



Finding hope at every twist and turn of cancer

LaDonna Hammar | page 3

Dear Friends,

As the new year begins, we usher in a fourth decade of providing life-changing support to people affected by cancer – all at no cost. Your generosity has helped us cross this momentous milestone and stand on the horizon of hope as we reach more people than ever before. While facing the physical and emotional challenges of cancer, hope can be found in over 485 online Wellness House programs per month and on-demand video content viewable at any time. As soon as it is safe to do so, a new combination of online and in-person programs will provide an even wider array of connectivity, community, opportunity and hope – no matter where someone lives

Cancer is complex. Each cancer experience is uniquely personal and contains twists and turns, just like it did for LaDonna, whose story is on page 3. LaDonna first shared her story with us when she began attending Wellness House programs at our partner location at Mercy Hospital three years ago. At that time, LaDonna was recently diagnosed and on the cusp of making life-altering treatment decisions. Her story today highlights new challenges including the pandemic, her brother's cancer diagnosis and his death. Throughout it all, even during the darkest moments when her brother died, she continued to receive support and hope from Wellness House through online programs. Wellness House was able to help at a time and in a way that LaDonna needed most, "It got me back where I needed to be."

As we continue to increase access to our programs, we know that many more people will experience a sense of community and hope along the twists and turns of cancer. We thank you for your generosity and commitment to Wellness House and all participants who are navigating the effects of cancer. We look forward to bright and meaningful days to come as we continue our shared vision into the next decade – envisioning a community where all people affected by cancer thrive.

With appreciation,



Lisa K. Kolavennu, MA, LCPC
Executive Director



Lauren Staniar Haarlow
Board Chair



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for Wellness
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Finding hope at every twist and turn of cancer

We first told LaDonna's story three years ago and recently caught up with her to share an update.

After a harsh allergic reaction to her first round of chemotherapy, **LaDonna Hammar** did not want to finish treatment.

But as a patient at Mercy Hospital, her nurse recommended that she try out the Wellness House gynecologic cancer support group, which was meeting in the same building where she came for treatment. LaDonna decided to give it a shot and has now been a part of the close-knit group for over four years.

This support group at Mercy helped LaDonna to connect with other women who had gone through similar experiences.

"There were some other ladies in the group who had reactions, and they assured me that the second time would not be like that," LaDonna said. "So I decided to go on and finish my chemo." This monthly group helped LaDonna feel supported and understood throughout her cancer journey. She explained, "Joining the group, talking with the other women, sharing what we're doing... it just makes you feel better. You feel more connected to somebody that has gone through what you've gone through."

The best part is she didn't have to make the trek out to Hinsdale to receive the warm and caring support that Wellness House provides. "I don't have a car, so I would have to take the train if I went out to the Wellness House main location," LaDonna said. "When you're not feeling well, traveling far is a lot harder than going just a few blocks away from your home." By providing programs throughout the Chicagoland area at places like Mercy, people affected by cancer have better access to the support that Wellness House offers.

Alongside her monthly support group, LaDonna participated in other activities that Wellness House offered at Mercy, like chair yoga or mindfulness meditation. And when her brother later got diagnosed with cancer, she started bringing him to a few programs, too. "They welcomed him in, and he felt so comfortable there," she said.

In light of the current pandemic, LaDonna's cancer support group (like all Wellness House programs) has gone virtual. But it's still an encouraging space for her to connect with others who get it. "When you're isolating and taking safety precautions, it's nice to see a familiar face, even if it's just through your phone," she said. "And touching base with everybody is wonderful."

attend any of the virtual offerings. So when LaDonna lost her brother to cancer this past year, she was able to take advantage of a drop-in bereavement group—one that wouldn't have been available to her in-person at Mercy. She said, "It got me back to where I needed to be."

Due to her brother's death, LaDonna took some time away from her regular support group last year to grieve. **But when she was ready to meet virtually with them again, it was a great feeling. "It felt like coming home," she said. "So many of us have bonded and we truly care about one another."**

Throughout LaDonna's cancer journey,

"When you're isolating and taking safety precautions, it's nice to see a familiar face, even if it's just through your phone. Touching base with everyone is wonderful!"

LaDonna Hammar

The tight-knit support group has evolved throughout the years as women come and go for various reasons. But during the pandemic, the virtual meetings have allowed them to touch base with those who had no longer been able to come in-person to Mercy. For LaDonna, this helped her reconnect with one of the very first friends she made when she joined the group over four years ago. "We picked up right where we last left off in person," LaDonna said. "We didn't miss a beat. We even sent each other Christmas cards!" She was overjoyed that the online group gave her the opportunity to reunite with an old friend.

Providing programs online has opened up all of Wellness House's programming to anyone affected by cancer—regardless of where they live. Participants are no longer limited to the programs available at their local partner site, but can choose to

Wellness House has been there to meet her where she's at. Even now as a cancer survivor, she still benefits from the support of connecting with her group. "In treatment, everything was fast and automatic. But suddenly, it's done. You feel like, what do I do now? How do I start my life over?" LaDonna said. "It's great to be able to check in with others and hear about their survivorship experience. They understand how you feel." Even when the cancer is gone, there is still immense value in having that familiar support system.

Amidst diagnosis, treatment, survivorship and grief, LaDonna is thankful for the support she's found and the strong community she's made through her Wellness House support group. **Wellness House has continued to walk alongside LaDonna through all seasons of her cancer journey, every step of the way.**



Legacy & Leadership

New Board Chair Lauren Haarlow Lauren Haarlow stepped into the board chair position in the summer of 2020 after serving on the board for five years, co-chairing the 20th Anniversary ball and a long family history steeped in supporting the Wellness House mission. More than 30 years before, her father-in-law, Bill Haarlow, played an instrumental role in laying the foundation of Wellness House. Lauren brings a unique perspective of historical knowledge, professional insight, and personal passion to her leadership role in a critical time that brings unique challenges as well as new ways to increase access and remove barriers.

Lauren leads the way into 2021 during a transformative time and is poised to work with an exciting board and staff to improve access and equitable cancer support to anyone affected by cancer.

*“I am honored to serve as the first female chair of the **Wellness House** board, and I am grateful to our donors who make it possible for us to do this important work. As we move into our fourth decade serving individuals and families who are experiencing cancer, it is critical that we continue to provide world class, research-based psychosocial support at our Hinsdale location and at our partner sites. I am looking forward to continuing to grow our partnerships outside of our Hinsdale hub and to making meaningful strides in addressing cancer health equity in the Chicagoland area.”*

Welcome New Board Members 2020/2021

Andrew Brickman



Andrew Brickman was born and raised in Hinsdale and spent the bulk of his thirty-five-year career in the Private Equity industry starting in NYC but ultimately migrating back to the Midwest. While working with several different funds,

Andrew spent much of his career at Baird Capital, the Private Equity arm of Robert W. Baird & Co. After over 20 years at Baird Andrew retired to pursue individual investments and is currently involved in a number of smaller manufacturing and related businesses. Andrew worked on the Project Second Century Committee at Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago involving the substantial upgrade and expansion of the physical plant and then later the Board of Trustees of the Church, serving as Board Chair in his final year. Andrew currently serves on the investment committee of the Community Memorial Foundation and Fourth Presbyterian Church. Andrew and his wife Donna have two children.

Molly Haunty



For the last 9 years, Molly has worked at the Chicago family law firm of Berger Schatz, rising to Partner in January 2019. Prior to joining Berger Schatz and immediately after graduating from Northwestern

Pritzker School of Law in 2010, Molly worked in Chicago as a Clinical Fellow representing the due process concerns of an incarcerated, indigent youth population via a John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation grant awarded to the Children & Family Justice Center. Molly is an avid Northwestern sports fan, having graduated from Northwestern with a Bachelor of Arts in 2007 and meeting her husband, James, there while he attended the Kellogg School of Management. Molly currently lives in Hinsdale with James and their three children.

LaToya McGhee



LaToya has served as an operation strategist focusing on Revenue Cycle Management (RCM) for the last 20 years, demonstrating success in leading teams in healthcare revenue

management and business operations. Named by Becker's Hospital Review as a "Female RCM Leader to Know" in 2018, In her current position with Boncura. Her effectiveness in optimizing operations and team building complements her extensive industry knowledge and expertise, including a Master of Jurisprudence in Health Law from Loyola University Chicago School of Law and a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt Certification in healthcare from Purdue University. In her spare time, LaToya enjoys being with her family and devoting time to mentoring young women.

Wellness House Ball Thrives in Various Locations

The annual Wellness House Ball, held on October 17, 2020, was **attended by more than 500 individuals** in intimate gatherings **at more than 50 locations**, hosted by generous friends, board and community members. The event was our first ever virtual ball and was **supported by 21 corporate partners**. Thanks to the passionate hard work of Co-Chairs **Allison and Rob Knuepfer, III and Kerstin and Geoff Regnery**, as well as their fabulous wine chairs and host committee, **over \$430,000 was raised** to benefit Wellness House programs for people affected by cancer.

The Wellness House Ball – at your house connected attendees via livestream and featured a meaningful video produced by **Maureen Muldoon** that shared stories of Wellness House participants and their transition to online programming in March 2020.

Each host created their own unique atmosphere and connection to the mission of Wellness House, with many serving elegant fare created especially for the ball by **BOKA restaurant group**. This event could not have been successful without the heartfelt



enthusiasm and generosity of each host, sponsor and attendee. Because of the generosity of the community, participants have been able to make **over 40,000 visits to online programs** since the start of the pandemic in March.

Save the date for the next Wellness House Ball, September 25, 2021, at The Geraghty in Chicago.

Curtis Reed



Curtis Reed has 25 years of experience in the banking industry and 17 of those years have been with JPMorgan Chase and predecessor organizations. His current role is Managing Director and Region Manager-

Chicago. Curtis has spent his entire career in commercial banking, holding a variety of different positions during that time. In March 2017 Curtis was named the Region Manager for Chase's Middle Market banking operations for the Chicago Region. Curtis currently serves on the board for the Civic Consulting Alliance, the advisory board for After School Matters and is an honorary board member for the AIDS Foundation of Chicago. He is also a member of the Windy City chapter of the Young President's Organization. Curtis earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Finance at the University of Iowa in June 1995. Curtis lives in Naperville with his wife, Tora, two daughters and one son.

Beth Sharp



Beth is a Technology and Finance Executive with over 25 years of experience focused primarily on managerial accounting and leading IT implementation projects and

teams. She is currently Vice President, IT at Weber-Stephen Products, LLC in Palatine, Illinois where she has worked for 6 years in several Finance and IT executive positions. Beth grew up in Northern Ohio and attended Miami University, graduating with a Major in Finance and Minor in Spanish. She moved to Chicago after college and has worked in several finance and IT positions starting in the futures industry, but primarily in consumer-packaged goods companies in the Western Suburbs. Beth currently lives in Clarendon Hills, where she has raised her 3 children.

Kevin Thilborger



Kevin currently serves as a Managing Director at Huron Consulting Group. He leads the Managed Care, Value-Based Care, and Reimbursement Transformation practice as well as sits on the advisory

councils for new strategic investments for the firm. Prior to his current role, he worked with organizations trying to transform their revenue strategies from traditional fee-for-service toward capitation, including overall performance improvement in administrative functions. He has over 23 years of health care industry experience working for medical groups, insurance carriers, and consulting firms on turn-around strategies, managed care negotiations, new product development, direct-to-employer arrangements, and overall operations improvements. He received his Master's in Health Administration from Tulane University and currently lives in the West Loop.

Behind the scenes putting it all together!

Facilitating programs with our fantastic partner sites



Meet Our Experts – Kelli Mitchell

Kelli Mitchell, Community Relations Manager

Kelli Mitchell joined the Wellness House team in April of 2015 in the then-new role of Program Development Specialist and has been facilitating programs with our fantastic partner sites ever since. Her role has now evolved into Community Relations Manager as she's built up a robust network of partnerships with hospitals, healthcare facilities, community centers, churches and more throughout the Chicagoland area.

“One of my favorite things is seeing folks get exposed to a new fundamental piece of health education, like the benefits of a plant-based diet. It's amazing to see their courage in trying something new, and then really liking it!”

- **Kelli Mitchell,**
Community Relations Manager

Before coming to Wellness House, Kelli had a broad scope of professional experience, ranging from marketing and design, to digital ad sales, to teaching assistant. While in search of a meaningful career transition, she found Wellness House. Having previously lost her husband to cancer, Kelli was well-versed in the daily reality of what it's like for those affected by cancer, and she wanted to be part of an organization that was making a difference in the cancer space. She reached out to Jeannie Cella, former President and CEO, and after learning more about the mission of Wellness House, Kelli joined the team to help make cancer support equally accessible to all who need it.

This was right at the time when Wellness House decided to start expanding outside the walls of Hinsdale. Kelli helped look at the barriers of entry preventing people from accessing programming—barriers like lack of transportation or feeling like an outsider in a different community. And instead of building new Wellness House facilities around Chicago, a decision was made to partner with existing organizations that were already established in the community. The partner site provides the physical space, and Wellness House provides the programming and experts.

Kelli is passionate about creating access to cancer support for people who would otherwise not have access in the communities where they live and work. She does this daily by identifying potential partner organizations, cultivating those relationships, and working with program managers to design programming specifically for the people in that community.

Because of Kelli's hard work and dedication, Wellness House now offers programming through ten different community partners, allowing people all over Chicagoland access to cancer support in their own community.

Kelli's professional highlights

- Earned a BA in Journalism/Advertising and Visual Communication from Northern Illinois University

Hundreds Attend Special Events from Home

The pandemic has put many areas of our lives on hold, but it's our goal to make sure cancer education and special events provide an avenue to increased quality of life for people affected by cancer. It's only because of you that we are able to continue to provide life-changing programs that help children, families and individuals find meaningful information as well as a little fun during challenging times. All our special events have been held online which provide a safe way to participate and increase access for anyone affected by cancer. **Participants and families attended from all-around Chicago, the suburbs and many locations around Illinois and beyond.**

Gathering Around the Table

food talks for cancer



Gathering Around the Table: Food Talks for Cancer

This exciting week of virtual nutrition events was presented November 7-13 to promote a whole food, plant based, cancer-fighting diet and featured special guest **Bryant Terry** – James Beard Award-Winning chef, educator, and author of the newly published *Vegetable Kingdom*. Participants made over 549 visits to this week-long series of programs which also included Cancer Nutrition Myths, Knife Skills, Gut Health and Cancer and Community and Food.

What participants said:

“I am inspired not only to cook but to get involved in my community!”
“Thank you for the knowledge, tips and effervescence of your spirit, Bryant.”

Wellness Evolving Finding Light in the Dark Using Humor as a Coping Tool - Humor Beats Cancer

Over 60 people affected by cancer attended the first Wellness Evolving event-part of a greater series designed to inspire by learning, engaging and doing. This event presented the founder of Humor Beats Cancer, **Olivia Clarke**, and other cancer survivors who have used the power of humor as a coping and community-building tool. The evening inspired participants through authentic exchanges along with a light-hearted appearance by Olivia's dog Oscar.

What participants said

“It was a good one that really made me think about the funny side of cancer and sparked my creativity!”

“Thank you for the positive energy and beautiful insights.”



HUMOR BEATS CANCER



Polar Express Drive-thru

What could be better than Santa arriving on a Fire Truck! Special thanks to the Hinsdale Fire Department for giving Santa the lift. The jolly good fellow complete with rosy cheeks arrived in a bucket lift and greeted kids as their parents drove through polar express stops that included games and treats. Each child received a specially selected present picked out just for them.

What participants said:

“Thank you so much for planning a unique and special event for the kiddos in this crazy time.”

“We love Wellness House and appreciate everything you do”

“From the bottom of our hearts - thank you! Tonight, was amazing and my little boys loved it.”

THANK YOU, for putting a smile on the face of a child. Wellness House wouldn't be able to present programs such as these without your help.



KIDS EVENTS

Spooky Spectacular

Our annual Spooky Spectacular event looked a little different this year, but the kids still had a wonderful time showing off their costumes over Zoom! We had a costume guessing contest, pumpkin decorating (courtesy of The Farm in Westmont), bingo, and a special guest storyteller. Thank you to our amazing group of volunteers and people like you who brought smiles to the faces of kids affected by cancer.



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

What is a Donor-Advised Fund & is it right for me?



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

Looking for a high-impact way to give while maximizing your tax benefit? You may be aware that in 2018 the standard deduction basically doubled for individuals and married couples, making it more difficult to get an incremental tax-deduction when donating to a qualified charity. In 2020, the standard deduction is \$12,400 for single taxpayers and \$24,800 for married filing jointly.

One approach you often hear about is “bunching”, where contributions you would typically give over 2 or 3 years are lumped into a single year to achieve a larger deduction. While the tax-benefit is great, the charity you donated to will go without your contribution in the gap years.

A Donor-Advised Fund is a way to get the full tax-benefit in a single year while spreading out your contributions over several years and even to multiple charities. A Donor-Advised Fund represents a cost-effective alternative to creating a private foundation. Advantages include claiming an immediate tax deduction, potential avoidance of capital gains if

contributing appreciated securities, ability to make grant recommendations, no tax reporting required by the donor, and the ability to recommend an investment advisor to manage the fund.

A common misconception is that a Donor-Advised Fund is only for the ultra-wealthy, but many can be established with minimums of \$10,000.

If you're looking to make a charitable donation in a calendar year but defer the payout, whether you want to invest and grow the balance or want to stretch the donation over several years, a Donor Advised Fund should be considered.

Consult with your tax, finance, and/or legal advisor to understand how a Donor-Advised Fund may fit into your gifting strategy.

Questions? Please consult RPI at 630.778.8100 x110.

Securities offered through Securities America, Inc. member FINRA/SIPC. Advisory services offered through Securities America Advisors, Inc. RPI and Securities America are separate entities. Source – “SEI Giving Fund” Program Guide

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:

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