



**Support Groups & Counseling:**

Living a life  
of Meaning  
and Purpose

Wellness House Ball Chairs  
Molly & James Haunty  
Noelle & Brian Perkins



## Night of Wonder Ball a Wonderful Success!

Wellness House's annual autumn black-tie ball—themed Night of Wonder for 2018 and hosted at the Museum of Science and Industry—completely sold out and raised nearly \$690,000, the second largest amount in the 28-year history of Wellness House! All funds raised directly support the lives of people impacted by cancer through Wellness House programming such as exercise classes, fitness consultations, nutrition classes and consultations, mind/body movement classes, special events for kids & families, networking & support groups, and educational programs.

Successfully chaired by Molly & James Haunty and Noelle & Brian Perkins, Night of Wonder was a beautifully inspiring event, featuring a wine auction, live auction and paddle raise, all taking place beneath the museum's gorgeous grand rotunda. The highlight of the evening, however, was a poignant video presentation and on-stage storytelling by a family impacted by cancer and all the ways in which Wellness House has provided critical and meaningful support.

*Save October 5 in your calendar for Wellness House's 2019 gala, to be hosted at the Ritz-Carlton, Chicago. Next year's ball chairs, Anna & Nick Fiascone, Sarah & Sam Richardson, and Christine & John Trainer, are already hard at work planning an incredible evening you won't want to miss!*

Check the Wellness House website at [wellnesshouse.org](http://wellnesshouse.org) for updates and details.

## Dear Friends,

As the new year dawns, we find ourselves reflecting on the beauty of what has passed and the possibility of what's to come. Your generous support inspires us with a constant sense of gratitude and hope.

And so we want to take a moment to thank you. You make a world of difference to the entire Wellness House family.

Elissa Speizman is just one member of that family. You'll learn more about her special story in the following pages, but right now we'd like to share a few of her thoughts with you. Her moving description of the Wellness House metastatic breast cancer support group reminds us that we all have much to give, and to receive.

“When I joined the group, I learned so much from those who were already part of it. And as my disease and my life have progressed, I have had the opportunity to share what I've learned with others who joined the group after I did. This is one of the great things about the group – we can all both learn and teach. And we can – and do – support each other. There are things that we talk about in the group, and concerns we share, that we don't talk about anywhere else. This is the only place where we know that we will be understood by others who don't just sympathize – but who share the experience.”

Thank you, Elissa, for reminding us that it's a privilege both to support each other, and to be supported.

We all have the opportunity to discover new ways to better support those around us – as we see in our newest partnership with UI Health. This month we expand our impact at UI Health by offering 35 programs at Mile Square Health Center in the Chicago medical district, bringing our special brand of psychosocial care to a new group of participants.

We are thrilled to be welcoming more people into our Wellness House family. And we're honored to count you among the members of that family as well.

**Jeannie Cella**  
President and CEO

**Robert C. Knuepfer III**  
Board Chair

# A Meaning-Centered Path

Elissa Speizman didn't plan to attend any Wellness House programs ... until she happened to glance at a brochure about our metastatic breast cancer support group. "There are so few programs like that, I decided to give it a try," she recalls. "And I'm so glad that I did. As soon as I walked into the room, I knew I'd found my people."

One of those people is senior oncology support counselor Valerie Piazza, RN, LCPC, who facilitates that group as well as individual sessions. Last year, Val told Elissa about a new offering called Meaning-Centered Psychotherapy. "I trust Val so much," Elissa says. "I thought, If she thinks MCP could be helpful, then I want to try it."

Based on principles of existential psychology, meaning-centered psychotherapy encourages participants to identify what gives their life meaning and purpose – and then to use that knowledge to get more joy and satisfaction out of each day. More structured than many other types of therapy, MCP guides participants through a series of pre-established questions over the course of about eight weeks. "It's such an honor to witness this process," says Val. "Meaning-centered therapy brings

a tremendous sense of intimacy and sacredness."

And for Elissa, the process has reaped substantial rewards. "It's helped me think through what makes me happy and how I want to be remembered. It's made a big difference in my day-to-day life."

"MCP was originally designed for patients with end-stage cancer, but we now offer this program to all of our participants who benefit from going through it," says Val. "Meaning-centered psychotherapy can clarify a path for anyone to live life to the fullest."

Elissa has worked hard to identify her own path with the help and guidance of Val and the other women she's met at Wellness House. She says that she now has a better sense of what she wants to leave behind (see article below) and what she wants to accomplish right now. "I won't waste time finishing a book I don't like," she says, "but I'll always make time for dinner with a friend." She and her husband have done a great deal of foreign travel in the four years since her diagnosis. "I probably wouldn't have done that if I hadn't gone through the therapy. I don't put things off now," she says.



**"It's helped me think through what makes me happy and how I want to be remembered. It's made a big difference in my day-to-day life."**

"I'm much better prepared because of the therapy with Val and my group at Wellness House," she continues. "I wouldn't be nearly as mentally and emotionally strong without the people I met there."

## Donor Story: Elissa Speizman

When participant Elissa Speizman received an unexpected inheritance, she considered the legacy she wanted to build with it. She says:

*We all want to be remembered in some way, and we want to honor the people and things that are most important to us. We also want our legacies to mean something.*

*I love the opera, and I considered making a donation with the inheritance. But I knew my gift would be too small to make a real difference at such a large organization. On the other hand, my gift could have an impact at an organization like Wellness House.*

*At first I thought sponsoring an author talk at Wellness House. That would have been fine, but [counselor Val Piazza] and I had noticed that lots of people had a hard time entering the building with walkers, canes, and wheelchairs. So I decided*



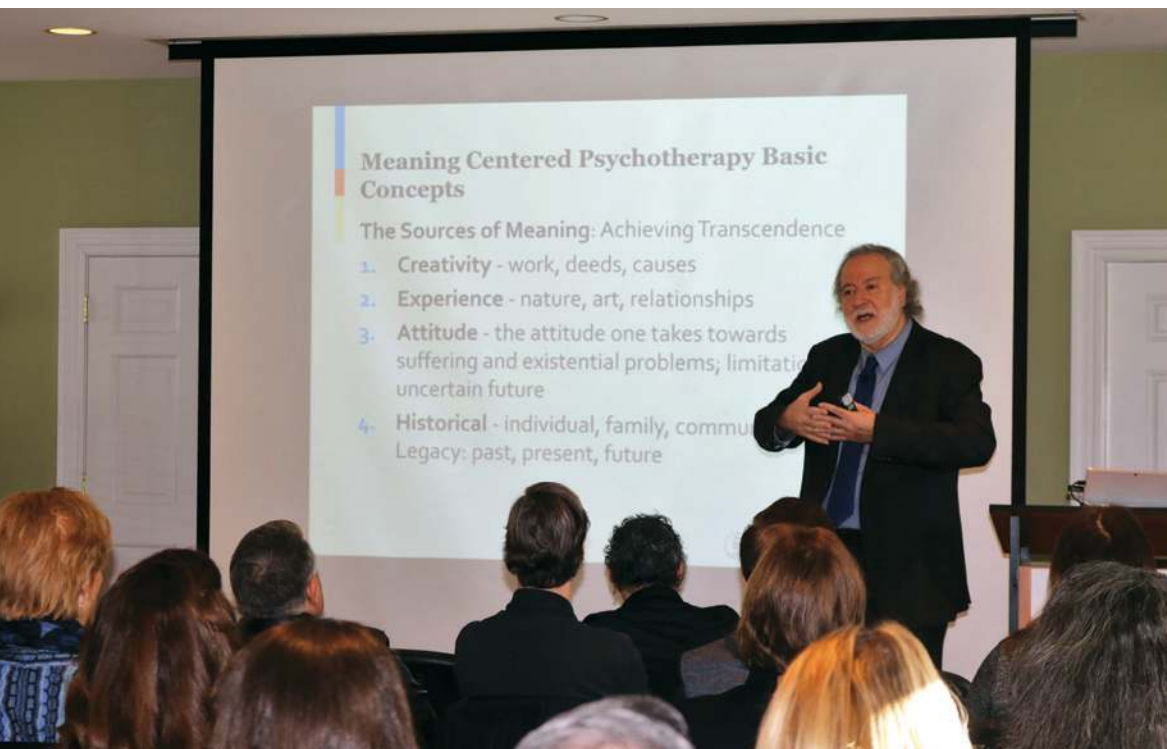
*to fund an automatic door. I knew that could make a big difference to a lot of people.*

Elissa dedicated the door, installed earlier this year, to Val and the women in her Living with Metastatic Breast Cancer support group. All of us at Wellness House are grateful for her thoughtful generosity.

# The Power of Purpose

Participants learn how to find meaning during times of uncertainty.

**A cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming for many different reasons.** It can be especially difficult to think about a future that may look different than what an individual had envisioned for themselves and their loved ones. This November, Wellness House hosted Dr. William Breitbart, Chairman of the Department of Psychology and psychiatric oncology expert at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, for a presentation titled “The Future, Prayer and Lies: Finding Meaning in Uncertainty and Cancer”. In his presentation to over 210 participants, Dr. Breitbart explored how the future still has the capability to be unique and fulfilling even during times of uncertainty. Participants learned the value of defining their life’s purpose and how to use this purpose to experience greater peace and meaning in their everyday lives. **In addition to his discussion on creating meaning, Dr. Breitbart also talked about the common concerns confronting people with life threatening disease as well as effective strategies in treating despair near the end of life.** This discussion helped to validate many participants’ feelings and experiences in an intimate setting with an industry expert.



Meaning-Centered Psychotherapy, a practice developed by Dr. William Breitbart at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, focuses on helping those experiencing advanced cancer establish a sense of meaning in their lives to combat feelings of despair. In addition to giving a presentation to Wellness House participants, Dr. Breitbart spoke about MCP to 36 professionals from the Chicagoland area so they could use this type of therapy in their own practices. **At Wellness House, five of our staff members have been trained in MCP by Dr. Breitbart to be a resource to participants who may**

**be experiencing greater anxiety and feelings of hopelessness due to the stress of a cancer diagnosis.** “Many people experiencing cancer are faced with uncertainty and existential concerns,” says Senior Director of Programs, Lisa Kolavennu, on the importance of offering MCP at Wellness House. “Dr. Breitbart’s talk helped people consider what makes life meaningful while the future remains unknown. His insights combined with his sense of humor made an otherwise difficult topic seem approachable and hopeful.”



# CEO Jeannie Cella Announces Retirement

After passionately serving Wellness House for 29 years, Wellness House **CEO, Jeannie Cella,**

has announced to the board that she will retire as of December 31, 2019. A transition committee made up of board and staff members has been launched to support Jeannie's retirement and begin the search for an executive director whom will be in place by July 1. This timeline will allow for a six-month period in which Jeannie can support the executive director's introduction to the

role and its responsibilities. The timeline means Wellness House can celebrate the many accomplishments Jeannie Cella helped envision, inspire and bring to fruition throughout her 29 years of service.

Jeannie began with Wellness House as a student intern in August of 1990, right after Wellness House opened its doors. For ten years, she provided direct services to cancer patients and their families, becoming Program Director in 1998. In 2000, she began her tenure as Executive Director and quickly executed a plan to double the size of Wellness House's

home in Hinsdale. Inspired by years of growth in Hinsdale, and knowledge of the ever-growing needs in underserved communities, Jeannie led the charge to expand Wellness House beyond Hinsdale through medical and community partnerships. Wellness House now has 17 partners across the Chicagoland area.

Jeannie's commitment to the mission, her passionate energy, spirit of inclusiveness and engagement, clinical expertise and strong leadership has been infused throughout Wellness House and will continue to be felt in the future.



Wellness House is excited to announce the launch of Professional Perk, a new Information and Education series for local healthcare professionals. Every month starting in January, local healthcare professionals are invited to learn about psychosocial topics from the experts at Wellness House, exchange thoughts, and connect with other professionals.

*“The value of this series is two-fold,” says Kelli Mitchell, who serves as the Community Relations Manager for Wellness House. “It will create opportunities for our colleagues to learn new information as well as raise awareness of Wellness House and our programs.”*

## Volunteers are Vital to Wellness House

**We couldn't do what we do without volunteers! Because of volunteers, Wellness House participants enjoy outstanding support during their cancer journey.**

### We're currently looking for the following volunteers:

**Saturday Front Desk Volunteer:** Making participants feel welcome is part of our philosophy. We are looking for people to greet visitors and help create a warm environment by answering phones and checking people into our busy programs. 4 hour shift, 1-2 shifts per month.

**Saturday Courtyard Volunteer:** The Courtyard is our local consignment/retail store that sells a variety of fine furnishings. All proceeds benefits Wellness House. Whether it's helping customers or setting up eye-catching displays, we would benefit from retail or computer support. 4 hour shift, 1-2 shifts per month.

**Massage Volunteer:** Help us support participants by providing massage. Minimum 2 appointments per month.

**Salon Volunteer:** We are looking for licensed cosmetologists to provide hair cutting, wig cutting, and head shaving services in our salon. We are also looking for a volunteer to coordinate these services.

**Administrative Volunteer:** We are looking for a volunteer to help with scanning, filing, and making follow up calls to participants.

# Wellness House Support Programs

## sharing a need to bond with others



### Meet Our Experts

**Michael Williams, Psy.D.**, is one of our longest-serving experts. For more than 20 years he has facilitated individual and group counseling sessions at Wellness House. Why has he chosen to stay for more than two decades? His attachment to the Wellness House family: donors, experts, volunteers, staff, neighbors ... and most of all, participants.

Still, each participant's story is unique, and "connections can happen in a million different ways," says Michael. "Maybe a person feels they need to ride their bike across the country. Maybe they need to blog articles about hope. As long as it's healthy and legal, I'll support it!"

- **Michael Williams, Psy.D., Senior Oncology Support Counselor**

Thank you to our donors for building such a remarkable team of experts here at Wellness House. Your generosity attracts outstanding specialists who often stay for years, even decades, forming deep and lasting bonds with many of our participants.

"It's an incredible privilege to spend time with participants during such an important and challenging part of their lives," he says. "It's humbling to have the chance to help them, to show them that they're not alone and that they can handle whatever faces them."

Michael notes that we all share a driving need to bond with others. "That lies at the heart of

Wellness House," he explains. "It's why we do whatever it takes to connect people; that's the heart of Wellness House."

Sometimes, of course, a healing connection doesn't involve anything out of the ordinary – it simply requires another person to listen thoughtfully and openly. "If someone feels sad or guilty, for instance, it's not my place to talk them out of those feelings. My role is to stand with them while they work through and try to understand their feelings," he says. "Shining a light on feelings changes them. We can loosen emotional knots that have hardened like concrete. Even the toughest challenge is a moment in time; it's not permanent."

#### Michael's professional highlights

- Earned a doctorate from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology and Bachelor of Science from Loyola University of Chicago
- Worked at Wellness House for two years before earning his doctorate, then returned in 1998 (and has been here ever since!)
- Previously served at Cancer Treatment Centers of America (Zion, IL)
- Licensed in clinical psychology
- Belongs to American Psychosocial Oncology Society

# Announcing Our Newest and Largest Partner Location in Chicago

Within four stops on the Blue Line, there is a difference in life expectancy of 16 years. In the Gold Coast, the average life expectancy right now is 85 years. Four stops away, in the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) neighborhood, that drops to 69 years. Beginning in January, Wellness House will bring life changing psychosocial support to that neighborhood.

## Wellness House is expanding its partnership with UI Health

to provide 35 programs per month at UIC's Mile Square Health Center beginning on January 29. This partnership, which includes the UIC Survivorship Clinic, will significantly expand our impact on those affected by cancer by providing opportunities for patients to engage in evidence-based psychological care. Dr. Robert Winn, MD, Professor of Medicine, Director, UIC Cancer Center, recognizes that the Wellness House and UI Health partnership will provide the capacity to deal with the psychosocial issues of individuals and their families, allowing patients with no previous access to these kinds of services to survive and thrive. Programs will include exercise and movement classes, support and networking groups, nutrition programs, and stress management classes. **By offering a wide range of programs, patients will be able to experience benefits similar to those seen by participants at our main location in Hinsdale. Dr. Winn believes that this partnership will have national impact and prompt other cancer centers to replicate this innovative model of care:** "I will be happy when cancer centers around the country talk about the 'Wellness House/UIC Model' for survivorship and impacting families' lives." We are thankful for our generous friends who help us continue to serve people affected by cancer throughout the Chicago metropolitan area, and we are excited to partner with UI Health to work to establish psychosocial care as a national best practice. It is only through donors like you that we are able to provide programs that promote wellness and healing at no cost to our participants.



**"I will be happy when cancer centers around the country talk about the 'Wellness House/UIC Model' for survivorship and impacting families' lives."**

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



David Blaydes, CFP, MS, RFC, AIF

## Why You Might Want to Create a Donor-Advised Fund

*A DAF can be a great way to give, with potentially great tax breaks.*

**Do you regularly donate to charities and other non-profit organizations?** Then you may want to open a donor-advised fund.

**Donor-advised funds are becoming popular.** It is easy to see why. They offer potential tax perks.<sup>1,2</sup>

It is all too easy to think of charitable gifting in either very small or very large terms: that “Norman Rockwell” moment when someone puts a few dollars into a metal box during the holiday season, and that big moment when a billionaire donates millions to a college. Donor-advised funds represent a middle ground, a way for you to make gifts without having to deal with a private foundation’s paperwork.

DAFs can be started with relatively small sums: a minimum of \$5,000 is not unusual. Please note that contributions to DAFs are irrevocable.<sup>1</sup>

**These funds offer you a tax break and flexibility.** You can claim an immediate charitable tax deduction for the amount you direct into a donor-advised fund,

and you advise the fund where the money should go and when. It can go to multiple charities, not just one.<sup>1,3</sup>

**A donor-advised fund may even provide a triple tax break.** Besides the upfront charitable deduction, there are two other opportunities for tax savings here. When you transfer highly appreciated securities into a DAF, you avoid the capital gains tax you would pay if you simply sold them (and that could mean saving thousands of dollars). In addition, those securities can benefit from tax-free growth once they are in the DAF.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally you do not need to plan how that lump sum should be distributed to charities in that first year.

Whether you routinely or occasionally donate to non-profit organizations, a donor-advised fund is worth considering. It may give you a great way to do good.

**Questions?** Please consult RPI at 630-778-8100 x110.

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**Citations.**

- 1 - [cnbc.com/2018/10/04/sheryl-sandberg-used-this-strategy-to-donate-surveymonkey-shares.html](http://cnbc.com/2018/10/04/sheryl-sandberg-used-this-strategy-to-donate-surveymonkey-shares.html) [10/4/18]
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- 3 - [dailycamera.com/business-columnists/ci\\_32200646/dave-gardner-make-your-generosity-count-come-tax](http://dailycamera.com/business-columnists/ci_32200646/dave-gardner-make-your-generosity-count-come-tax) [10/14/18]

### Thank you to our generous grantors:

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