

SHARING THE

SUMMER 2020

gift
gift of life



GIFT OF LIFE
TRANSPLANT HOUSE
A HOME THAT HELPS
AND HEALS

Visit Our Website



Resiliency During a Pandemic *How Our Guests Turned Fear to Gratitude*

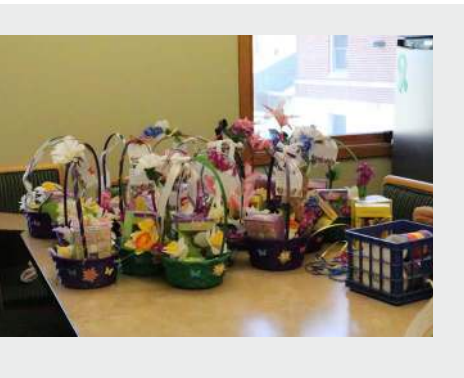
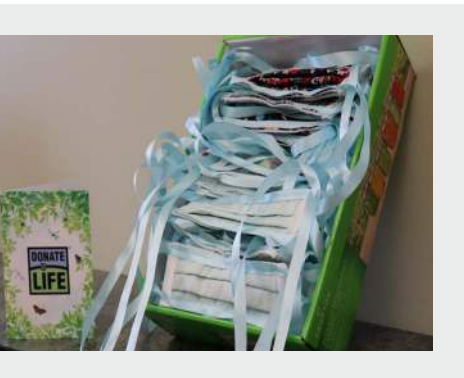
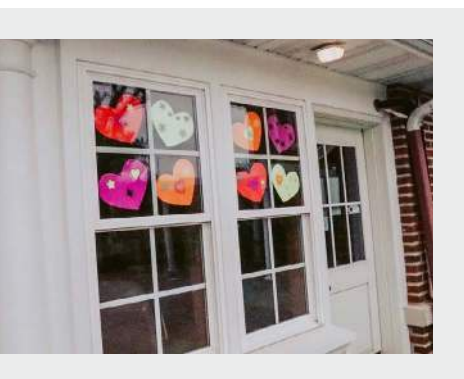
It wasn't until Governor Walz issued Executive Order 20-04 on March 16, closing all restaurants and bars that I first noticed an uneasy anxiety settle over Gift of Life Transplant House. The Governor had issued an Executive Order closing schools in Minnesota two days before, but we had all assumed this was a temporary measure to protect our state's children. Now the anxiety seeped into the house like a cold draft. It wasn't just concern I saw on our faces – I now saw fear.

Our priority remained the safety and security of our

immunocompromised guests and the reassurance for their caregivers that we would do all we could. So we developed four objectives:

- To keep Gift of Life Transplant House open
- To alleviate the stress and anxiety as much as possible for our guests and caregivers
- To stop coronavirus at the front doors
- To continue to employ our staff

Working closely with our board, we made the determination that we would remain open even if only one guest and caregiver remained. As Mayo Clinic set in motion their plan to protect their patients, we



saw our occupancy rates begin to drop. At one point, we had only 36 people staying with us on our campus. But the decision was made and we were committed to remaining open.

To stop coronavirus at the front doors, we implemented a number of policies and protocols.

We restricted all visitors; we asked everyone, including staff to wear a face mask; thanks to our Mennonite volunteers, we were able to sanitize every public surface on the hour; and we communicated as much as possible about coronavirus and what we were doing. Our high standards meant we were already well prepared. Our housekeeping and facilities staff continued their diligent work to ensure the cleanliness of the house.

We also wanted to continue to employ our staff. Many companies were either furloughing or laying off staff and we were committed to their well-being. When the Governor issued a “Stay-At-Home” order, Gift of Life Transplant House was determined to be an essential business, but several of our staff, due to either age or pre-existing medical conditions, fit the criteria for “at-risk” employees and our board generously allowed those staff to stay home, receiving full salaries. We also monitored the stress level of employees and provided “free” days to anyone who needed it. The “free” day was a paid day off for rest and relaxation.

The challenge of alleviating the stress and anxiety of our guests and caregivers was the most difficult to address. We created table tents for the dining room tables that communicated the symptoms of coronavirus and what to do if you thought you were ill. We accepted phone calls and emails at any time day or night to answer questions or concerns. For nearly 10 days, the anxiety and stress levels were high, until we held a Town Hall Meeting at each house. It was during those Town Hall Meetings that I had the privilege to witness something miraculous – that resilient, courageous spirit that characterizes our transplant patients and their caregivers began to push back the stress. The fear I had seen in faces was, over the next few days, replaced with gratitude once again – that atmosphere that makes Gift of Life Transplant House so unique.

It isn’t over yet and we are all still a bit anxious. But I see the light of smiles, covered by a face mask, but unmistakable in eyes. I hear the laughter once again in the dining rooms and listen as one guest encourages another. And I am inspired to live my life as our transplant patients live their lives – seeking out the beauty, the hope and gratitude for each day.

-Executive Director, Mary Wilder

LETTERS FROM LEADERSHIP



JOE FORRER
OUTGOING PRESIDENT

As I step down from my current role on the board I'm looking forward to the new leadership's fresh ideas and initiatives. The last few years have had their challenges and some incredible examples of support for our mission. It never ceases to amaze me how much can change in such a short span of time. Last year, Gift of Life Transplant House and our community were thriving and looking forward to what would become a very successful year of events.

This year we are facing an unprecedented challenge with the COVID-19 crisis. But it is in these unsettling times that we see the true nature of our community and our staff. I am both humbled and honored to be working alongside our dedicated, kind, and thoughtful staff. I would also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our medical staff on the board and a number of physicians within the Mayo Clinic for their guidance in assuring a safe home for our guests.

Finally, I want to say one of the best decisions our board made was to bring Mary on as the Executive Director. Her experience and stalwart devotion to managing the house has helped us transition through previous challenges and no doubt Mary and the new leadership will guide us into better days ahead.

Sincerely,

Joe Forrer

Former Board President



PJ CALKINS
INCOMING PRESIDENT

As I prepare to take on my new role as President of Gift of Life Transplant House, I am humbled by the responsibility and the unprecedented challenges we will face. I'm grateful to have such a diverse group of industry experts and medical professional board members alongside our Executive Director, Mary, to support me to ensure we maintain our stability and future growth plans as an organization.

It's a privilege to be asked to lead this great organization and the exceptional, hard-working staff that make Gift of Life Transplant House the huge impact that it is. I'm excited for this opportunity and will do the best I'm capable of to follow and learn from the great leadership that has come before me and continue to set a positive example for those that will lead after.

There is no surprise the years to come will have challenges this organization has never faced but I know the board, Mary, and the staff have already risen up and not allowed those challenges to impede the Gift of Life Transplant House mission and the lives it touches each and every day. With the continued support of the community, our partners, and generous donors we are still very optimistic about our future. My hope is that our expansion plans can continue as we feel our capacity level will return and the future need will still be there.

Warmest regards,

PJ Calkins

Board President

Meet Our Leadership Team.



Steve "Gomer" Smith's family donates supplies one year after Steve's passing.



Savannah Byers donating gift cards to restaurants in Rochester.



A bag of donations for the house food shelf donated by board member, Cyle Erie.

GRANDMA'S TWO HOUSES

Eugenio had been an interior designer, when in 2001 he became sick and was having difficulty breathing. He had to stop working and he and his wife, De, decided to come to Mayo Clinic for help. It was there they received the hope they had been seeking.

Once a year the two would travel to Mayo Clinic and Eugenio would participate in research studies. Eugenio's health improved. He wasn't needing oxygen during the day and while he had to reduce some of his activities, he accepted that and enjoyed life in spite of his diminishing lung capacity.

Then in 2012, Eugenio changed to a new doctor who told him to consider the possibility of going on the transplant list. And life continued on. De had retired from her job as a customer service director for an office supply company and was watching their grandchildren 3 days a week.

In October, 2019, they traveled to Chicago and by the time they arrived home, Eugenio was sick. He was admitted to the hospital on Thursday and by Sunday, Mayo was transporting him via a medical plane. De and her oldest son drove to Rochester and the following morning, she received a call from Eugenio's doctor, asking where she was. The doctor indicated that Eugenio was critically ill and De and her son needed to get to him as soon as possible. Both De and her son spent time with Eugenio. Although the doctor was prepared to put Eugenio on a ventilator, Eugenio slowly but surely improved.

De arrived at Gift of Life Transplant House on November 22, just a few days before Thanksgiving and began a routine that would last for many months. She went to spend every day with Eugenio in the hospital, ordering a guest lunch so she could eat lunch with him and then catching the shuttle back to the house in the evenings. Day after day, she and Eugenio waited and prayed and hoped. The doctors told Eugenio he needed to be strong for his transplant, so he walked 20 laps in the morning and 20 laps in the afternoon, putting nearly 8,000 steps on his pedometer.

Eugenio posted on his Facebook page on April 26 – "Nothing yet, after nearly 164 days – nothing yet."

Then, just 7 days later, Eugenio called De to let her know that he would be receiving his transplant the next day. From 2:00pm until 9:30pm, De paced

back and forth in the house, waiting to hear what time the surgery would be scheduled. At last the call came – 8:30am on Monday morning. De called a good friend and asked that she send a post to all their friends and post it on the church website and De posted it on her Facebook page.

Eugenio went to the OR the next morning at 8:30am, and De began receiving messages of the progress. At 11:00am, the new lung was in transit. That evening, she received a call from the doctor, stating that it was a healthy lung and her husband had been stable during the entire surgery.

De is grateful for Gift of Life Transplant House and says "it has made a world of difference". She likes being able to walk safely to the hospital and to be in a safe environment. While she misses her grandchildren, they have now come to understand that papa is in the hospital getting well and grandma is at one of her two houses – the one in IA and the one in MN.

De and Eugenio will celebrate 22 years of marriage on July 4th and De is hoping that they will be able to celebrate it at their IA home!



Eugenio (and his team) on his way to receive his new lung.



Eugenio and his wife, De.



ROOF REPAIR & DORMER REPLACEMENT



It was a few years ago when Ladd, our Facilities Manager, climbed up on the roof at the Edward and Jayne Pompeian Home and noticed something that concerned him! The wooden dormers that give the house such a distinctive look were beginning to show signs of age and would soon be in need of repair. We had already planned to replace the shingles

on the roof of the wing built in 2000, and the dormer repair could easily be done at the same time.

We had budgeted for this replacement and repair for 2020; however, we had suspended all capital improvement projects due to the uncertainty of COVID-19.

But thanks to a generous donation from **The Tisi**

Family Foundation, work began last week and is proceeding quickly.

We are so fortunate to have individuals like Chris and the Tisi Family Foundation who partner with us!

Stay tuned – the donation also provided for mattress replacement at 724 and we'll be sure to keep you informed!

[Learn About The Tisi Family Foundation](#)

YOUR SUPPORT

Means So Much

Tim and Susan recently sent a donation with this note: *"We wanted to share this gift with you. We have been very thankful for Gift of Life House when I am at Mayo Clinic. Thank you for being there for us and we look forward to my next visit."*

Notes like this not only warm our hearts, but also have a direct impact on the operations of Gift of Life Transplant House. Our mission to provide high quality affordable accommodations is a daily commitment for us, but your generosity makes that mission come alive. ***We want to take this opportunity to say THANK YOU!***

As we all began to deal with COVID-19, Mayo Clinic made the decision to limit the number of appointments for transplant patients as well as pausing all living donor transplants. While we are independent of Mayo Clinic, the impact on our occupancy was swift, dropping from 87% to 46% in one month! The impact on our revenue was concerning to our Board of Directors so we began to take the necessary steps to weather the possibility of the uncertainty the next few months would hold.

In the midst of that uncertainty, your generosity has remained consistent and we are so grateful! At one time during the pandemic, we had only 36 guests and caregivers staying with us between our two facilities. And the one comment we heard over and over again was – "we are so thankful you are still open!" It is because of you that we have been able to remain open – your donations continue to bring comfort and peace to individuals navigating not only their transplant journey but also through the "COVID Chronicles" as one guest put it!

CHARITABLE DONATIONS

As you consider your charitable donations for this year, we wanted to provide you some updated tax information as well.

A NEW DEDUCTION FOR NON-ITEMIZERS:

If you do not itemize on your income taxes and make a gift to a charity in 2020, you will be allowed to take a special tax deduction, up to \$300, to reduce your tax liability in 2021.

AN INCREASE IN THE DEDUCTION LIMIT:

If you make a charitable gift this year, you can deduct up to 100% of your annual income for cash gifts (previously the deduction was capped at 60% of annual income).

WAIVER OF IRA RMDs:

For 2020, the required minimum distribution (RMD) for retirement plan owners over age 72 is waived. The 2020 RMD waiver also applies to inherited IRAs.

Donations can be made online at:
www.gift-of-life.org/make-a-donation
or by check to Gift of Life Transplant House.

THANK YOU

Make A Charitable Donation

A HAVEN FOR RESTORATION

Their story began a year before Gift of Life Transplant House first opened its doors. Bob and Colleen were traveling to Mayo Clinic in December, 1983. The temps were below zero and Colleen was driving, while Bob lay in the back seat of the car in pain. And then what Colleen had feared the most – the car died. Colleen was at a loss, and she did the only thing she could think of – she grabbed a pair of jumper cables from the trunk and stood by the back of the car until a passerby stopped to help her get the car started again.

They arrived at Mayo Clinic with no appointment and only hope that they could be seen. Bob was evaluated the next day!

Bob developed his kidney disease when he was 33. He had been studying for the ministry, but when his funds ran out, Bob took a job helping a local farmer. One day the auger in the grain bin stopped running and Bob went into the grain bin to see what the problem was. A yellow mist rose up from the grain, indicating the grain had spoiled and the very next day, he began to develop pain and felt as though he had flu 24 hours a day. Their local hospital had done what they could, but after 5 painful failed biopsies, Bob's grandmother told him that if he would go to Mayo Clinic, she would pay for it.

Mayo Clinic entered Bob in medical study programs and those programs allowed him to maintain a kidney function of 50% for 36 years. But about 5 years ago, Bob's kidney function began to steadily drop. 3 years later, he was placed on the transplant list for a new kidney. Bob and Colleen discussed with their doctors whether to have a living or deceased donor and decided that for him, a living donor would be the best option. So prayerfully, Bob and Colleen presented the situation to their 5 children. Their 4th child, a daughter, volunteered and the testing showed she was better than a good match!

Two days after he and Colleen arrived at the Edward and Jayne Pompeian Home this April, Bob had his kidney transplant. Colleen wasn't able to be near either her husband or her daughter at the hospital, but her day was filled keeping family and friends informed of the progress. By early evening the news they had all been waiting to hear came back – the kidney was functioning and Bob and his daughter were doing well.

These days, Bob and Colleen are seen in the hallways, kitchens and common areas, doing what Bob enjoys the most – being an encourager! While a mask hides their faces, it is impossible to miss the smile in their eyes as they visit



Bob and Colleen at Gift of Life Transplant House.

with guests and staff alike. Bob commented that, as he was reading about our founder, Ed Pompeian, he felt as though his vision and creation of Gift of Life Transplant House were actually cheering him on in his recovery. "This is a haven for restoration!" Bob says sincerely.

Bob and Colleen will be married 60 years this December. They were delivered by the same doctor and went from kindergarten through 12th grade together. But it wasn't until they were sophomores that they began dating. Now they enjoy their 5 children and 13 grandchildren. Bob and Colleen will continue to enjoy the journey that brought them to Mayo Clinic and Gift of Life Transplant House.

A WHITE PICKET FENCE LOVE STORY



Bob and Tracy at Gift of Life Transplant House.

Tracy always wanted the perfect story – a white picket fence, happy ending, love in every room kind of life. So when she and Bob met 5 years ago, she thought she had found the story she had always looked for. But as all good stories go, there was a twist. Bob had been struggling since the age of 12 with ulcerative colitis, and at 44 was diagnosed with PSC, a disease of the bile ducts. He gently asked Tracy, “Do you still want to be with me?” And Tracy’s response was a resounding yes!

PSC or Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis, causes scars within the bile ducts. These scars make the bile ducts hard and narrow and over time causes liver damage. The disease progresses slowly but will eventually lead to liver failure, tumors on the bile ducts or infection. The only known cure is a liver transplant.

From Maryland, Bob was routinely seen by his doctor in Boston at Beth Israel. He was able to live a fairly normal life

for nearly 11 years. It was during this time that he met Tracy and the two began their life together. They had planned a lovely vacation to Jamaica, planning to leave on Saturday morning, when the phone rang that Friday night. His doctor informed Bob that he now had cancer and should be seen as soon as possible at Mayo Clinic.

As soon as they returned, Tracy and Bob made their way to Rochester, Mayo Clinic and Gift of Life Transplant House in late February. Dr. Gore explained the process of a liver transplant and Bob began a week of testing, followed by 3 weeks of chemo and radiation. Throughout the process, Bob discovered he was #2 on the liver transplant list and despite wanting to go home, they made the decision to stay.

Then came the news of COVID-19 and Tracy learned that a positive test for COVID would mean no transplant for Bob. Tracy became a staunch advocate in the house,

reminding guests and caregivers to wear their masks and sanitize everything. She and Bob spent quite a lot of time in their room as they waited. But it was during this period of waiting that she and Bob developed some lasting friendships that carried them through as well.

The call came one morning just before breakfast. They were to report to hospital about noon. Tracy felt helpless as Bob packed, knowing that she would have to drop him off and not be allowed to be with him in the hospital. So Tracy waited in the lobby. She received frequent texts, letting her know the progress the transplant team was making, until she finally received the text that surgery was over and all was well! At 5:20pm, Bob was moved to ICU and the first thing Bob said was, “Call Tracy.” Bob returned to Gift of Life Transplant House 5 days later!

“I couldn’t have done it without Tracy or Gift of Life Transplant House” Bob says. Tracy’s support and the camaraderie, affordability and encouragement he received were invaluable to his recovery. Despite the anxiety caused by COVID-19, Tracy and Bob both found friendship, support and the home-like atmosphere that helped to make their stay reassuring and comfortable.

Bob and Tracy traveled back to their Maryland home via an Angel Flight and hope to return to Gift of Life Transplant House in August. Oh, and the white picket fence? Tracy says this is their new story – white picket fence and all!

STAFF UPDATES

MEET OUR NEW OPERATIONS MANAGER: KARI WEDEKING

"I grew up right here in Rochester and recently moved 17 miles east to Eyota. When I first set out searching a career, I had my heart set on opening my own coffee shop. Being a newly married, 22-year-old during the recession, let's just say the timing wasn't quite right. I went on to work at Mayo Clinic for seven years, first in a lab, then in the Mayo Clinic Store. As luck would have it, I was recruited to be the Site Manager of the Children's Museum. This was an opportunity to learn and grow my managerial and team building skills. The Executive Director and I were the only two full-time staff and my responsibilities included everything from recruitment and on-boarding, IT support, facilities, exhibit builder, and bookkeeping with the occasional custodial duties. We had huge aspirations

with very little budget and a small staff which forced us to collaborate and get creative!

And that is what brought me to Gift of Life Transplant House. As our family grew, Nolan (6) and Sophia (5), I needed a change that would allow me more time at home. I was passively looking around and found an opening for an Office Supervisor at Gift of Life Transplant House.

"She works here. She always has a good day here at Gift of Life"

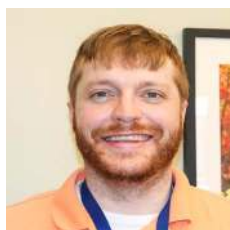
At that point in my life I had never known anyone that had gone through a transplant. I was a little nervous but when I read through the website and checked out the Facebook page, it's hard to explain the feeling that came over me. Reading the history and posts from guests on Facebook I just knew this was where I wanted to be. Here is where I could make an impact. Over the next four and a half years



I've gained so many friends but I've gained even more perspective. The people within these walls are such an inspiration to me every day. I'll never forget just a couple months ago a guest and his caregiver were sharing with me about how excited they were for his transplant in the morning and when we parted ways the caregiver said "Well goodness, here we are going on and on and we never asked you how your day has been." Before I could utter a response, the guest said 'No need to ask her, she works here. She always has a good day here at Gift of Life.'"

WELCOME NEW STAFF:

Meet Our Staff!



BEN ALKER
Receptionist



CONNIE THEDENS
Receptionist



KYLE SWANSON
Housekeeper

WHERE'S TAMI?



A common question we hear these days is Where is Tami? Tami, our Head Receptionist, hasn't been seen at the front desk since the end of February! We are pleased to report that Tami has been promoted to our new Administrative and Volunteer Coordinator. Tami has worked at Gift of Life Transplant House for the past 5 years and is loved by guests, caregivers and staff alike. In her new role, Tami is responsible for providing front desk administration, including training our new receptionists, office and volunteer administration. While Tami admits she will miss her daily interactions with guests and caregivers, she "is excited about her new responsibilities and wants everyone to know her office door is always open." Tami's winning smile will be sure to make every one feel welcome!

STEVE TARARA BIDS FAREWELL

"I would like to thank everyone for the well wishes on my retirement. I miss everyone at Gift of Life. I hope everyone is doing well with everything that is going on. I would especially like to thank Mary Wilder for being the Executive Director that she is and giving me the best retirement get together that a person could ask for. I will never forget the GREAT staff at Gift of Life and all who go through the doors.



Thank you and I miss you all!"

- Steve Tarara

House Happenings

OPERATIONS

- Thanks to a grant from Otto Bremer Trust, Gift of Life Transplant House has been able to update our **IT INFRASTRUCTURE**. This includes a new server, increased access points, allowing better internet connectivity, and a new phone system. While some of the installation has been put on hold, we are prepared to finish up as soon as we believe it is reasonably safe to do so. We have also been able to increase our internet bandwidth since we are currently restricting visitors.

- **DIGITAL SIGNAGE** has been implemented on the TVs above the mailboxes. This will be used for daily updates, reminders and event postings. We also have our sponsors logos displayed on the screen.

FACILITIES

- **THE NEW DECK** on the east side of the Edward and Jayne Pompeian Home was completed last fall, the result of a generous donation from Trails4Transplants! The deck features lighted ramp and railings, an enlarged grilling area and seating beneath our walnut trees! The generous donation also made it possible for us to furnish the deck with individual gliders and outdoor dining tables and chairs. Thank you, Trails4Transplant!



Support Our Facilities & Operations.

2020

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JULY 13

GIFT OF LIFE GOLF
TOURNAMENT

AUGUST 7

CLASH OF THE CHEFS
- A FOOD FIGHT

SEPTEMBER 13

GIFT OF LIFE
RUN & WALK 5K

SEPTEMBER 18

GALA

2020 VIRTUAL EVENTS

STAY TUNED!

For more information or to register for our events, please visit our
website: www.gift-of-life.org.

Keep an eye on our Facebook page for photos, event details and
more information!

Don't forget to follow us on Instagram:

[@GiftofLifeTransplantHouse](https://www.instagram.com/GiftofLifeTransplantHouse)

Find us on 

THANK YOU ROCHESTER AREA FOUNDATION!

We are extremely grateful to be selected as a recipient of an \$8,000 grant from the Rochester Area Foundation Together Fund. "Community Partners launched the Together Fund to support Rochester area nonprofits who are experiencing unforeseen challenges due to the ongoing pandemic and serve the region's most vulnerable communities." Not only has the Rochester Area Foundation provided this grant, they have also

been a leader in the community in providing information regarding the pandemic, the stimulus package and the Paycheck Protection Program. We are honored to be chosen! This grant will ensure that the mission of Gift of Life Transplant will continue to weather the challenges of the pandemic that may lie ahead and provide high quality, affordable accommodations to transplant patients and their caregivers for generations to come.

GIFT OF LIFE TRANSPLANT HOUSE WISH LIST

- ♦ \$30 for one night of lodging
- ♦ New commercial vacuum cleaners
- ♦ Toilet paper
- ♦ Paper towels
- ♦ Facial tissues
- ♦ Forever postage stamps
- ♦ Gallon-size Ziploc bags
- ♦ Wrapped chocolate candy
- ♦ Gift Cards to Wal-Mart, Target, or Hy-Vee
- ♦ Liquid hand soap - large refill bottles
- ♦ Hand sanitizer
- ♦ Scrubbing Bubbles
- ♦ Soft Scrub
- ♦ Coffee - regular & decaffeinated

[View Our Amazon Wish List](#)



The mission of Gift of Life Transplant House is to provide transplant patients and their caregivers with high quality, affordable accommodations in a supportive, home-like environment.

Gift of Life Transplant House is a proud member of



2020 CORPORATE PARTNERS

LEGACY



MAYO
SPECIALTY
PHARMACY

INVESTING



KRAUS-ANDERSON

FRIEND



ENRICHING



GIFT OF LIFE TRANSPLANT HOUSE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND STAFF

Executive Committee

President - P.J. (Phillip) Calkins
Past President - Joe Forrer
Secretary - Brian Sheehan
Treasurer - Jesse Buhl
Emeritus - Nick Pompeian
Emeritus - Jayne Pompeian

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Dr. Andrew Bentall
Tina Bro
Matt Christensen
Cyle Erie
Lori Ewoldt
Dr. Saad J. Kenderian
David Liebow
Paul Mensing
Adrienne Pompeian
Dr. Thomas Schwab

Honorary Lifetime Board Members

Mary Davie
Sylvester Sterioff, MD
Greg Warner

Gift of Life Transplant House Staff

Executive Director
Mary Wilder

Facilities Manager
Ladd Baldus

Operations Manager
Kari Wedeking

Administrative & Volunteer Coordinator
Tami Konakowitz

Receptionists
Karen Kruse, Ben Alker, Connie Thedens

Bookkeeper
Mary Dahlen

Resident Night Manager
724 House: Debbie Niemeier
705 House: Val Koehn

Maintenance Lead
Cory Cody

Facilities Staff
Bob Himmer, Mitch Yennie

Lead Housekeeper
Pollie Goodman

Housekeepers
Kathy Gilbertson, Kyle Swanson

Marketing Event Coordinator
Miranda Halling

Data Entry Clerk
JoAnn Volker