A NEWSLETTER OF GIFT OF LIFE TRANSPLANT HOUSE

SHARING THE gift

SPRING/SUMMER 2024

gift of life

GIFT OF LIFE
TRANSPLANT HOUSE
A HOME THAT HELPS



The Transformative Power of Caregivers

By Mary Wilder

Everyone who has stayed at Gift of Life Transplant House has heard the words – "You must have a caregiver to stay here". Our insistence on that policy is focused on the patient – the patient needs support to look after all the details and challenges of recovery.

But it isn't just the patient facing a host of challenges - the role of caregiver brings a unique set of challenges as well. From navigating the bewildering buildings that make up the Mayo complex to remembering the various policies at Gift of Life Transplant House to offering assistance to a person who is sometimes less than happy about needing help, caregiving can be exhausting, stressful and thankless. Combine that with an individual who views himself as ill-suited to being a caregiver and a recipe for discouragement and frustration is started.

According to the National Center of Biotechnology Information, caregivers report prominent feelings of distress, uncertainty, loneliness, fatigue, sleep disturbance, and financial worry.

One day while waiting for the elevator with a caregiver, Jerry Reitmeier walked by on the way to his room! Jerry is one of our guests and he loves to visit! Jerry is one of those immediately likable people

and will strike up a conversation everywhere he goes.

Jerry was diagnosed with MDS (myelodysplastic syndrome) and leukemia in the spring of 2021 and he started chemo treatments shortly thereafter and began to see some improvement. Jerry continued to ask his oncologist in North Dakota about a bone marrow transplant and at first was told he was too old, but in September, his doctor sent a short note to Mayo Clinic, stating "I've got a 72-year-old who thinks he should have a bone marrow transplant." By January of 2022, a donor had been identified and Jerry was scheduled for transplant.



JERRY WITH HIS WIFE AND CAREGIVER, SUE

Sue, his wife and caregiver, said that his schedule started a series of questions – How will we get the mail in Rochester?; What do we need to bring to stay 100 nights?; Who will care for the house while we are gone?

The questions worked themselves out and Jerry and Sue made the trip from North Dakota to Rochester for his transplant in May 2022.

Sue reports that she was initially overwhelmed with all his medications. It was difficult convincing him to eat and drink, but she learned that he did better if he took his pills with applesauce and ice cream.

Jerry was hospitalized for two months following his transplant, giving Sue an opportunity to meet many of the other caregivers and guests. When Jerry returned in July, he met Kevin, a caregiver staying at Gift of Life with his wife. He and Jerry had farming in common and they became fast friends. When Kevin's wife returned to Gift of Life Transplant House after a hospitalization, she asked to meet Jerry. She came over and gave Jerry a hug and said: "You are the person who saved my husband's life."

She had been worried about Kevin. He had a crop in the field but couldn't leave her. When he met Jerry, his discouragement left and according to her, he became a completely different man!

Gift of Life Transplant House offers a supportive environment for guests and caregivers alike. Sue met other caregivers and patients, who supported and encouraged her and shared similar stories. Jerry found friendship and offered support and encouragement because he understood the worry Kevin was facing, both with his wife and with the farm. Kevin's discouragement was transformed by the kindness and friendship of a patient.

We remain committed to supporting caregivers and we are currently working on creating a bank of resources to support our caregivers emotionally, physically, and spiritually! There are surprisingly few resources currently available for transplant caregivers. If you have resources you believe would be helpful, please email Mary Wilder at

mwilder@gift-of-life.org

Letter from Our Board President



Cyle Erie

Dear Friends of Gift of Life Transplant House,

I hope this letter finds you well and enjoying the warmth and renewal that comes with spring. As President of the Board of Directors for Gift of Life Transplant House, it is my honor to share with you the remarkable impact of our collective efforts and the unwavering dedication that fuels our mission.

Gift of Life Transplant House, its dedicated leadership, staff, and volunteers have impacted countless lives during its 40 years as an organization. My family has experienced firsthand the unique struggles that a transplant patient and their caregivers endure, and the love, compassion and support required for a successful journey through organ transplantation. My father has experienced the life-saving gift of organ transplantation, having received a pancreas transplant and two kidney transplants at the Mayo Clinic. Witnessing his resilience and the transformative power of these procedures has given me a profound appreciation for the support systems that make such journeys possible.

When my father was undergoing treatment, our family faced many challenges, both emotional and logistical. While our family was blessed with the gift of proximity to the Mayo Clinic and support systems nearby, I appreciate the life-changing service Gift of Life Transplant House provides for guests and caregivers, providing more than just a place to stay.

This personal connection drives my commitment to ensuring that Gift of Life Transplant House continues to be a beacon of support for transplant patients and their families. Our mission is to provide affordable, high-quality accommodations in a supportive, home-like environment. This is vital for those who come from near and far to receive the life-saving treatments offered at Mayo Clinic.

Over the past year, we have made significant strides in expanding our services and enhancing the comfort of our guests. We've renovated our facilities, implemented new support programs, and are extending the mission to impact even more families. The Pediatric Transplant House is currently under construction, fittingly located in the original Gift of Life Transplant House located just 2 blocks from the current 2 Houses. These advancements would not have been possible without the generous contributions and unwavering support of individuals like you.

I invite you to join us in this journey. Whether through volunteer work, financial contributions, or simply spreading the word about our mission or visiting the house, your involvement is crucial to our success. Together, we can make a lasting difference in the lives of transplant patients and their families, offering them the support and hope they need during one of the most challenging times of their lives.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to Gift of Life Transplant House. It is through our collective efforts that we can live our mission to provide affordable, high-quality accommodations in a supportive, home-like environment, provide a haven of healing and a community of care for those in need.

With heartfelt gratitude,
Cyle Erie

The 10th Annual Walk of Remembrance



April was DonateLife Month, a time to remember those who have given the gift of life and to honor those who have received the gift. DonateLife Month always features several special events, including blue/green lighting of the government center in Rochester, hosting a billboard reminding everyone to register to be an organ donor and our most special tradition – the annual Walk of Remembrance. This year marked the 10th anniversary of the Walk.

Organized by Cathy Dudley and the DonateLife Committee, a program began the celebration at St. Mary's Hospital. Following the program, the attendees are invited to gather on the front lawn at St. Mary's as the DonateLife flag was lowered and handed to a donor family. This is a special part of the ceremony – each time a donor shares the Gift of Life, the DonateLife flag is raised to honor that individual's selfless act. It had been raised when Christian Wolter, just 20 years old, lost his life on December 27, 2023.

Christian's organs and corneas were donated, and Tiffany Hendrickson learned that her 3 year wait for a kidney was over. Tiffany and Christian's mother, Elizabeth, met a week before the Walk of Remembrance. The Wolter's carried the DonateLife flag to Gift of Life Transplant House where the flag was raised by the honor guard as bagpipes played in the background.

This tradition remains a sacred and cherished event each year!





Scan this QR code to watch a recap video of the 10th Annual Walk of Remembrance!



Save the Date for the Annual Transplant Picnic



Sunday, July 28, 2024
11:00-2:00pm
Soldiers Field Park

To RSVP:

SCAN ME

Questions? Email us at transplantpicnic@gmail.com

September Tribute Corrections

Despite our best efforts, we wanted to correct oversights that were made in our Fall/Winter 2023 newsletter. We sincerely apologize.

Tribute

Lien, Scott

Jody Chapin. She willingly and proudly donated her bone marrow for her sister Christine Ann Lien

Contributions

Impola, Carol and Hans

40th Anniversary Documentary

In honor of our 40th Anniversary, our Gift of Life Transplant House videographer is completing production of our 40th Anniversary documentary. The documentary will share the remarkable history of Gift of Life Transplant House and the vision of our founder, Ed Pompeian. Ed's passion was to provide a 'home away from home' for transplant patients and their caregivers; our passion is to continue his legacy! Once complete, the documentary will be shown at a private screening at a local theater and then released on YouTube for your enjoyment. We anticipate an August release date!

Online Reservation Requests Now Available

Bypass the phone call and make your reservation request online! Gift of Life Transplant House wants to make scheduling your next visit as convenient as possible. Just go to:

www.gift-of-life.org/be-our-guest/room-request and complete the form.

You will receive an email confirming we have received your request. We will call you the day before or the day of your scheduled arrival with room information.

If you have any questions, please call our office at 507-288-7470 and either Debbie or Payge will be happy to assist you.

Our New Staff



Kaylee Lewno
Housekeeper



Myranda Pahl
Custodian





From Caregiver to Activity Coordinator

When Warren and Brenda Hicks came to Gift of Life Transplant House, Brenda's life was consumed with her caregiver responsibilities. Warren had a heart transplant in February 2024 and for the first two weeks, Brenda didn't leave the hospital.

As Warren began the recovery process, Brenda was able to spend more time at Gift of Life and once he was able to come to the house, Warren and Brenda became a well-known and well-loved couple, offering friendship, laughter, and encouragement.

Brenda was able to adapt her schedule to allow her to work remotely, but as Warren's recovery progressed, she started to "get bored". Brenda isn't one to tolerate boredom for long and she began to look for ways to encourage others. She had already adopted the "blue" kitchen as her own, watching over it, keeping it clean, teaching other guests the "ropes", but she wanted to do more for the other guests and caregivers.

So, Brenda organized a crab boil for her fellow guests and caregivers! She made key chains for the staff and painted rocks that could be placed in our front landscaping, offering cheerful colors and words of encouragement. When I noticed a temporary tattoo on her arm, she asked if she could hold a Temporary Tattoo party and it was very well received.

We will miss Warren and Brenda when they return to Iowa, but we'll see them again in a month.



Farewell To Mary Mitchell

Mary Mitchell has served as a volunteer for the last 10 years. She is a tour guide, organizes our greeting cards, organizes our libraries, and does all of our seasonal decorating. Her husband recently retired, and they will be making their home in Arizona. Mary has been a committed and dedicated volunteer, and we will miss her so much. She has begun training new volunteers to take on her responsibilities.

Thank you, Mary Mitchell!

In The Beginning

Our First House Managers

It was my pleasure to meet sisters, Brenda Lee and Kelly Flo recently. Both have a strong connection to Gift of Life Transplant House.

In 1985, Kelly started as the 1st house manager at the original Gift of Life Transplant House, located at 624 W. Center St. (Yes, the same house that is currently under renovation as our pediatric transplant house.) Kelly was 19, a nursing student and being the house manager provided her with a home. When she first moved in, her bedroom was located on the main floor, and she would greet people as they came into the house in the evenings. This quickly proved disruptive to her studies, so she moved to the 2nd floor. Her responsibilities include welcoming guests as they arrived, giving tours, reviewing policies and protocols with guests, and unloading the laundry quarters.

Kelly worked as the house manager until 1987, when her sister Brenda took over. Brenda shared the same responsibilities, and both remember making late evening runs to Target to get paper products that had run out.

Each of them would post their schedule by the front door so that guests and caregivers knew how to reach them. A pay phone sat in the front



lobby of the house and one of the policies was not to sit on the phone for too long!

The guests and caregivers were a close-knit group, with some even taking on the “parenting” of these young women. Kelly and Brenda remember this fondly now, but at the time, it wasn’t welcome!

Merry Maids came in and did the cleaning. Deep cleaning was done once a week.

Kelly and Brenda both report that working at Gift of Life Transplant House changed their lives. “It was a fabulous experience, growing, learning about life, and meeting so many people. We became very conscious of how fortunate we are.” “Working at Gift of Life gave me a broader sense of the world. I had always lived in Rochester, but we met people from all over.”

Both are grateful for their time as Gift of Life house managers and we are so thankful for all they did for us.





Gift of Life Pediatric Transplant House Renovation Begins

After months of waiting for the approval of permits, work began on May 6th at the Gift of Life Transplant Pediatric House. Our contractor, KrausAnderson, has already been hard at work finishing up the demolition work and beginning the renovation. We are hoping for a completion date of December, 2024.



Con-Tech Manufacturing Blesses Nonprofits

Con-Tech Manufacturing is a private concrete mixer manufacturing company, owned by Dan Welsh and Grant McNeilus and might seem like an unlikely partner for a transplant house.

But the owners of this company believe in sharing their resources and profit with the nonprofit community and every year, they auction off two Mack trucks and donate the proceeds of that sale to various nonprofits in the community.

Gift of Life Transplant House has been honored and blessed to be one of the recipients of their generosity. For the last two years, Con-Tech has included us in their generosity, inviting us to their plant for a tour and then treating us to a luncheon and check presentation.
This year they donated $77,500 to Gift of Life and much to our delight, included a replica cement mixer with the Gift of Life logo on the side!

We continue to be filled with gratitude for the generosity of both Dan and Grant and the entire Con-Tech Manufacturing organization!

Greeting Card Generosity

Gift of Life Transplant House has made greeting cards available to our guests and caregivers at no charge for many years. Appointments can run all day long and stopping along the way to find a greeting card to honor a birthday, say thank you or just thinking of you can be difficult. Greeting cards are displayed at the house in a rack that is organized by types of cards and guests and caregivers are welcome to browse through the cards to find just the right one. So, when our volunteer, Mary Mitchell, told me we were running low on greeting cards, we put out a request our to you all on Facebook. One of the media outlets in Rochester also picked up the story and aired a story about our need on an evening newscast.

Within just a few days, you responded! And responded and responded and responded. We have been overwhelmed by the number of greeting cards your generosity has provided for our guests and caregivers! Thank you so much!

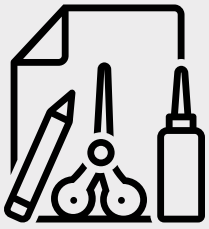


The Welcome Home Club
A Monthly Giving Opportunity

We all love to hear the words – Welcome Home! It means we are wanted and loved, and we know we are entering into familiar surroundings filled with good smells, encouraging sounds and warmth!

Gift of Life Transplant House is that welcoming 'home away from home' for transplant patients and their caregivers. Many come with worries and anxieties and one of the greatest is financial concerns.
Even though we charge just $30.00/night, medical costs can cause financial hardships that make even this nightly cost seem impossible.

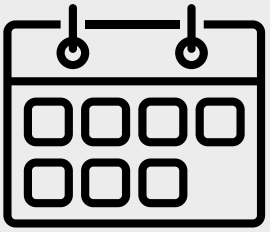
By joining the Welcome Home Club, you are committing to a monthly donation!



$20.00 Pays for art supplies for our self-directed art program for guests and caregivers



$30.00 Pays for a night's lodging for a transplant patient and caregiver



$210.00 Pays for a week's lodging for a transplant patient and caregiver

To become a member, go to www.gift-of-life.org/make-a-donation

Right under the amount you wish to donate, click the box that says "Make this Donation every Month".
You can also choose another time frame. Complete the rest of the form and near the bottom of the 1st page, indicate that you want to be a member of the Welcome Home Club. Remember when you click Donate Now, you will be taken to a second page to input your credit card information. You do not have to use PayPal to make a donation. Simply click Donate with Debit or Credit card.

Your generosity will allow us to continue to say "Welcome Home" for many years to come!

Thank you.

Gift of Life to Honor Transplant Social Workers

The team of social workers who work with transplant patients and caregivers at Mayo Clinic have a profound impact! Tirelessly, they assist patients navigating the many, often overwhelming aspects of the transplant journey, offer genuine care and compassion and even work with us at Gift of Life Transplant House when questions arise. Gift of Life Transplant House will be saying thank you at an Appreciation Afternoon on May 30th. Thank you, Transplant Social Workers

2024 Events

Walk of Remembrance











Timmay 5K



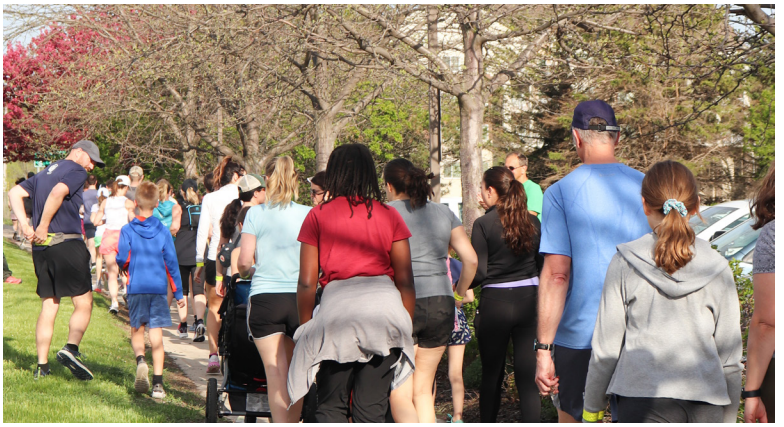








VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION WEEK



TERRALOCO $5 5K RUNNERS



CHECK PRESENTATION FROM TERRALOCO



THE POMPEIAN FAMILY GIVING A TOAST AT THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY NYE BALL



DANCING AT THE NYE BALL

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Rochester, MN

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@GiftOfLifeTransplantHouse

www.linkedin.com/company/gift-of-life-transplant-house/

Gift of Life Transplant House Mission Statement

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 HEALTHCARE HOSPITALITY NETWORK

Gift of Life TRANSPLANT HOUSE

Gift of Life Inc.
705 Second Street, Southwest
Rochester, Minnesota 55902

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WEIS builders

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Associated Bank

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DBS GROUP BREAKING NEW GROUND IN CONSTRUCTION.

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KRAUS-ANDERSON

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