealth Mortgage  
Ruth G. Foltz  
Fort Pitt Capital Group  
John J. Gaughan  
GBU Life  
Good Orthodontics  
Joann and Tony Grieco  
Holland Mortgage Advisors  
Howard Hanna - Denise Marasco  
IBEW Local Union #5 & Western PA Chapter, NECA  
Jefferson Memorial Funeral Home, Inc.  
Jewish Healthcare Foundation  
Jimmy’s Mobile Detailing  
John F. Slater Funeral Home, Inc.  
Julian Gray Associates  
Just the Tip Cigars  
Karndean Designflooring  
Peter and Alice Leone  
Maroadi Transfer & Storage Inc.  
Neofes Insurance Group  
Paul Henney Cremation & Funeral Tributes, Inc.

Pennsylvania Land Titles  
Pittsburgh Cremation & Funeral Care  
PNC Bank  
Presbyterian SeniorCare Network  
Range Resources Corp.  
Resnick Roofing & Contracting, LLC  
Kathleen Robbins  
Rusmur Floors South - Carpet One  
John Ruzicka  
Rx Partners, Inc.  
Schellhaas Funeral Home & Cremation Svcs., Inc.  
Scheuermann’s Disease Fund  
Shenderovich, Shenderovich & Fishman, P.C.  
Simply Compliance  
Christopher Slagle  
South Hills Auto  
Southwood Psychiatric Hospital, LLC  
Sunny Days in Home Care  
Sandra R. Tomlinson  
Louis J. Towchik  
Townview Health and Rehabilitation Center  
Trib Total Media, LLC  
Two Men and a Junk Truck  
University of Pittsburgh Health Sciences  
University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing  
UPMC Center for Rehab Services  
UPMC Palliative & Supportive Institute  
UPMC Passavant Hospital Foundation  
UPMC Washington  
Vector Security  
Washington Financial Bank  
WGL Energy Services  
Worgul, Sarna & Ness  
Zacharia Brown, PC

Omissions or errors: we are grateful for the ongoing support given by our contributors and make every effort to report giving information accurately. If you discover an error or omission, please accept our sincere apology and contact Christine Jamison, director of development, at 412-572-8812 or jamisonc2@upmc.edu.



This newsletter is published annually. Permission must be granted for reprinting of articles that appear here.

Please direct questions, comments, and/or requests to **Christine Jamison**, director of development, at **412-572-8812** or **jamisonc2@upmc.edu**.

Go Green! If you would prefer to receive your copy of our newsletter via email, contact **Helen Stickney**, development assistant and donor database manager, at **412-572-8457** or **stickneyhe@upmc.edu**.



25FAMHOS326450 CK/JB 3/26

## Upcoming Family Hospice Events

For questions, ticket ordering, or more information, contact Dianne Whetsell at **whetsellid@upmc.edu**, call **412-639-4975**, or visit **UPMC.com/FamilyHospiceDonate**.



### The 39th Annual Charity Golf Outing Monday, May 11, 2026

Southpointe Golf Club  
Shotgun start 10 a.m.



### Holiday Memorial Doves Nov. 1 through Dec. 31, 2026

On display at five local malls,  
U.S. Steel Tower, and our  
Lawrenceville inpatient unit



National Comedian  
**Julian McCullough**  
Thurs., Oct 22, 2026, 7pm  
Carnegie Library Lecture Hall

Emcee of the Nate Bargatze Tour  
Appearances on TV game show "The Greatest Average American"  
and the Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon

## Bereavement Educational Support Groups

Registration is required. Please call **412-572-8829** to register.

### Growing Through Grief

Mondays  
from 1 to 2:30 p.m.

Fall and Spring Series

### Cooking for One

Tuesdays and Fridays  
from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Fall and Spring Series

