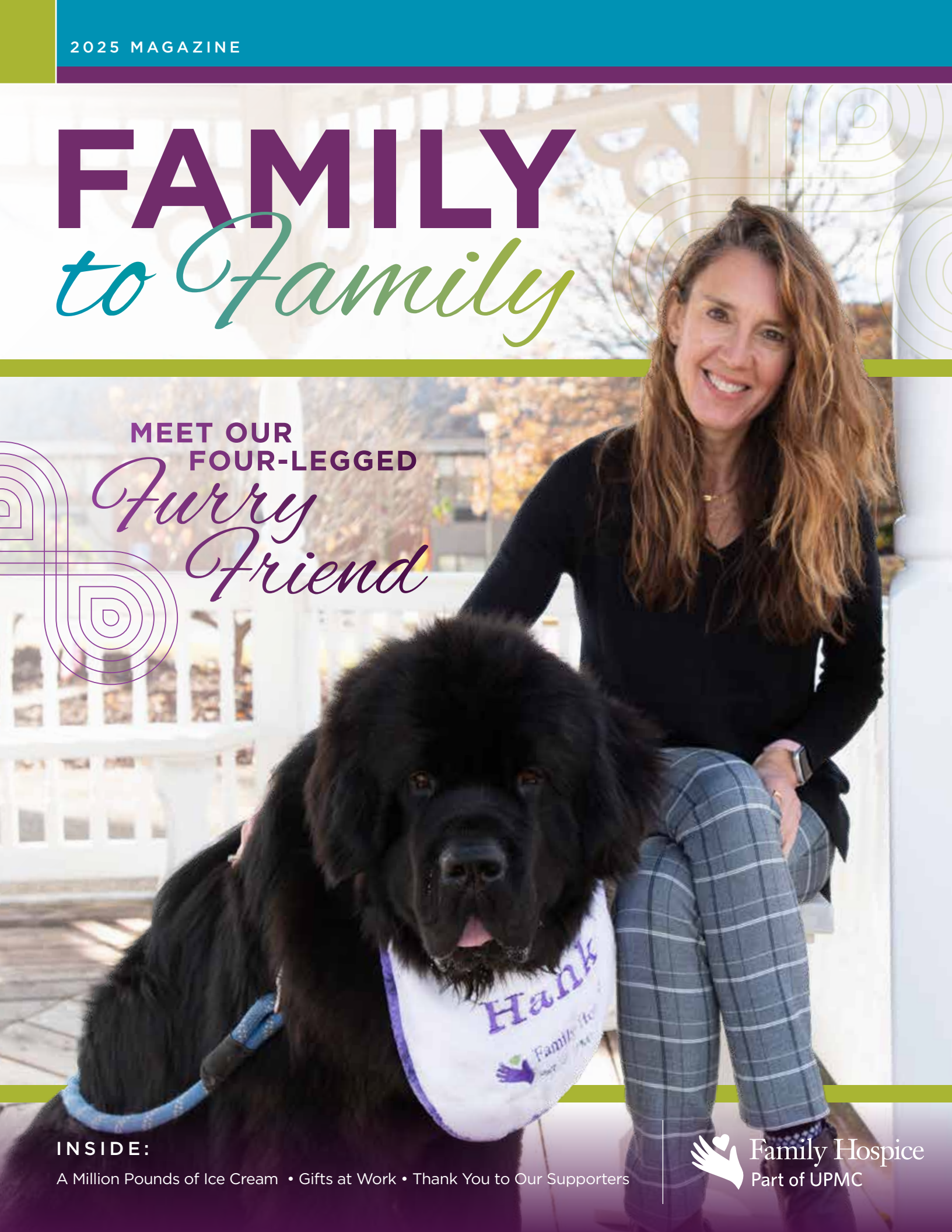


FAMILY *to Family*

MEET OUR
FOUR-LEGGED

*Furry
Friend*



INSIDE:

A Million Pounds of Ice Cream • Gifts at Work • Thank You to Our Supporters



Family Hospice
Part of UPMC

Dear Friends,



Life can bring us sweet moments even in challenging times. These experiences are meant to be savored as they unfold and can become touching, healing reminiscences that endure through the years.

At Family Hospice, helping to create lasting memories from tender moments remains vital to our purpose. This goes hand-in-hand with the foundational hospice principle of quality of life, no matter the measure of time we have left.

As you will read across these pages, this past year included an abundance of these moments, made possible by our benefactors, volunteers, and staff. Moments shared between husbands over a dish of ice cream; moments of unconditional love and perhaps

some slobbery kisses from Hank, the therapy dog; moments of wonder between a mother and her infant child on a visit to Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens — each a privilege to witness, each with a lasting imprint.

Whatever your role in support of these moments, we thank you for the generosity and compassion you extend to individuals and families throughout our region who are navigating end of life. Even when fleeting, the impact is profound.

Gratefully,
Jennifer Vennare
President, Family Hospice

A MILLION POUNDS OF ICE CREAM

Jeff Oaks was regarded as a beloved teacher, colleague, artist, mentor, husband, son, brother, and friend. Michael Rusnak, Jeff's husband, cherished a particular aspect of his identity: his undeniable love of ice cream. As he enjoyed his last meal of this particular treat at Family Hospice's inpatient unit in Lawrenceville, he closed his eyes and relished in the milky sugary goodness, with only a soft "mmm" escaping. When the nurse checked in to gauge how much he had eaten, Jeff exclaimed he'd had "a million pounds of ice cream."

This was one of several recollections of their time together at the inpatient unit which inform Michael's understanding of hospice care today. "Family Hospice allowed us to be there for Jeff in a way that wouldn't have been possible without them," says Michael. "For me personally, it was a way to be present, not as a caregiver, but as a spouse. That is the biggest gift I've ever received."

Michael describes the care that Jeff and he received as an impossible task made possible. "It was very elegantly accomplished," Michael explains. "Staff who cleaned the rooms, the nurses — they were there to comfort us, seeing us as their family, all while helping us understand the process and what to expect next. The doctors were straightforward and thoughtful and relayed information appropriately. Collectively, they cared about every single person there. It was a place of love and compassion."

The experience compels Michael to urge people to choose hospice sooner. "Some don't realize that one can live an extended period while in hospice. Hospice doesn't always mean life is over. You can live a regular, normal life in hospice, and the remaining moments of your life will be happier. It allows for your final experiences with those you love to be memorable in a way that you won't regret."



Michael and Jeff



MEET OUR FOUR-LEGGED

Furry Friend

Meet Hank, the therapy dog, who sports a bib made especially for him by Family Hospice. Hank's owner, Ann, enjoys volunteering with Hank as a means to give back to others.

Hank is Ann's fifth Newfoundland. The breed is known for a formidable physical presence which belies a very gentle and social nature. He has achieved near rock star status on the campus of Asbury Heights, where he and Ann visit residents under Family Hospice's care.

Hank is the second of Ann's Newfies, as they are also known, to become certified through Therapy Dogs International, and he is quite the pup about town.

In addition to volunteering on behalf of Family Hospice, Hank and Ann also visit several UPMC hospitals during Nurses Week, oncology patients at UPMC Hillman Cancer Center in West Mifflin, and residents in several memory care settings.

"We can't possibly know what someone is feeling or going through on any given day or moment, so if Hank can bring a bit of cheer to someone's day or make someone feel good, that's a great thing," Ann said.

The pet therapy program at Family Hospice is being funded by generous donors like Ruth Foltz and a grant from Richard Sagan. Richard's wife, Pamela, was in Family Hospice's care in 2023.

Richard recalled, "While on hospice service at the Canterbury inpatient unit, our daughter's dog provided comfort at the bedside, carefully watching to make sure Pamela was receiving the best care." The grant honors his wife and provides comfort for others receiving hospice care.

True to the hospice philosophy, Hank eases the end-of-life experience for family members and caregivers as well as for patients. Even though he is still young at a year and a half, Hank is a calm and obedient dog.

"Hank is happy to meet new people," Ann said "and his calm, gentle demeanor makes him a great therapy dog."

"Family Hospice is grateful for Hank, Ann, and all our volunteers who seek to comfort patients and family members with their gentleness and generosity."

Ed Lewis

Manager of Volunteers and Bereavement

To learn more about volunteering with Family Hospice, contact Nick Petti at **412-651-1602** or **pettin@upmc.edu**.

Support for the Family Hospice Foundation impacts daily life for 3,100 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 2024. Our team of physicians, nurses, social workers, spiritual counselors, and volunteers administered customized care plans, catered to special needs groups such as veterans, and provided services and items to ease the journeys of patients and families.

Care plans included cardiac medications, radiation, chemo, and dialysis that insurance would not cover. Aromatherapy, art therapy, massage therapy, and comfort music enhanced the psychological, physical, and emotional well-being of patients. For caregivers in the home setting, we provided bed pads, XL twin sheets for electric beds, pill crushers and pill minders, handbooks, and personal planners. Overnight stays at the Iris Respite House were also provided to fatigued caregivers.

Donor support also funded the adult bereavement “Cooking for One” class that taught meal planning, cooking, coping strategies, and life skills. And, bereaved children received tote bags with age-specific books on grief, activity sets, memory boxes, photo frames, and toys.



Honoring a veteran



Music therapy



An afternoon of baking

General Donations

Looking ahead to 2025, a total of \$95,350 will fund the following:

Bereavement:

- 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. Serves 60 children.

Clinical and Complementary Care:

- Treatments not covered under the Medicare Benefit. Dialysis, oral chemo, radiation, and specialized formulas for patients transitioning to hospice. Benefits 20 patients.
- Pumps to deliver infusion therapy for medications for home patients.
- Art, massage, and pet therapies as well as comforting music to alleviate pain and stress and enhance physical and emotional well-being. Benefits 400 patients and families.

Specialized Support Programs:

- Recognition and honor guard ceremonies for veterans. Presentation of pins, certificates, and blankets to veterans who have served their country. Serves 140 veterans.
- Patients’ heart rhythm printouts and fingerprint cards given as tangible keepsakes for loved ones. Benefits 1,000 family members and caregivers.

Angels On Call Fund

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

In 2024, the Angels On Call Fund fulfilled requests in the amount of \$1,713, some of which included:

- Oxygen management system with retractable tube to prevent tripping and kinks.
- External catheter for elderly patient with cerebrovascular disease.
- Payment of electric and gas bills due to job losses.
- Security camera for family to monitor their mother.
- Battery-powered fan for patient who experienced power outages.
- Fidget blankets, cooling pillows, hospital gowns, and bed sheets.

Carol Sayers Vockel Fund

In 2024, the Carol Sayers Vockel Fund for Community and Volunteer Education provided \$1,540 for two volunteer “lunch and learn” events covering symptom management and spiritual care and for a social worker to attend a national conference on death education and counseling to improve how staff and volunteers care for our patients and their loved ones.

Imagine Harmony Fund

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

In 2024, the Imagine Harmony Fund fulfilled requests in the amount of \$2,770, some of which included:

- Forty-five Thanksgiving meals served to patients and their families to alleviate their stress and to help them enjoy the holiday.
- Trip to Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens for a 2-month-old pediatric patient and his family.
- Photography session with a 23-month-old pediatric patient and his family at the beach.
- Gateway Clipper Cruise for a 52-year-old and her family.
- Birthday and anniversary parties for nine patients.
- Baking supplies for 88-year-old man to make his famous holiday cookies.
- Penguins and WWE Tickets for two patients.



Trip to Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens

END-STAGE RENAL DISEASE CONCURRENT CARE

The UPMC Palliative and Supportive Institute (PSI) partners with Family Hospice, part of UPMC, and Dialysis Clinic, Inc. (DCI) in an innovative concurrent care program for end-stage kidney disease patients receiving dialysis with limited life expectancy.



This program allows qualifying patients to continue dialysis while accessing hospice care when the goal of care is palliative. This alleviates a long-standing barrier to the benefits of hospice services for a patient and caregiver population in need of expertise in pain and symptom management and psychosocial support at end of life.

The Aston family found this program to be a valuable resource in navigating the final months of life for their beloved husband and father, Charlie. Charlie was a dialysis patient at DCI Canterbury while a resident in long-term care at Canterbury Place. Described as gentle, funny, and curious about the world, Charlie was always one to make the best of a difficult situation. When his care dictated a change in his living environment, Charlie fashioned a warm and welcoming room at Canterbury, full of photos, rare books, and even miniature trains that reflected his joys and passions.

Over time, Charlie's condition declined, including worsening of his circulation, which came with very uncomfortable symptoms such as pronounced itching and swelling in his hands and arms. Additionally, surgeons were suggesting amputation due to a deteriorating leg wound. The Astons were weighing Charlie's prognosis and his potential quality of life. "Watching his body succumb was difficult," recalled Jean, Charlie's wife. "He couldn't do what he wanted any longer."

With Charlie's capacity to understand the consequences of treatment options dwindling, Jean and her children leaned into the support of the concurrent care team, which included Jane Schell, MD, UPMC Palliative and Supportive Institute, nursing staff from DCI, and Mary Jo McLaughlin, RN, Family Hospice nurse case manager. Together, they helped bridge the transition from dialysis and life-prolonging treatment in his familiar space to inpatient end-of-life care on a dedicated hospice unit at Canterbury Place.

"Everybody on the care team wanted the best for my father," said Sarah, Charlie's daughter. "During those weeks, the care was intentional and collaborative. We felt respected by the team, they listened to us, they guided us, and they communicated with us."

Charlie lived the final days of his life at Family Hospice's inpatient unit. Jean described the inpatient environment as an escape that gave everyone peace as Charlie's time grew short. She noted additionally that staff were keenly aware of the needs of the family as a whole and could often anticipate them. "It takes a special person to do this," said Jean. "Their work impacted us all positively."

His family remains grateful for the relief from suffering, the calm, and the room to gather and sit vigil which the unit afforded Charlie and them. "My son was reading to him from his favorite book, 'Walden' (by Henry David Thoreau), when he passed," said Jean. "He was true to his nature to the end."

Elena Nosal, M.S.N.
Director, Regional Hospice Services

"This program allowed Charlie to experience a peaceful environment outside an acute care setting. He was able to decide how care would align with his goals and to ensure support for his family."

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Donations of \$500 or more are recognized in print. List reflects donations made in 2024.

ANGEL'S CHOIR \$5,000+

Anonymous
CentiMark Foundation
The Cottage Bridge Foundation
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Saundra Lumish
Estate of Lois O'Connor
Pittsburgh Pirates Alumni Association, Inc.
Pamela Robertson
Estate of Susan Tilbrook Sheap
Slagle Family Foundation
T. R. Paul Family Foundation
V. Wayne and Cordelia Whitten
Barker Fund of the Pittsburgh Foundation

Milton Burkart and Patricia Crumrine Charitable Trust
Janet Misko
Poeppel Charitable Foundation
Dorothy Pozar
James & Pamela Rogers
Richard Sagan
Christine Schaeffer
Bill & Sue Schmitt
Siciliano Family Fund of the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies
Patricia Thomas & Terry Aldridge
Tippins Foundation

FAMILY FRIENDS \$500-\$999

William Boyd
Eileen Britsch
Lily Chin
Dolly Curtin
Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation
Lyle Farmer
Kathryn Kean
Dawn Kitko
Walter McNew, Jr.
Susan Park
Donna Pecovish
William Ries
Michael Rusnak
Donna Sherman
Loretta Stanish
Marty & Lynn Tokarczyk
John & Irene Wall

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

Stephen Andolina
Anonymous
Ann H. Collins Charitable Trust
Nancy Bonenberger
Katharine Brunkhorst
Carol Sayers Vockel Fund of the Pittsburgh Foundation
Laura Deger
Ruth Foltz
Daniel Frazier
Hilda Fu
Majorie Gibson
Peggy Vockel Harris
Reneé Holmes
Kathleen Lindner
Jeffrey Maurin
Mechanical Contractors Association of Western PA

EVENT SPONSORS

84 Lumber Company
All Ways Safe & Fuel Required
BAW Plastics Inc.
Builders Guild of Western PA
CAPTRUST
Chartwell Pennsylvania
Clearview Federal Credit Union
Coen Markets
Colussy Chevrolet
Community LIFE
Compati Home Care
Coyle Auto Body, Inc.
Crust Cafe and Pizzeria
D'Alessandro Funeral Home & Crematory LTD
Delta Care Rx
Sharon DeMilo
Dana & Julie DiVecchio
Encompass Health
Fahringer, McCarty, Grey, Inc.
Fort Pitt Capital Group
John Gaughan
GBU Life
Joann & Tony Grieco
Huntington National Bank
IBEW Local Union #5 & Western PA Chapter, NECA
Invictus Capital Partners
Jefferson Memorial Funeral Home, Inc.
John F. Slater Funeral Home, Inc.
Julian Gray Associates
KA Sports LLC
Karndean Designflooring
Peter Leone, Jr.
Mariani & Richards, Inc.
Maroadi Transfer & Storage Inc.

McVay Plumbing, Heating & Cooling
Neofes Insurance Group
Ogg, Murphy & Perkosky
Pennsylvania Land Titles
PNC Bank
Presbyterian SeniorCare Network
Primary Care Pharmacy Services, Inc.
Range Resources Corp.
Resnick Roofing & Contracting, LLC
Restaurant Holdings, LP (Juniper Grill)
Kathleen Robbins
Rusmur Floors South - Carpet One
Rx Partners, Inc.
Schellhaas Funeral Home & Cremation Svcs., Ltd.
South Hills Auto
South Hills Interfaith Movement
Sperling Funeral Home, Inc.
Sunny Days in Home Care
Louis Towchik
Townview Health and Rehabilitation Center
Trulieve
UPMC Center for Rehab Services
UPMC Palliative & Supportive Institute
UPMC Passavant Hospital Foundation
UPMC Senior Communities
UPMC St. Margaret Hospital
UPMC Urgent Care
USA Compression Partners, LLC
WesBanco Bank, Inc.
XTO Energy Inc.

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**.



FAMHOS600005 CK/JB 3/25

Upcoming Family Hospice Events

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



**The 38th Annual
Charity Golf Outing**
Monday, May 12, 2025

Southpointe Golf Club

Shotgun start 10 a.m.



Spring Raffle
Tickets on sale now

Single chance \$10
Six chances for \$50

Drawing Monday, May 12, 2025



Celebrity Hoops for Hospice
Oct. 22, 2025
Baldwin High School

7 to 8 p.m.



Holiday Memorial Doves
Nov. 1 through Dec. 31, 2025

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

Bereavement Educational Support Groups

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

Growing Through Grief

Wednesdays
from 1 to 2:30 p.m.

March 12 through April 16

Cooking for One

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

April 1 through April 11

