

FROM DIAGNOSIS
TO EMPOWERMENT:

Kathryn's Story

See cover story page 4

Register now for the
Walk for Wellness House
wellnesshouse.org/walk

For more info see page 7



Dear Friends,

For 35 years, Wellness House has been a place where hope takes root and grows. A cancer diagnosis brings uncertainty, fear, and change—yet, amidst it all, hope remains a powerful force. Since our founding, more than 50,000 individuals have walked through our doors seeking connection, understanding, and strength. They have found a compassionate community, expert guidance, and programs that help them navigate the challenges of cancer with knowledge and resilience. What began as a vision to provide supportive oncology care has flourished into a vibrant and thriving community where hope is nurtured across Chicagoland and beyond.

A cancer diagnosis can feel isolating and overwhelming, but at Wellness House, no one faces it alone. Over the years, we have built a welcoming, supportive environment where participants and their loved ones can find solace and empowerment. With expert-led programs in nutrition, exercise, stress management, support groups, and counseling, we cultivate spaces where individuals can share their experiences and find comfort among others who understand their journey.

In this newsletter, we are honored to share the story of Kathryn, whose cancer journey led her to Wellness House. When diagnosed with triple-negative stage 2 breast cancer, Kathryn discovered Wellness House through her care team at Rush. From nutrition guidance to yoga classes, she found strength, knowledge, and a supportive community. Inspired by her experience, Kathryn's sister formed a Walk for Wellness House team that raised more than \$10,000 last year. Now, as she nears the completion of her treatment, Kathryn's participation in this year's Walk will be a tribute to her resilience.

As we celebrate 35 years of hope, we invite you to our annual Walk for Wellness House on Sunday, May 4, 2025. This milestone event brings together cancer survivors, families, friends, and supporters to honor our shared journey. Led by Walk Co-Chairs Mahrukh Hussain and Julie Thick, the Walk raises critical funds to keep our programs free and accessible to all who need them.

We are deeply grateful to you—our donors, partners, and champions of hope. Your generosity has expanded our reach to include over 30 partner collaborations across Chicagoland. Your continued support keeps Wellness House a place of healing, connection, and hope. We look forward to seeing you at the Walk for Wellness House and encourage you to reach out with any thoughts or feedback. Please feel free to contact us at lkolavennu@wellnesshouse.org. Thank you for your partnership and trust in our mission.

With gratitude,



Lisa K. Kolavennu, MA, LCPC
Chief Executive Officer



Stephen Smith
Board Chair



Volunteer Needs

Volunteers are vital to Wellness House, and we couldn't do what we do without them! Volunteers make it possible for Wellness House participants to enjoy outstanding support during their cancer journey by serving in various functions throughout the organization.

Courtyard Volunteers

The Courtyard, our local consignment and retail store, sells a variety of fine furnishings, with all proceeds benefiting Wellness House. Whether it's helping customers or setting up eye-catching displays, we would appreciate retail or computer support. **Shifts are 4 hours long, with a commitment of 1-2 shifts per month.**

Walk for Wellness House Volunteers!



Get involved in our Walk for Wellness House on Sunday, May 4! Interested in volunteering for the Walk for the **first time?** Scan the QR code to view the Walk for Wellness House Volunteer Application and sign up:

Have you volunteered for the Walk before? Great! Then you are already in our volunteer database and do not need to submit an additional volunteer application!

To sign up for a Walk for Wellness House volunteer assignment, email volunteeradmin@wellnesshouse.org, and we'll provide more details.

Friday and Saturday Front Desk Volunteers

We're seeking friendly, service-oriented volunteers to create a warm and welcoming experience for participants, staff, and the broader Wellness House community.

Volunteers must be available for at least two shifts per month during the following times:

Fridays: 12 Noon – 3 pm, 3 pm – 5 pm
Saturdays: 9 am - 12 Noon

Wellness House Ambassador

Help spread awareness of Wellness House and The Courtyard while supporting revenue and participation goals. As a Wellness House Ambassador, you'll serve as an extension of our staff and an integral part of the Wellness House community.

Healthy Living Instructors

Join us in empowering and supporting Wellness House participants! We're seeking licensed or certified professionals in massage therapy, Reiki, Energy Touch, yoga, or Tai Chi.



Hope Grows at the Annual Wellness House Ball

More than 400 guests attended the annual Wellness House Ball on Saturday, October 19, at The Old Post Office in Chicago. Guests at the Hope Grows-themed Wellness House Ball dined, danced, and donated to support individuals and families affected by cancer.

Hope Grows Ball Co-Chairs **Katie and Michael Isadore** and **Pamela and George Pontikis**, along with a team of committee members, volunteers, and Wellness House staff, orchestrated a memorable evening featuring lush greenery and candlelight set against elegant table settings and Art Deco decor. Guests enjoyed cocktails and dinner before participating in a live auction and paddle raise, followed by a moving video that shared the experiences of two young adults who attend Wellness House programs. The evening concluded with guests dancing the night away to the band *Déjà Vu*.

The annual Wellness House Ball provides critical funding to support the mission of offering supportive programs to individuals and families throughout Chicagoland. **Nearly 4,000 individuals made 45,813 visits last year to in-person and online programs focused on nutrition, exercise, stress management, support groups and counseling, child and family, and information and education.** Wellness House programs are open to anyone, regardless of where they receive medical treatment. Free cancer support programs are available at the organization's main location in Hinsdale, as well as partner locations including UI Health at Mile Square Health Center, Rush University Medical Center, and Loyola Medicine's Cardinal Bernardin Cancer Center.

A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO OUR GOLD-LEVEL AND ABOVE SPONSORS WHO MADE THE 2024 BALL POSSIBLE:

Presenting Sponsor: *Burke Beverage*

Platinum Sponsor: *Redesign Group*

Gold Sponsors: *Corporate Fleet Services, Curi RMB Capital, Hallstar, Holiday Transport Group/Fire Science Techniques, J.P. Morgan, Ed Napleton Automotive Group, Nvidia, UChicago Medicine AdventHealth, and William Blair.*

Each year, sponsors at all levels make a profound difference in the lives of people affected by cancer.

SAVE THE DATE!

On Saturday, October 18 the 2025 Wellness House Ball will celebrate 35 years of hope at the Radisson Blu in Chicago. Stay tuned for more details on attendance and sponsorship opportunities.



Kathryn entered her gynecologist's office in January 2024 excited to talk about the next steps in her journey toward motherhood. *But the visit sent Kathryn on a much different path.*

From Diagnosis to Empowerment: Kathryn's Story

During her exam, her doctor found a suspicious lump in her breast and immediately sent her to Rush University Medical Center for more testing. It was there that she received her diagnosis of triple-negative stage 2 breast cancer. It's also where she learned about Wellness House, a place that over the next year would strengthen her with information, fuel her with confidence, and energize her to embrace life with renewed excitement. Although it's located just seven minutes from Kathryn's home, she had never heard of Wellness House until her care team at Rush recommended it. What she found there was more than she could have imagined or expected.

"I've leaned on Wellness House for quite a bit," said Kathryn, who made her first visit in March 2024. In the year since, she has attended a wide variety of programs. She's also made friends and found a supportive community where she can ask questions and voice concerns.

Through cooking classes and the guidance of Community Oncology Dietitian Emily Guzman, Kathryn has learned to fuel her body with the nutrients it needs to fight her cancer and manage her treatments.

Yoga classes at Wellness House have helped Kathryn manage her stress and find calm on her uncertain journey.

The Unique Boutique has made her feel more confident and beautiful as she manages hair loss and other physical changes resulting from her treatment.

"I've done some really fun classes through the Unique Boutique," Kathryn said.

Through Wellness House, Kathryn was introduced to sound healing and chair yoga. She's also explored Wellness House's library, discovering cookbooks to support her commitment to



good nutrition and stories from others who have shared similar cancer experiences.

"That's a good resource that I think people forget about," she said.

Kathryn's sister Dawn noticed the impact that Wellness House was having on Kathryn. Just two months after Kathryn's first visit, Dawn formed a team to participate in the annual Walk for Wellness House. Calling the team Beautiful Bad Ass, a nickname given to Kathryn by her husband, the team of about 15 raised more than \$10,000 to further the work of Wellness House.

"Even tough cookies need a place to feel comfort and peace," Dawn said in a message to potential supporters of last year's Walk. "Wellness House has been that place for Kathryn and so many others who are facing this difficult journey."

The return of Beautiful Bad Ass in the 2025 Walk will double as a celebration. Kathryn's treatments end in April.

"I'll have some fun things to look forward to," she said, including the Walk and a yoga retreat in Portugal planned for later in May.

Wellness House, she said, has fueled her desire to try new things and embrace new experiences. It's also strengthened her commitment to living a healthier life, with better nutrition and a heightened awareness of the products she chooses to use on and in her body. Fitness and overall wellness, Kathryn said, are a bigger focus for her now.

A year ago, Kathryn didn't know that Wellness House existed. Now, she considers herself a vocal advocate and ambassador, telling everyone she can about its impact on those facing cancer. The experience of having cancer stays with people forever. Kathryn says Wellness House's impact will stay with her just as long.



All Aboard the Polar Express

In early December, Wellness House got the festive season started and became a stop on the Polar Express. We welcomed over 35 families to enjoy an evening of winter-themed games, ornament crafting, cozy treats, and of course, Santa! We were thankful to have the Hinsdale Fire Department join us, creating a warm welcome for participants in the parking lot. A wonderful volunteer family also brought the magic of a Santa visit experience. Thanks to our partnership with Cal's Angels, each child received a gift. The Wellness House Youth Council played an integral role in making the event memorable by planning and leading the games and crafts, alongside our staff.

Resilience and Hope: Navigating Cancer, Caregiving and Grief with Marisa Renee Lee



This past November we welcomed advocate, writer, and speaker, **Marisa Renee Lee** to Wellness House. In 2022, Marisa published her book *Grief is Love: Living with Loss*, which details her personal experiences with loss, and her insights and wisdom for navigating loss, rooted in a deep sense of hope, joy and resilience. An engaged group of 67 participants asked questions and shared reflections with Marisa about the impact her book and work had on them. Marisa created a space and opportunity to acknowledge the pain and difficulty that comes with grief while also acknowledging that hope, joy, and living fully are still possible in the midst of grief.

Leading up to Marisa's presentation, participants also gathered in a 4-week long book club discussion and shared their reflections on living with grief, resilience, and coping.

STRENGTH IN PARTNERSHIP: Wellness House and PCFC Expand Support for Prostate Cancer Community



Since its founding in 2006, the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Chicago (PCFC) has been dedicated to improving the quality of care and quality of life for individuals diagnosed with prostate cancer. Led by Dr. Brian Moran until his passing in 2024, the foundation continues to promote public awareness, cancer prevention, early detection and treatment options to prostate cancer patients, their families, and medical professionals.

Wellness House is proud to have partnered with PCFC for more than a decade, hosting their monthly survivor meetings at our Hinsdale Home of Hope location since 2019. These sessions are a vital component of Wellness House's prostate cancer programming, which also includes the annual *Hot Topics in Prostate Cancer Symposium*, prostate cancer exercise programs, *Prostate Cancer Connections* support groups, prostate cancer nutrition programs, and more.

In the fall of 2024, Wellness House and PCFC deepened their partnership. Recognizing Wellness House's expertise and leadership in psychosocial oncology care, PCFC awarded the organization a four-year grant. This funding will subsidize Wellness House's existing prostate cancer programs

while also supporting their expansion—both through the introduction of additional services and by extending programming to the south and west sides of Chicago.

By joining forces, Wellness House and PCFC are ensuring that more individuals affected by prostate cancer have access to high-quality psychosocial support. This collaboration underscores a shared commitment to improving well-being for prostate cancer patients and their loved ones as well as expanding awareness of the risks of prostate cancer throughout northern Illinois. Wellness House is deeply grateful to PCFC for their generous support and shared vision. Through this partnership, we are expanding access to critical resources for those facing prostate cancer, helping them navigate their journey with strength and connection. We look forward to continuing this work together and reaching even more individuals who can benefit from our services.

For more information on Wellness House's programs and our growing reach in the Chicago area, visit wellnesshouse.org. For more information on the mission of the Prostate Foundation of Chicago, visit chicagoprostatefoundation.org.



Meet Our Experts

Michael Williams, Psy.D.

Senior Oncology Support Counselor

Michael has been a valued member of the Wellness House team for almost 30 years. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Loyola University Chicago and a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology. Michael is a licensed clinical psychologist and an active member of the American Psychosocial Oncology Society.

“We don’t make the cancer go away, but together with the entire Wellness House team, I strive to help each participant grow stronger and make their journey a little easier.”

Michael Williams, Psy.D.

Every person who joins a Wellness House support group has at least two things in common: they have been affected by cancer, and they have a supportive community to share their experiences with.

“Right away, they realize they are not alone,” said Michael Williams, Psy.D., Senior Oncology Support Counselor at Wellness House.

Each week, Michael leads up to 10 support groups, guiding discussions about participants’ cancer experiences. Some groups focus on specific diagnoses, while others bring together individuals who are just beginning their cancer journey or those grieving the loss of a loved one. In addition to group sessions, Michael provides counseling for individuals, couples, and families—whether they are living with cancer, supporting a loved one, or coping with loss.

No matter the group, Michael believes each gathering creates a sacred space—one he feels privileged to be a part of.

Midway through his undergraduate studies at Loyola University Chicago, Michael decided to pursue a career in healthcare. He later became a licensed clinical psychologist and earned his Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology. While completing his doctorate, he was invited

to join Wellness House as a psychotherapist.

“I’ve been here ever since,” Michael said.

Michael said the entire Wellness House team knows that treating a person with cancer goes beyond medical visits. The organization’s commitment to supporting the whole person is what first drew him to Wellness House and remains one of the things he values most about his work.

His job is both challenging and rewarding, filled with moments of grief, resilience, celebration, and connection. Michael regards his work at Wellness House as a privilege. Through it all, Michael sees his primary role as one of listening and learning.

“They are our teachers. They are our guides,” he said of Wellness House participants.

Michael remembers a woman in one of his groups telling a fellow participant that Wellness House changes everything, and Wellness House changes nothing.

“We don’t make the cancer go away,” Michael said. “But together with the entire Wellness House team, I strive to help each participant grow stronger and make their journey a little easier.”

1. Donate to the fundraising page
2. Ask team members to pledge by mile
3. Hold a dog wash
4. Offer spring yard clean-up services in exchange for donations—have your team take care of the yard work!
5. Publicly thank your donors on social media to show appreciation
6. Host a pre-Walk fundraiser at a local business or restaurant
7. Create a good, old-fashioned lemonade stand
8. Come up with an unforgettable team name
9. Swim 35 laps and ask supporters to pledge per lap



10. Ask 35 people for 35 dollars
11. Share the team page on social media
12. Hold a bake sale with all proceeds supporting your team goal
13. Hold a team car wash
14. Partner with your local church to promote your team's goal
15. Help your captain make signs
16. Organize a team tie-dye t-shirt party and sell the shirts
17. Create satellite teams—recruit captains in other communities to organize remote walks
18. Hold a team ice cream social with friends and family
19. Sell unused items from your basement, garage, or attic on eBay to raise funds



20. Put a sign on your front lawn
21. Birthday Fundraiser—Ask for donations on your birthday
22. Provide services—such as babysitting, pet sitting, or lawn care—in exchange for donations
23. Share fundraising link widely with friends, family, and colleagues
24. Share your team updates on social media
25. Hit 35 balls at a batting cage and have donors pledge per hit
26. Set goals for your team and make it a competition
27. Host a karaoke night with an entry fee that goes toward your fundraising goal
28. Gather spare change from your piggy bank or coin jar and donate it!

29. Be an early bird—register early and kickstart your fundraising efforts!
30. Ask family members to pledge their support
31. Host a BBQ for 35 guests and charge an entry fee to raise funds
32. Hold a team garage sale
33. Share Wellness House Walk emails with your friends
34. Invite your neighbors to join you
35. Spread the word—tell everyone you know that you're walking for Wellness House!



35 Ways to FUNdraise for the Walk



The annual Walk for Wellness House is one of our biggest fundraising events. Join us on Sunday, May 4, for a meaningful, fun, and family-friendly event. This year's Walk celebrates 35 years of hope—past, present, and future. Learn more or register at wellnesshouse.org/walk

CREATE A TEAM

JOIN A TEAM

WALK AS AN INDIVIDUAL

WALK YOUR WAY

MAKE A DONATION

Not able to attend the Walk? it's easy to donate on the Walk website!

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



Charitable Gifting Trends in 2025 Under the New Administration

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

With a new presidential administration in 2025, charitable giving is undergoing notable transformations. Influenced by shifting economic policies, evolving social expectations, and an increasingly connected global society, the landscape of philanthropy continues to adapt. Two areas worth noting are the growing popularity of Donor-Advised Funds (DAFs) and a surge in cryptocurrency donations.

DAFs on the Rise

Donor-Advised Funds (DAFs) allow donors to make charitable contributions, receive immediate tax benefits, and then recommend gifts to charities over time. The new administration has proposed reforms to streamline the DAF process, making it easier for donors to contribute and for charities to receive funds.

DAFs are particularly appealing to individuals who wish to maximize immediate tax savings while maintaining flexibility in their giving strategy. The trend is expected to grow even further in 2025 as more donors look for efficient ways to manage their charitable legacies.

Philanthropy in the Digital Age

The intersection of technology and philanthropy continues to reshape how charitable giving occurs. For instance, investments in cryptocurrency have picked up steam, and the current administration is considered "crypto-friendly." As a result, nonprofits are finding simple avenues for charitably-minded investors to make an impact while using new forms of giving.

For investors holding cryptocurrency with investment gains, the opportunity to gift appreciated investments can apply to these holdings, just like a stock. Gifting appreciated securities allows the donor to avoid paying taxes on the gain, meaning one's gift can have a larger impact. The same applies to cryptocurrencies. Two common ways to take advantage of a reduced tax bill is to gift the appreciated investment directly to a charity or to transfer it into a DAF.

As the political landscape evolves and technology continues to advance, so will the ways in which you can engage with and contribute to charitable causes. Talk with us or your CPA if you'd like to explore tax efficient ways to donate.

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

Securities and investment advisory services offered through **Osaic Wealth, Inc.**, member FINRA/SIPC. The Investment Fiduciary standard of care applies to advisory services only. **Osaic Wealth, Inc.** does not provide tax or legal advice.

Thank you to our generous grantors:

Anonymous
Guy A. and N. Kay Arboit Charitable Trust
Bears Care
CBOT Foundation
The Coleman Foundation
Community Memorial Foundation
Duly Health and Care Charitable Fund of DuPage Foundation
Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust
The Greer Foundation
Hinsdale Junior Woman's Club
Illinois Department of Public Health
Gene S. Moss Foundation II Inc.
Naffah Family Charitable Foundation
Oberweiler Foundation
Edmond & Alice Opler Foundation
Prostate Cancer Foundation of Chicago
Ramon Bueno Cancer Support Foundation
Rolfe Pancreatic Cancer Foundation
Together at Peace
Westlake Health Foundation

The Courtyar
You'll treasure the experience.

A Donation/Consignment Shop of Quality Home Furnishings to benefit Wellness House.

#thecourtyardhinsdale
ShopTheCourtyard.com

for weekly "featured items" as a preview of the treasures you'll find there.

Hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

For more information: **Call 630.323.1135**

The Courtyar | 63 Village Place | Hinsdale, IL 60521