

Support Groups & Counseling

Finding Brotherhood at Wellness House

Scott Saacke | page 3

Wellness News

JOIN US *at your house!*

WELLNESS HOUSE BALL...

at your house!

30th anniversary

Saturday, October 17, 2020

**Join us for a new and unique celebration
of the Wellness House Ball!**

Be inspired and engaged via livestream as we celebrate 30 years of changing lives – past, present and future. Enjoy elegant dinner or cocktail menus created especially for Wellness House by BOKA restaurant group, all from the comfort and safety of home – on your own or with others.

Tickets are available now! Your purchase includes instructions on attending an inspirational livestream video program on 10.17.20 to join in the celebration of the 30th anniversary of Wellness House. Celebrate with friends, purchase fine wines and luxury items in our auction, and make a difference for people living with cancer in our community.

Learn more at wellnesshouse.org/ball-2020

Dear Friends,

Many people say that a great house requires good bones. A house can withstand the test of time if the foundation, structure and basic design are sound. 30 years ago, Wellness House was created with all the elements needed to rise to challenging times. We are strong by design, not by accident. Our strength and adaptability are rooted in the early determination and common purpose of donors, community and volunteers like you.

Last year at this time, we were busy preparing for our 30th anniversary. Who could have imagined the arrival of a pandemic and the consequential changes made to businesses, organizations, culture and families? We have all experienced this life-altering year together as the dynamics of day to day living have forced us to find ways to survive and adapt. Yet, our house remains strong.



When it became clear we could no longer offer in-person programs due to the virus, we knew without a doubt that we would continue to provide uninterrupted support and most importantly **the same level of care**. Our house, though temporarily closed as a physical space for gathering, has become an even larger, symbolic place of gathering while all programs are offered online. Since March 16, participants have made 22,500 visits to our online programs. Being able to access support, without leaving home, has had a profound impact for participants. In this newsletter, participant Scott Saacke talks about his experience with the Prostate Cancer Support Group and the men's exercise groups. Scott shares how important it is to feel a sense of common purpose and the meaningful bond that forms in the groups he attends. Our strength of community and shared purpose began 30 years ago and continues to impact everything we do for participants like Scott.

We couldn't do this important work without your support and shared vision. The Virtual Walk for Wellness House was an amazing example of walking a little differently while maintaining our 30-year message of hope and community. The result was a resounding show of support as we raised critical funds for our programs. We hope you'll join us and celebrate 30 years of shared purpose on October 17 for the Wellness House Ball - at your house!

With appreciation,

Lisa K. Kolavennu, MA, LCPC
Executive Director

Lauren Staniar Haarlow
Board Chair

Finding Brotherhood at Wellness House

Scott Saacke received his prostate cancer diagnosis while he and his wife Linda were driving back from a special anniversary trip to Galena, IL. After a routine physical, Scott's doctor sent him to a urologist to do a biopsy, and the results were finally in.

While Scott and Linda knew there was a chance of a cancer diagnosis, the call confirming it came as a shock to them both.

Although cancer is everywhere, many people don't notice it until it affects them. Scott said, "For many of us, the world of cancer is one that we don't have a clue about until we are directly impacted. I quickly found out that the cancer world was always all around me – many people I knew socially and professionally were impacted themselves."

Scott soon connected with the right surgeon and lined up a date to have the cancer removed. It turned out that his cancer was aggressive and had spread beyond the prostate, so he underwent an additional eight weeks of radiation treatments and is currently doing two more years of ADT therapy for his advanced prostate cancer.

Scott and Linda are avid bicyclists, and it was during these rides that they first discovered Wellness House. "We were going down County Line Road and I noticed this big house," Scott said. "It stood out to me because of how quaint and welcoming it appeared, but it was obviously not a residence."

"I think the second or third time passing by, after I had finally gotten my head around the next steps that I had to take for medical treatments, I decided to stop in and talk to somebody there," he said. He was immediately told about the monthly Prostate Networking Group and he soon decided to check it out.

"From the programs and professional guidance, to all the new friends I've made who feel like brothers, it has really added a whole new level to my quality of life."

Scott Saacke

At first, Scott was a bit skeptical of how effective a group of 30 guys sitting together in a room could be, but that feeling quickly vanished. The professional facilitation and the comfort of being with others in the same boat creates a strong support system. "For me, it was cathartic and exhilarating," he said. "I was thankful to find so many individuals who could relate to my own experiences and offer their own insights."

Since then, Scott has gotten to know the group incredibly well. He likens the men to fraternity brothers due to the tight-knit bond

they've created. "The group feels like an extension of my family now, like a new group of brothers," he said. "We laugh, encourage each other and pull for one another when things get tough." **And as new guys come in, the group welcomes them with open arms and provides the same healing space that they have each experienced.**



Scott also joined the Men's Prostate Exercise Group that started this past year and has become increasingly popular. This group helps develop physical strength, which complements the support group's emotional strength. "This program has been a godsend to those of us who have been through treatments, targeting

strength in all of the specific parts of our body that have been impacted," he said. He appreciates the exercise coaching that is adjusted to each individual's ability, but also continually pushes them to work a little harder.

And while these support groups and exercise programs are now virtual due to the pandemic, Scott has still found them to be hugely beneficial to himself and others. "For the exercise group, meeting online has helped immensely because there are some guys who live far away," Scott said. "Before, they weren't able to come to Wellness House three times a week. Now they can come to every session."

The offerings at Wellness House have helped Scott to elevate his quality of life in the midst of cancer. He's been able to strengthen himself both physically and mentally and has found a network of men who understand what he's going through. "From the programs and professional guidance, to all the new friends I've made who feel like brothers, it has really added a whole new level to my quality of life," Scott said. "No matter how my cancer story turns out, I'm grateful that Wellness House is there."

Cancer Support in Spanish

At Wellness House we value inclusivity for everyone affected by cancer, but occasionally there are barriers for reaching everyone. We recently addressed a vital question: **how can we provide support for those who don't speak English?**

“The alliance between Wellness House and ALAS-Wings is making a huge and powerful impact on the Latina community in Chicago.”

Judy Guitelman,
Founder and Executive
Director of ALAS-Wings

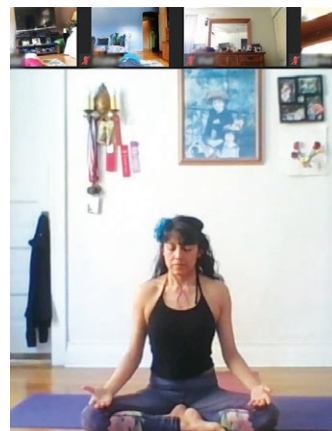
We strive to foster an environment where participants feel comfortable and supported. As we've reached into the community and expanded programs to our Partner Locations throughout Chicagoland, we've prioritized reaching Spanish-speakers in the language they're most comfortable with.

Over the years, we've established partnerships with organizations specifically focused on the Hispanic cancer population. One of those is ALAS-Wings (*Asociación Latina de Asistencia y Prevención del Cáncer de Mama*), a Chicago-based organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for the Hispanic community by providing breast health awareness, education and support programs. Wellness House teams up with ALAS-Wings to provide joint programs in Spanish, including yoga classes, art classes, music events and support groups.

“Wellness House has been an amazing partner to ALAS-Wings for many years,” said Judy Guitelman, Founder and Executive Director of ALAS-Wings. “Our collaboration has provided numerous innovative programs to Latina breast cancer survivors, their families and caregivers throughout Chicago.”

Wellness House also offers programming through its partnerships with Spanish-speaking

healthcare professionals. During the past year, we offered two weekly Spanish language yoga classes, one in Chicago and the other in Berwyn. Additionally, we offered a number of Spanish-language expressive arts classes in various locations throughout Chicagoland. We're proud to share that in the past year alone,



we've had 124 participants join in our Spanish programming.

In response to the pandemic, we combined the Chicago and Berwyn yoga classes online to streamline programming

and ensure the most cost-efficient use of resources. Additionally, we've offered virtual programs on a wide variety of topics, including maintaining mental health during COVID-19, Latin American art, and live music from *Guitarra Azul*. And together with ALAS-Wings, we hosted the first Hot Topics in Breast Cancer event in Spanish. (Hot Topics in Breast Cancer is an annual, day-long event hosted at Wellness House to provide information and support to those affected by breast cancer, and we were thrilled to offer the same opportunity to Chicago's Hispanic population, albeit online this year.)

As the next year comes around, we have plans to continue expanding our Spanish program offerings – whether it's online or in-person. Only because of donors like you, we are able to provide meaningful programs for Spanish speakers affected by cancer. ¡Gracias!



ONLINE Program Updates

As COVID-19 continues to circulate throughout the country, our online programs are here to stay. In March, we quickly started adapting all our programs to the new online format and even pivoted to add new programs. We've continued to have strong attendance because, pandemic or not, cancer support is always needed. While we look forward to the day that our participants can meet up again in person, our online programs have been a huge success.

Every week, over 400 people are tuning in to participate in one of our many virtual programs. From Tai Chi to Flute Circle to Networking Groups, we have a lot to offer. One of our most popular classes is Chair Yoga, which brings in an average of 63 people a week. To date, we have had over 1,300 people participate in our online programs!

One participant told us about the virtual classes, "The variety is amazing as well as the dedication of all the instructors and presenters. You can tell they enjoy what they are doing. It is truly appreciated by every one of us that has been touched with cancer."

We've introduced new informational programs like webinars on COVID-19 and Cancer (offered in both English and Spanish), and a variety of other new programs specifically created for the virtual space.

We had a drive-by parade for families outside of Wellness House and we offer kids fun online programs like Storytime, Picnics and Bedtime Relaxation. We've added additional exercise classes that are easy to do from home, like Yoga & Pilates Combos and Meditation with Movement. And even our Unique Boutique services like Reiki, Healing Touch and Wig Consultations are now able to be done remotely.

By offering our programs online, Wellness House has also opened its doors to those who live far from Hinsdale or our Partner Locations, and to those who don't have the energy to leave home. One participant said, "The online programs are much more convenient for me since I don't live near Hinsdale, and I just finished chemo last week. I don't have the energy right now to go to face-to-face meetings. And nobody cares if I show up in pajamas and a robe!"

During these unforeseen circumstances, we are finding the silver lining. We are continually proving the value of offering programs to people who may not be able to come in person, due to location or physical restrictions. Online programs are filling a vital need right now for the cancer population and we are grateful to have the resources to provide these services.

One thing is for sure – when the pandemic is finally over and we re-open our doors, we will continue to offer a wide selection of programs online.

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

Celebrating 30 Years of Community Changing Lives – past, present and future

We asked 4 questions of people who represent the many friends of Wellness House like you. Below is just one of the many thoughts and treasures we'll continue to share throughout the year.



Mollie Mills Cole –
Yoga Instructor
Volunteer at
Wellness House

1. What brought you to Wellness House and when?

I had just returned from a month-long yoga teacher training program in Thailand and happened to run into an old friend who had followed my adventure on Facebook. When Connie asked if I planned to teach, I said no, that I just needed a "hard reset" after years in the corporate sector.

A breast cancer survivor, she shared how important yoga was to her recovery and said there was always a need for yoga teachers. A few days later, I typed "yoga teacher" into the VolunteerMatch search bar, and (boom!) the Wellness House opportunity popped up.

I began as a sub in January 2019 and am now teaching Thursday classes at the Wellness House, Hinsdale, and Tuesday classes at Lemons of Love (a Wellness House program), in Mount Prospect. As John Lennon wrote, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."

2. Can you recall a specific, meaningful memory or interaction at Wellness House?

As a new and somewhat reluctant yoga teacher, I often wonder whether I am making a difference. Those doubts were dashed when, after returning from a two-week vacation, our yoginis welcomed me back with big smiles, a few

hugs, and even remembered to reset the room configuration we were testing before I left.

3. What makes Wellness House unique?

Wellness House is a community where every single volunteer and staff member is dedicated to creating and supporting an environment where participants have an opportunity to thrive through a journey of self-care.

4. What one word would you use to describe Wellness House?

Loving-kindness

Supporting those at Wellness House from participants to staff members



Meet Our Experts – Jill Otto

Jill Otto, LCSW, Support and Family Programs Manager

Jill Otto started at Wellness House just over a year ago and has quickly become a beloved member of the team. As the Support and Family Programs Manager, Jill covers a lot of ground in her work. She manages and oversees both the Support and Counseling Team and the Child and Family Team. And as a licensed clinical social worker, she herself also facilitates a number of support groups.

“Our work impacts people as they walk through their entire cancer journey — from diagnosis through treatment, into survivorship, or even bereavement. There’s never a point where we can’t work with them.”

- **Jill Otto, LCSW,**
*Support and Family
Programs Manager*

Before working at Wellness House, Jill had experience supporting families going through a wide variety of challenges – from domestic violence to teen parenting. From a personal perspective, she was drawn to Wellness House because of the opportunity to work with an oncology population.

Currently, Jill leads the weekly Metastatic Breast Cancer Support Group, as well as the groups for caregivers and the weekly Turtles Group for parents who have lost a spouse to cancer. She thinks that one of the most positive outcomes of her work is connecting participants with one another in the support group setting.

“There’s nothing like talking with someone else who really gets it – someone who is walking a similar journey and understands what the challenges are,” Jill said. “They have the opportunity to say things that they can’t say to other people outside the group. It’s a safe place for them to receive the support they need.”

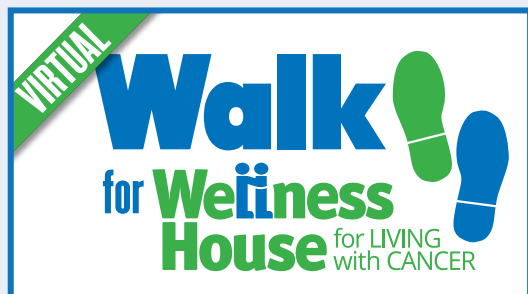
Especially during the current pandemic, Jill appreciates when she can help to empower participants to cope with overwhelming stress. “Because cancer is so challenging, and then you add on these additional layers with the pandemic and isolation, it can be increasingly difficult,” she said. “Teaching participants new coping strategies to support themselves in these challenging times is an important tool that we provide here at Wellness House.”

While Jill loves being able to support those affected by cancer, she also loves the opportunity her role gives her to support her colleagues and team members. “This role gives me the opportunity to utilize my management background and my love of supervision, but also to provide direct counseling support to people in need. And that’s been a wonderful combination for me,” she said.

Jill’s professional highlights

- Earned a BA in Psychology from the University of Missouri, Columbia
- Earned an MSW from Loyola University
- Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Virtual Walk for Wellness House



This year, our annual **Walk for Wellness House** went virtual! On Sunday, June 28, people across Illinois – and across the country – walked or ran a course in their own neighborhoods.

The morning kicked off with a live broadcast from Wellness House featuring **Lisa Kolavennu** (Executive Director), a story from a participant impacted by the online programs, corporate sponsor acknowledgements from **Dan Wagner** (Senior Vice President of The Inland Real Estate Group), and some warm-ups with **Jeri Lau** (Oncology Exercise Specialist). After the broadcast, nearly **1,400 people** got moving and showed off their Wellness House shirts as they walked or ran their preferred path.

The Walk for Wellness House helps make it possible to offer no cost psychosocial support to people affected by cancer around the Chicago area.

Even though we didn't gather in person this year, that didn't put a damper on people's generosity. **With over 2,500 donors, we raised \$568,109 – hitting 90% of our goal!**

TOP TEAMS:

- **Team Inland - \$101,580**
- **Crown Royals Team - \$52,026**
- **50 Shades of Ben Gay - \$17,560**
- **Stepping by Grace - \$16,285**
- **MTCares - \$14,095**

Save the date —
Walk for Wellness House 2021
is Sunday, May 2

Weddings for Wellness House

This past winter, **Sumana Devata** and **Keronn Wade** made the selfless decision to invite guests to their upcoming wedding to donate to Wellness House in lieu of providing wedding gifts. Both have family affected by cancer and Wellness House has been a support system for many they love. Unfortunately, the pandemic caused a postponement of their wedding



celebration, but Suma and Keronn enthusiastically continued their advocacy by encouraging family members to form a team for the Virtual Walk for Wellness House in June! Thirty of Suma's family members from all over the country joined them for

the Virtual Walk this year, and they plan to continue their support when the wedding celebration happens in 2021. *Many thanks to this generous and creative family for making a collective impact on Wellness House!*

You can ask friends and family to support Wellness House in lieu of gifts for birthdays, weddings or celebrations. Just contact Liza Larsen, Manager of Special Events and Annual Giving, at llarsen@wellnesshouse.org and we can work with you to create your own personalized fundraising page.

Kids Kamp - Online!



This summer, we took our annual Kids Kamp online! We did crafts, played games, read stories, took virtual aquarium field trips, and created amazing artwork—all over Zoom. And we even had a special appearance from the Chicago Blackhawks mascot, Tommy Hawk! Everyone got involved in this year's *Under the Sea* theme, and even Tommy Hawk showed up in his snorkel and goggles.

A huge thank you to everyone who helped make this year's Kids Kamp a success. The kids all had an amazing time!

Wellness House | Main Location
The Kay & Mike Birck Home of Hope
131 North County Line Road
Hinsdale, Illinois 60521

The CARES Act: Charitable Giving Incentives in 2020



David Blaydes and his team may be reached at info@rpiplan.com or 630.778.8100. www.rpiplan.com

In 2017 the tax reform bill essentially doubled the standard deduction for individuals and joint tax filers. While the vast majority of people had a reduced tax liability due to the change, it also meant fewer being able to write off their gifts to charity. 2020 is an exception to this due to The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

The CARES Act creates two temporary changes to the tax treatment of such donations. One is a universal deduction targeted primarily at taxpayers that use the standard deduction, and the other is meant to incentivize the remaining high-income givers and corporations.

Universal Deduction for Donations Up to \$300

For the over 9 out of 10 people who no longer itemize their charitable giving, the CARES Act will allow these individual taxpayers to deduct donations to charity of up to \$300 on their 2020 federal tax return, even though they take the standard deduction. Married-filing-jointly taxpayers will get an above-the-line deduction of up to \$600.

Raising the Charitable Giving Deduction Cap

Before the CARES Act, individuals who itemize their deductions could directly write off gifts to charity up to 60% of adjusted gross income. Corporations are typically able to deduct up to 10% of taxable income. The CARES Act lifts these caps to 100% for individuals and joint filers, while corporations will see their cap lifted to 25% for 2020. These are substantial changes to the tax treatment of donations. For individuals, it could theoretically mean zero taxable income if someone gives big during the year.

Consult with a financial or accounting professional to discuss how this might benefit your gifting strategy. Whether giving in large or small amounts, the CARES Act has given many families and business an added incentive to give during 2020. The window for taking advantage of these changes is set to close on December 31, 2020.

Questions? Please consult RPI at 630.778.8100 x100.

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Our Mission: Wellness House envisions a community where all people affected by cancer thrive. Offered at no cost, and as a complement to medical treatment, our programs educate, support, and empower participants so they will improve their physical and emotional well-being.

Learn more about us at wellnesshouse.org

Thank you to our generous grantors:

Guy A. and N. Kay Arboit Charitable Trust
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Chicago Board of Trade Foundation
The Coleman Foundation
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The DuPage Foundation
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