Operation Santa
Northern Illinois Hospice program helps spread the holiday spirit

In early December, Northern Illinois Hospice patient Kurt Carlson died, leaving behind his family, including nine grandchildren. The Carlson family had a special holiday tradition and, thanks to one of our special Northern Illinois Hospice Foundation programs, a special volunteer with a beard and red suit stepped in to help.

Kurt’s wife, Melissa, said Christmas has always been something special to their close-knit family. Kurt was fascinated with Santa Claus, purchasing only decorations that included images of the jolly old elf, and dressed up as him to pass out Christmas gifts. Although the children are all grown with their own families now, the tradition continues for the next generation.

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Northern Illinois Hospice partners with OSF Healing Pathways

For six weeks in January and February, we partnered with OSF Healing Pathways to offer a grief support group.

The group was held at OSF Healing Pathways on East State Street and is facilitated by Rev. Pierre Polycarpe, manager of pastoral care at OSF Saint Anthony Medical Center, and Andrew Vitale, CT, bereavement coordinator for Northern Illinois Hospice.

The support group offered hope, education, and resources to assist participants with their individual grief journeys. Participants took part in several grief education activities, all exploring different facets of dealing with the loss of a loved one. The sessions offered something for everyone, from drawing to meditation, to writing and mindfulness and breathing, plus much more. Outlets such as these give participants the opportunity to share their grief stories and begin the healing process.

From the Chief Executive Officer

Wherever you are as you read this, whether it’s the still chilly Midwest or warmer climates, we hope you’ve had a good winter!

In organizations, just like Mother Nature, seasons change, bittersweet with both an ending and beginning.

After seven years as our Medical Director, Dr. Rich Londo, MD, HMDC® retired at year end. When Dr. Londo joined Northern Illinois Hospice, he also served as a Family Medicine practitioner in a clinic setting. Eventually, he focused exclusively on hospice patients. During his years here, he enjoyed caring for patients in their homes, outside the doctor’s office. With hospice, he returned to his roots, practicing medicine focused on the whole person - mind, body and spirit.

In addition to expertly caring for patients, Dr. Londo extended his care and caring to our clinical team, taking and making the time to listen, facilitate, and teach. We will miss him and hope he misses us a bit too as he putters about in his yard and garden.

With Dr. Londo’s retirement, Dr. John C. Myers, MD, FACS, FACC has become our Medical Director. A well-respected physician, seasoned leader, and team player, Dr. Myers also understands the significance of hospice to healthcare and the human experience.

As Medical Director, Dr. Myers oversees the medical component of a hospice patient’s plan of care. He certifies/recertifies a patient’s terminal illness, and partners with the interdisciplinary team to assess the patient’s progress toward his/her goals. He also collaborates with a patient’s attending physician, communicating the patient’s wishes and status.

Now in our 39th year (156 seasons, if you’re counting), Northern Illinois Hospice moves on and goes on, forever blessed by seasons past yet inspired by what’s still to come.

Make today the BEST day!

Lisa Novak,
Chief Executive Officer
We are happy to announce the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization has awarded Northern Illinois Hospice the designation “We Honor Veterans Partner Level Three.”

This national program recognizes the services, activities, and organizational-wide commitment to our community’s veterans. Through the We Honor Veterans Program, Northern Illinois Hospice staff are learning more about veteran issues and needs, and are working together to address them.

In the months leading up to our Level Three recognition, we provided many services to patients who are veterans. Activities have included meaningful and moving recognition and pinning ceremonies; community-based education and networking events; and active participation in the Hospice Veteran Partnership of Northern Illinois.

The Northern Illinois Hospice Veteran-to-Veteran program now includes three exceptional veteran volunteers who join us in all of our veteran activities. They bring a special kind of presence when they visit our veteran patients and their families, and veterans throughout the community.

Veteran volunteer David Borgetti speaks of his father’s and his own military service, saying he has “a special place in my heart” for veterans. David volunteers with Northern Illinois Hospice because he wants to “honor them one last time,” and thank them for their service and dedication.

Veteran volunteer Lee Bach notes that sometimes our patients can’t always clearly express things. What has meant a great deal to him is “the gleam in someone’s eyes” during a pinning and recognition ceremony.

He fondly recalls a memorable pinning event where a non-verbal, veteran patient, who struggled with communication with others, broke into a huge grin after being saluted and hearing a spirited “Oorah!” from fellow veteran volunteer, Clarence Izadorski.

Clarence is interested in knowing more about when and where each veteran served, how they served, and is especially moved if a veteran was recognized in some way for their service and/or valor.

He recalls General MacArthur’s quote — “Old soldiers never die, they just fade away” — and shares his hope that this one last recognition ceremony ensures that the veteran doesn’t “fade away” in the thoughts of his/her family and loved ones.

With such amazing veteran volunteers, and a staff dedicated to caring for veterans, we are looking forward to continued growth and enhancement of our veterans program in service to those who have served.
In tune with helping patients
Northern Illinois Hospice music therapist shares knowledge during advocacy month

Music has the ability to reach people in a special way. Music therapy, a clinical discipline that taps into music’s therapeutic benefits, reaches people and accomplishes things in ways medicines and other therapies do not. The husband of one of our patients said this about music therapy: “Music Therapy really helped my wife feel more relaxed at a time when she really needed it. When the music therapist played my wife’s favorite songs, my wife was so engaged she was able to forget her challenges for a moment.”

Board-certified music therapists across the U.S. shared their passion for their discipline in January during Music Therapy Advocacy Month. More and more Americans are experiencing the benefits of this powerful specialty, but what exactly is music therapy and how can it help?

Music therapy is a research-based profession and is provided by board-certified music therapists who use music to meet the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals. After an assessment, music therapists create an individualized plan of care, then engage individuals in singing, instrument play, active music listening, and/or movement to music in order to work toward their individualized goals. These goals can include engaging in self-expression, reducing pain or anxiety, enhancing quality of life, decreasing feelings of isolation, providing opportunity for life review, promoting decision-making opportunities, providing coping skills, and promoting relaxation.

Music therapy not only benefits the individual but also family members. Quality of life for all involved can improve, which is especially important in end-of-life care. Providing joyful, meaningful experiences at this challenging time is such a gift.

Mallory Pannell, MT-BC, is our full-time music therapist. Northern Illinois Hospice has offered music therapy as a complementary therapy since 2015. For more information about our Music Therapy program, contact Mallory at mpannell@niha.org or 815.398.0500.
Bereaved family and friends attend Winter Legacy Memorial Project

Last December, several Northern Illinois Hospice families participated in a winter legacy/memorial project to celebrate and remember their loved ones. Those present shared stories of their loved ones as they created the project, a memorial grapevine wreath.

For some participants, the wreath crafting bought forth memories of time shared and experiences created with their loved ones. For others, the project time opened up an avenue to remember shared stories, inviting smiles, laughter, and tears.

The circular grapevine symbolized there’s no beginning nor ending for the continuing love of those no longer with us. Participants also had an opportunity to add “something more” to their grapevine wreathes. By the end of the workshop, the group had beautiful creations, and stories, were brought to life.

One family member shared, “It’s painful and hard to deal with, but something like this in a group setting is very helpful to not feel alone and to feel like it is okay to be sad and remember them and to know that what we are feeling is normal.”

“Grief is not a one-day event; rather it can last many weeks, months, and years – and Northern Illinois Hospice bereavement is available to walk that journey with our families,” Northern Illinois Hospice Bereavement Coordinator Andrew Vitale, CT, said.

We will host a similar legacy/memorial project gathering for Northern Illinois Hospice families in April at Klehm Arboretum, including a meditation-mindfulness walk within the gardens.

Starting the new year right
“Making Meaningful Moments”

Fairhaven Christian Retirement Center’s Life Enrichment Coordinator, Katie Martin, presented “Making Meaningful Moments” during a January in-service for volunteers. Katie is a Therapeutic Recreational Therapist, and her presentation focused on enhancing patients’ lives during volunteer visits.

Katie defined various forms of participation, discussed the importance of familiar routines, and demonstrated ways to involve the senses and stimulate the brain. She also talked about the value of patient-volunteer connections.

Katie brought along a sampling of resources used at Fairhaven, and shared ideas and activities centered around various themes. Volunteers talked about their experiences, asked questions, and explored the materials. Since the workshop, volunteers have helped us gather a number of resources for use during future visits with Northern Illinois Hospice patients.

After the in-service, we expressed our appreciation by sending our “Thank-You Thursday” volunteer team to Fairhaven to deliver treats to Katie and her staff.

Northern Illinois Hospice volunteers, Peg Hanson (left) and Marcia Aramovich (right) bring treats to the staff of Fairhaven Christian Retirement Center as a thank you for the in-service provided by their Life Enrichment Coordinator, Katie Martin (center).
After Kurt died December 5th, one of our social workers told the Carlsons about Mike Barron, whose own son, Brian, died in our care a few years ago. Mike understands how difficult the holidays can be for children who have experienced the death of someone close to them. Because Santa visits have such a positive impact on children grieving the loss of a loved one, Mike offered to dress the part for the Carlsons and a few other Northern Illinois Hospice families. He visited six of Kurt’s grandchildren on December 20th at Melissa’s home in Rockton. The visit was a secret to the children, who range in age from 10 months to 9 years.

This Operation Santa visit was offered through the Northern Illinois Hospice Foundation’s Wishes program, which operates year-round to fulfill end-of-life wishes for Northern Illinois Hospice patients and their families.

To support or receive more information about the Wishes program, please contact Foundation Director Susan Lundin at slundin@niha.org, 815.398.0500, or visit northernillinoishospice.org/giving. All donations are tax-deductible. Volunteers also are needed. To discover meaningful ways to partner with Northern Illinois Hospice to brighten the days of area patients and their families, please contact the Volunteer Department at soleary@niha.org or call 815.398.0500.
Foundation offers many ways to give back

The Northern Illinois Hospice Foundation was established in 2013 as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit charitable organization. Governed by its own Board of Directors, the Foundation focuses on growing, managing, and expanding philanthropy and community investment to benefit and support the operation, educational activities, and services of Northern Illinois Hospice and ensuring patients without financial resources or insurance are never turned away.

“We are so fortunate to have Foundation Directors with dynamic leadership and vision,” Foundation Director Susan Lundin said. “Our directors put 100% into fulfilling the Foundation’s mission and finding ways for donors to connect, invest, and support our mission in ways that are most meaningful to them.”

Signature charity events
This year we’ll host our 31st Annual Charity Golf Outing and 3rd Annual Rockvinia, an outdoor concert featuring Miles Nielsen and the Rusted Hearts and Kelly Steward. “The idea for Rockvinia came to me a few years ago as I watched Rockford become a town that truly supports the local music scene,” said Scott Olson, Foundation Board Member, 2018 Rockvinia Co-chair.

Legacy Society
The Foundation’s Legacy Society members are donors who have named the Foundation in their wills, trusts, or estate plans. Carol and Jeff Moll became Legacy Society members because they wanted “to dedicate a portion of our financial resources to make a difference in the world beyond our family circle.” Carol added, “We know first-hand [Northern Illinois Hospice Foundation’s] extraordinary dedication to the mission of helping people and their families through the challenges that end of life presents. The continuation of this mission is important to us and part of the legacy we hope to leave behind.”

Memorial Gifts
Memorial gifts are tributes to individuals who have died that we wish to remember and recognize. When families direct gifts in memory of their loved ones to the Foundation, they are helping expand grief support to families and provide integrated therapies to patients like music, massage, and pet-specific programs like the Pet Peace of Mind Program®.

“My wife and I cannot express the compassion shown by Northern Illinois Hospice staff during both the passing of my mother and father over the last five years,” said Glenn Rieker, who chose to direct gifts in memory of his father and mother to the Foundation. “When you don’t know where to turn during a difficult time, Northern Illinois Hospice steps in to hold your hand, care for and guide both you and your loved one during this very difficult time that we all will face.”

Car donation
In addition to memorial giving, the Rieker family donated their father’s car through our convenient donation program. “My father would love to know that his beloved, green Ford Taurus, affectionately known as ‘the pickle’ was able to help others experience the same wonderful care he received from Northern Illinois Hospice,” Glenn said.

There are as many ways to support Northern Illinois Hospice Foundation as there are reasons to do so! To help, contact Susan Lundin, Foundation Director at slundin@niha.org, 815.398.0500, or visit northernillinoishospice.org/giving.
BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Northern Illinois Hospice patient Anna Lake receives a gift for her 98th birthday from our newly launched patient birthday program. Happy birthday, Anna! The program is run entirely by volunteers, who create and assemble the packages that we gift.