

When life
gives you
lemons...

see page 4



Wellness News

Dear Friends,

Wellness House's main location, The Kay & Mike Birck Home of Hope, proudly stands on an approximately half acre plot of land and has served as a symbol of community and strength for over 34 years. This building reminds us about the foundation of our mission in name and individual stories of hope. Nearly 50,000 people have attended Wellness House programs at the main location and beyond thanks to our expansion to over 23 partner locations throughout Chicagoland.

In this newsletter, you'll read about Sherry who walked into Wellness House and met staff member Alex at the door. After a year of treatments, complications, and side effects that took a toll on her mind, body and spirit, Sherry found community and hope at Wellness House. From her very first encounter with Alex that day, she felt an immediate sense of belonging. That welcoming feeling has been present at every subsequent visit Sherry has made to Wellness House, where she is able to choose from nearly 500 programs a month that help with her recovery.

This year, our annual Ball, Hope Grows, will be held on Saturday, October 19 at The Old Post Office. Our Ball Chairs, Pamela and George Pontikis and Katie and Michael Isadore, along with the Ball Committee and staff, are hard at work creating a memorable and elegant gala. This event is more than just a beautiful evening, though. It is a night to raise critical funds in support of Wellness House programs that will bring hope to many individuals. Please consider joining us for this meaningful night. You'll find more information at wellnesshouse.org/ball.

We are incredibly grateful to you for sharing your gifts, talents and passion for the Wellness House mission. With your support, Wellness House continues to be a haven of healing and hope for so many.

Warmly,

Lisa K. Kolavennu, MA, LCPC
Chief Executive Officer

Stephen Smith
Board Chair

Volunteer Needs

Volunteers are vital to Wellness House. We couldn't do what we do without volunteers! They make it possible for Wellness House participants to enjoy outstanding support during their cancer journey.



Front Desk Volunteers:

We are always looking for individuals who are interested in providing exceptional customer service by being warm, welcoming, and relationship-focused to all of our participants, staff, and the Wellness House community. Please reach out if you are interested in greeting and assisting participants and visitors when they enter the house and programs.

Shifts to volunteer weekly/bi-weekly at the front desk are as follows:

Mondays - Thursdays:

9:00 am - 12:00 pm
12:00 pm - 4:00 pm
4:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Fridays:

9:00 am - 12:00 pm
12:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Saturdays:

9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Wellness House Ambassador

Promote awareness of Wellness House/The Courtyard by representing the organization at tabling and public-speaking engagements. As a Wellness House Ambassador, you are an extension of staff and an integral part of the Wellness House community.

Program Facilitators

Help us empower and support Wellness House participants. We're looking for professional Massage Therapists, Reiki or Energy Touch Healers, or Yoga or Tai Chi instructors.



If you are interested in signing up for any of these volunteer opportunities or would like to learn more, please fill out our volunteer application at wellnesshouse.org/volunteer or scan the QR code.



Hope Grows at the Wellness House Ball

Join us on Saturday, October 19 at The Old Post Office in Chicago for the most anticipated event of the year, the Wellness House Ball – Hope Grows. We will celebrate the mission and impact of Wellness House and raise funds for its continued work.

Join Co-Chairs Pamela and George Pontikis and Katie and Michael Isadore as they present a memorable evening recognizing the many ways that Wellness House benefits people with cancer. Cocktails and dinner will be followed by a live auction and paddle raise, along with a moving story sharing the experiences of Wellness House participants. To cap off the evening, Deja Vu will provide live music with dancing until midnight.

Guests will experience a sense of community, hope and shared purpose amid the verdant backdrop of gorgeous decor in the marbled art deco space of The Old Post Office. The annual Wine Cellar will offer a variety of fixed price wines available for purchase in advance, delivered directly to your table and enjoyed at the event.

Can't make the Ball? We welcome general donations to the event at any time.

For more information, to purchase tickets, or to make a donation visit wellnesshouse.org/ball

Special thanks to our Presenting Sponsor, Burke Beverage



HOPE SHINES BRIGHTLY AT WALK FOR WELLNESS HOUSE

Annual Walk Raises Funds for Free Cancer Support



On Sunday, May 5, 2024, over 3,000 people came together at the annual Walk for Wellness House in support of cancer survivors, families and friends. The day was filled with encouragement, hope and community as runners and walkers took to the pavement in the streets surrounding Wellness House's main location in Hinsdale, raising over \$780,000. Funds raised will help support more than 500 free monthly programs in areas such as nutrition, exercise, support and counseling and child and family support.

This year's event would not have been a success without the steadfast efforts and support of Walk Co-Chairs, Dr. Arpi Thukral and Mahrukh Hussain; Walk committee members; Presenting Sponsor, The Inland Real Estate Group of Companies; as well as teams and individual registrants.



The day began with the steady arrival of runners and walkers wearing red Walk t-shirts and volunteers wearing white, all with a shared vision to help support those living with cancer. A meaningful program commenced at 8:00 a.m. followed by the Walk kick-off at 8:30 a.m. Runners and walkers set off following a countdown and blast of confetti, then wound through streets in northeast Hinsdale.



Special thanks to the 2024 Walk for Wellness House Presenting Sponsor, The Inland Real Estate Group of Companies, Inc., Platinum Sponsor Hallstar, and other valued sponsors. Additional special thanks goes to our top fundraising teams, THECROWNROYALSTEAM, Team Inland, Hallstar Hustlers, Wellness Warriors, Team Julian, Heard of Zebras, The Beautiful Bad Ass, Team FU, Love Like Sean, and Curi/RMB.



When life
gives you
lemons, make

Strawberry Snacking Cake

Sherry Cummings' first visit to Wellness House wasn't what she expected. It was so much more.



More than a year of treatments, complications and side effects in her fight against cervical cancer left Sherry feeling isolated, lonely, and looking for some human interaction. Moments after entering Wellness House for the first time, Sherry knew she had found what she was looking for. Oncology Exercise and Engagement Specialist Alex Bohnstedt happened to be working at the welcome desk that morning. She greeted Sherry warmly and talked to her not only about the support group that brought her to Wellness House, but about all of the programs and services Wellness House could offer.

"I felt an immediately sense of belonging," Sherry said, recalling that Alex suggested Moving Forward, a program for people who have recently completed cancer treatment that pairs exercise with the opportunity to speak to others who are experiencing cancer.

"Alex knew what classes I could go to. I credit Alex with getting me started at Wellness House," said Sherry, who has since found many programs to help with her recovery.

She attends exercise classes every Monday and Wednesday, Tai Chi on Tuesday, and Qi Gong on Fridays. Sherry also works with Community Oncology Dietitian Emily Guzman to help with lingering gut issues.

"She gave me a lot of recipes to incorporate," Sherry said, including a couscous salad and a strawberry snacking cake that includes ingredients to calm acid reflux.

Wellness House also introduced Sherry to Reiki, a form of energy healing. Sherry enjoyed it so much, she became certified herself.

"I'm not a joiner," Sherry said of herself. But she's found a new confidence that she credits at least in part to Wellness House. Not long ago, she surprised even herself by traveling alone to see her daughter in California.

"I didn't think I could get on a plane by myself," said Sherry, who not only flew on her own, but also rented a car and drove herself to her daughter's home.

"I had a wonderful trip for Mother's Day. I give Wellness House credit for giving me the confidence to do that," Sherry said.

Sherry said she had no knowledge of Wellness House prior to her own diagnosis. She has since encouraged several people to take advantage of its many programs and support services.

In the months since Sherry first stepped inside the doors of Wellness House, she said she's found relief for her anxiety, learned about exercise and nutrition that's right for her unique needs, and become stronger in mind and body.

Thanks to Wellness House, Sherry is rediscovering the things she loves and finding new things to enjoy.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



Kids Kamp 2024

We celebrated another week of fun and connection during Kid's Kamp in mid-July. 28 kampers and 15 teen volunteers gathered each morning throughout the week for a variety of fun activities.

Kampers and counselors engaged in activities such as make-your-own stress ball, birdhouse building, yoga, and an Olympics competition. Wellness House staff planned and facilitated the week and were joined by guests, including a magician and a team from Home Depot who led the birdhouse project. Once again, Kids Kamp provided a safe and fun way for kids whose lives have been touched by cancer to grow, build confidence and find community.



HOT TOPICS IN BREAST CANCER | 2024



Nearly 100 breast cancer survivors and their families attended the annual Hot Topics in Breast Cancer event held on Saturday, June 22 to hear about the latest updates in breast cancer research and treatment.

Top oncology professionals from RUSH, Endeavor Health, UChicago Medicine and UChicago Medicine AdventHealth came to Wellness House for an in-person event held at The Kay & Mike Birck Home of Hope in Hinsdale. Participants had the opportunity to learn about current and upcoming treatments for breast cancer, as well as important topics for cancer survivorship including the role of genetic testing, sexual health after breast cancer, and reducing recurrence risk. This year, as we gathered back in-person for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, participants also had the opportunity to move through an early morning gentle yoga session, and network with other survivors in facilitated discussion groups during lunch.

Other events held in this series include Hot Topics in Prostate Cancer in September, Hot Topics in Blood Cancer in November and Hot Topics in Colorectal Cancer in March.





Meet Our Experts

Ellen Nieman

Associate Director of Programs

Wellness House exists to educate, support and empower people affected by cancer. Ellen Nieman's role is to ensure the programs, classes and events offered get that job done. As Associate Director of Programs at Wellness House, Ellen oversees educational programs, assesses participant engagement and evaluates programming in an ongoing effort to provide participants with what they need and want from Wellness House.

“I often receive and explore new ideas from participants, and others in the Wellness House community.”

Ellen Nieman

Ellen came to the organization in 2016 from Boston, where she worked with survivors of the 2013 marathon bombing. A native of Illinois, her job at Wellness House was a homecoming as well as an opportunity to take on something new.

“It was time for me to make a change,” said Ellen, who holds Dual master’s degrees in social work and pastoral ministry. Ellen shares that Wellness House’s holistic approach to care and wellness drew her to the job.

“We really serve all parts of the person,” she said, including the families of those with cancer.

“We are committed to our foundational programs,” including support groups, exercise classes and nutrition programs, shares Ellen. But Wellness House also is attentive to the changing needs and interests of its participants. She points to facilitated discussion groups added to the conference-style Hot Topics in Breast Cancer event this June. “After previous Information and Education programs, participants expressed desire for more time to connect with one another. We added these conversations to the program as a way to help facilitate deeper connections and information-sharing between participants.”

Keeping in tune with the needs of Wellness House participants involves talking, listening and asking for opinions using tools such as post-program evaluations. “I often receive and explore new ideas from participants, and others in the Wellness House community” said Ellen, recalling a recent suggestion from a guest interested in hypnotherapy.

“A lot of my time is spent connecting with our staff,” said Ellen, who occasionally fills in to lead a program or class and also works with the Wellness House Youth Council. The fact that every day is different is among the many things she enjoys about being on the Wellness House team. “I love our mission and the work that we do,” Ellen said.

Ellen’s Professional Highlights

A licensed clinical social worker, Ellen is a member of the *National Association of Social Workers* and the *Association of Oncology Social Workers*. Outside of her work at Wellness House, Ellen enjoys sewing and reading.

Unique Ways to Give

Support for Wellness House comes in many forms—from individuals, foundations, through events, and from unique fundraising efforts. Whatever the source, Wellness House is grateful for the endorsement and contributions from people and organizations that help keep its services free for all participants.



One such supporter is **Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits**. On October 11, 2023 Southern Glazer's Bolingbrook-based "Cheers to Women" chapter hosted a fundraiser and awareness event for breast cancer. Capitalizing on the nationwide love of pickleball, and in support of a staff member dealing with the disease, the organization hosted a "Pink Pickleball" event to have fun, generate staff camaraderie, and raise funds for Wellness House.



Held at the Cress Creek Country Club in Naperville, the pickleball event commenced at 5:00 p.m., with spirited competition between colleagues. Once the victors were crowned, participants enjoyed a festive reception with food and beverages, along with raffles to win one of many coveted prize packages. During the event,

Southern Glazer's welcomed a current employee receiving services at Wellness House, as well as a Wellness House representative, to speak about the organization, its services, and its impact on participants. The evening was such a success that in addition to attendee-generated funds, Southern Glazer's matched event proceeds with an additional gift to Wellness House.

Wellness House is deeply grateful to Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits for this, and other forms of support it has provided. Without question, it takes a village to provide free cancer wellness care for patients and their networks and Wellness House welcomes all members of the village with open arms. We offer extra thanks to **Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits** for its kindness and support, and applause for its pickleball prowess.

Please contact the Development Department at **630-654-5191** if you, or your organization or company is interested in hosting a fundraiser for Wellness House. *Have questions? Email us at development@wellnesshouse.org*



Cancer Health Equity Summit

Nearly 80 healthcare professionals attended the inaugural **Stronger Together, Cancer Health Equity Summit** held on Friday, June 14, presented by Wellness House in partnership with UIHealth and on the University of Illinois-College of Medicine campus.



This special event united cancer health equity leaders across Chicago to share new findings and collectively shine a light on solutions to address inequities in cancer care through expert speakers and interactive workshops. The day began with opening remarks by Lisa Kolavennu, CEO of Wellness House, followed by keynote speaker Otis Brawley, MD, MACP, FASCO, FACE – Johns Hopkins Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of Oncology and Epidemiology. Other notable speakers included Dr. Kent Hoskins – University of Illinois Cancer Center, Dr. Pam Ganschow – Univ. of IL Cancer Center, Dr. Yasmin Asvat – RUSH, and Dr. Nita Lee – University of Chicago.



Attendees also engaged in a community building lunch, and Cancer Disparity Interest Group breakout discussions. *This event will be held annually with a participant-focused summit coming in September 2024.*

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



Critical Juncture for Charitable Gifting

David Blaydes and his team may be reached at info@rpiplan.com or (630) 778-8100 x100. www.rpiplan.com

The sunset provision of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) is a critical juncture for charitable gifting. The TCJA implemented various changes to the tax code, including modifications to the standard deduction, individual tax rates, and deductions for state and local taxes. These changes had implications for charitable gifting strategies.

The TCJA was signed into law in December 2017 and went into effect on January 1, 2018. We're near the act's expiration, set for the end of 2025. This leaves the final months of 2024 and 2025 to take advantage of the beneficial provisions around cash donations when it comes to charitable gifting, as it's unclear what will happen going into 2026.

Before the TCJA, cash donations were deductible up to 50% of taxpayers adjusted gross income (AGI). The TCJA increased this by 10% allowing individuals to deduct

60% of AGI for cash donations. The enhancement provides an opportunity for individuals making significant contributions to deduct a larger amount from their taxable income, a change intended to incentivize charitable giving.

Let's say you have an AGI of \$100,000. If you make a cash donation of \$60,000 (60% of your AGI), you'd be able to deduct the full amount as it doesn't exceed 60% of your AGI. At this time, the same donation made in 2026 or after would only be deductible up to \$50,000, or 50% of your AGI.

By understanding the evolving tax landscape and leveraging strategic gifting strategies, individuals can maximize their philanthropic impact while optimizing tax benefits. Work with your trusted advisor, CPA and/or attorney to better understand how you can make the most of your charitable goals.

Questions? Please email David at davidb@rpiplan.com or call him at 630-778-8100 x100.

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For more information: **Call 630.323.1135**

The Courtyard | 63 Village Place | Hinsdale, IL 60521