

# celebrate **GIVING**

Spring 2021 | Issue 10



## **BEHIND THE MASKS**

Meet Our “Feel Better” Experts

### **ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:**

Commitment to Serve • Healing Patch Update  
Family Hospice Adapts & Adopts







# aligning excellence

A MESSAGE FROM PAULA THOMAS

In the past year since COVID-19 began impacting our lives, we all have endured loss – from the greatest grief of losing loved ones to the sorrow of changed plans, canceled events, social isolation, and more. With the benefit of hindsight and the hope of turning a corner in mitigating COVID-19, we can reflect with appreciation on the good that punctuated this particularly challenging year.

First, I want to celebrate our team’s quality of care and focus on customer service that has garnered local and national recognition. Home Nursing Agency Private Duty Home Care recently earned the 2021 Best of Home Care® – Provider of Choice Award, ranking among the top home care providers in the country for the ninth consecutive year. UPMC Home Healthcare was voted as the Best Home Care Provider by readers of the *Huntingdon Daily News*, and our organization was selected as a Top 100 Organization by the *Pennsylvania Business Central*.

These accolades speak to our team’s unwavering dedication to serve our community regardless of the challenges we face. In fact, it is in this adversity that we have seen tremendous stories of good that have triumphed over the past year. I invite you to be encouraged by the stories in this issue of *Celebrate Giving*, as we celebrate:

- the tenets of philanthropy and volunteerism that remained throughout the pandemic, as evidenced in the life of Hollidaysburg native Patricia Gildea

- the Home Health Aides of UPMC Home Healthcare and Family Hospice who continue to offer a friendly smile behind their masks and reassuring presence for our patients who need personal care
- the way the Healing Patch Children’s Grief Program has touched lives through virtual groups and family grief activity packets, reaching even more local families than our in-person groups could have served in this time
- the flexibility and generosity of our Family Hospice team in caring for patients and their caregivers

Throughout these stories, we celebrate YOU – our donors and supporters – who enable us to meet needs outside the scope of what we are paid to do. Your generosity allows the free services of the Healing Patch to continue for grieving children and families. Your donations cover the cost of groceries, emergency funding for heating and utilities, and essential items for patients in need. These are just a few examples of what your donations and support of events like Mercedes Moment mean to our neighbors and friends.

Thank you for standing with us as partners in caring for our community as we look to brighter days ahead.

Sincerely,

Paula Thomas  
President, UPMC Home Healthcare & Family Hospice

## Hollidaysburg Resident Continues **LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO SERVE**

### WHAT DOES A LIFETIME OF SERVICE LOOK LIKE?

Exemplified through the life of Patricia Gildea, it is filled with the rich colors of humility, passion for learning, and drive to improve her community.

Professionally, Pat worked 36 years at the Great A&P Tea Co. before its closure and then 26 years as deputy court administrator for Blair County. She began volunteering within the community at a young age and has continued her legacy of service in the decades after retirement. Having joined the Home Nursing Agency Board more than 20 years ago, Pat remains involved through the UPMC Home Healthcare Professional Advisory Committee and actively donates funds to help patients and clients who receive funding from the Home Nursing Agency Foundation.

Her current volunteer roles extend far beyond her work with UPMC Home Healthcare, as she serves on the Hollidaysburg Area Arts Council, Catholic Daughters of the Americas, Mount Aloysius College Alumni Association, Blair County Historical Society, Altoona-Johnstown Diocese Liturgy Committee, Hollidaysburg’s YMCA Auxiliary, and more.

A lifelong learner, Pat discovered a love of parliamentary procedures through her work at the Blair County Courthouse. She has since served as Parliamentarian to assist presiding officers in various organizations at the local, state, and national level. Embracing these leadership roles, Pat has inspired others with her passion to serve and desire to keep learning and doing.

“There are always things you can do to try and help other people,” she explains. Although Pat has been presented with various honors, including the first Athena Award in Blair County and the Lifetime Achievement Award from WISE Women of Blair County, she is not driven by recognition. Her dedication to serve and tireless pursuit of improvement are evident in her daily life.

Helping others looks markedly different since the COVID-19 pandemic began, but Pat has taken it in stride, learning how to participate in Zoom meetings and completing online workshops. She shares, “I’ve learned that there are always alternate ways to do things.” She recently began participating in a “Tele-buddy” program through Catholic Daughters to provide a friendly voice and listening ear for the isolated residents of Garvey Manor.

Whether it’s offering a personal touch, elevating the arts, implementing parliamentary procedures, or providing spiritual opportunities for connection, Pat is always looking for the next thing she can do to serve: “I always want to be planning something and have something to look forward to!”





# HOME HEALTH AIDES

## Build Trust, Maintain Dignity

**Relationship builders.**  
**Compassionate caregivers.**  
“Feel better” experts.

These are the unofficial titles of the Home Health Aides who care for UPMC Home Healthcare and Family Hospice patients in their most vulnerable states. As they provide assistance with bathing, dressing, and other daily living tasks, Home Health Aides must quickly earn the trust of their patients in a way that makes them feel comfortable.

Over the past 25 years, Cheri McCommons of Blair County has learned how to break the ice with new patients and families: “I find something in their house – a photo, piece of artwork or furniture – and start a conversation. Usually if I can get them talking, I can build that trust and can talk them into the personal care that they need.”

As they establish rapport, Home Health Aides like Cheri, along with Andrea Weyandt, who sees patients for the Southern Blair Home Health

team, balance patients’ care needs with their comfort level. This requires careful listening, observation, and a commitment to patients’ dignity.

“I’ve never let anyone take care of me like that, so I try to be sensitive to how our patients may be feeling,” Andrea shares. “I let patients do as much as they can independently, and I’ll help with whatever they need and want help with. I reassure them that I’m there to make sure they’re safe.”

Many patients are admitted to home health after a surgery, illness, or hospital stay with the goal of resuming independence wherever they call home. For longer-term patients like Rose Williams, affectionately called “Grandma Rose,” the care that Andrea and the UPMC Home Healthcare team provides is what allows her to remain safely at home and not be admitted to a personal care home.

“I don’t know what I’d do without her,” Rose says emphatically as she recounts the daily tasks that require assistance: bathing, dressing, setting

her curlers, getting the mail, and more. “I couldn’t be here [in my home] if it weren’t for Andrea.”

As they interact frequently with patients, Home Health Aides communicate with case managers to share updates and patients’ unaddressed needs. Serving patients in Mifflin and Juniata Counties, Amber Hancock draws from a decade of experience as a Home Health Aide for both home health and hospice patients to identify when patients may need transitioned to a different level of care.

“Over the years I have had a lot of home health patients that I recognized may be appropriate for hospice,” Amber explains. After discussing with care supervisors, Amber opens the door for critical conversations with patients and caregivers about bridging to Family Hospice care. “I can explain all the benefits. Family Hospice is amazing, and it does a lot of good things for patients and families.”







While Amber enjoys helping her UPMC Home Healthcare patients achieve the goal of independence, she is fulfilled by the special relationships she builds with those whose goal is quality of life and making every moment matter.

“My favorite part of what I do is bonding with the Family Hospice patients and families and making their last days special,” she says. “I have different bonds with all the people I have worked with. They are why I love what I do.”

“I love the people I take care of,” Cheri echoes. Joined in a commitment to their patients, she and Andrea delight in the same satisfaction of their role – how patients feel after they’re bathed. Cheri says, “Once we’re all done, they say, ‘I can’t believe how good I feel! I’m so glad you came!’”

Andrea knows that all of her teammates may not receive the same feedback. She says, “I tease our therapists and nurses that I have the best job! I tell them, ‘You make

our patients work. I make them feel better!’”

To learn more about UPMC Home Healthcare or Family Hospice, visit [UPMCHomeHealthcare.com](http://UPMCHomeHealthcare.com) or call 1-800-445-6262.

**Previous Pages:** Home Health Aide Cheri McCommons has been serving patients for 25 years with personal care and assistance to help them remain safely in their own homes. One such patient is Blair County resident Sandy Pearson, who is facing MS, cancer, and other health challenges that have required Cheri’s help for the past two years. Sandy and her husband Jim are grateful for Cheri’s support. Sandy shares, “I love Cheri! She treats me well (and she loves me, too!). She does my hair perfectly and is a wonderful caregiver. We love to laugh together!”

“Not one morning do I open the door and she’s not smiling,” Cheri says. Sandy’s upbeat attitude in the midst of hardship is an encouragement to Cheri while she helps with bathing, dressing, getting her breakfast, and getting her ready for the day.



**Left:** Amber Hancock, Home Health Aide in Mifflin and Juniata Counties, savors the relationships she develops with many of her patients, including Family Hospice patient Ethel Wileman. Amber’s assistance gives Ethel’s daughter a break from her role as the primary caregiver for her mom. As she bathes and dresses Ethel, Amber enjoys the time and opportunity to make every moment matter.

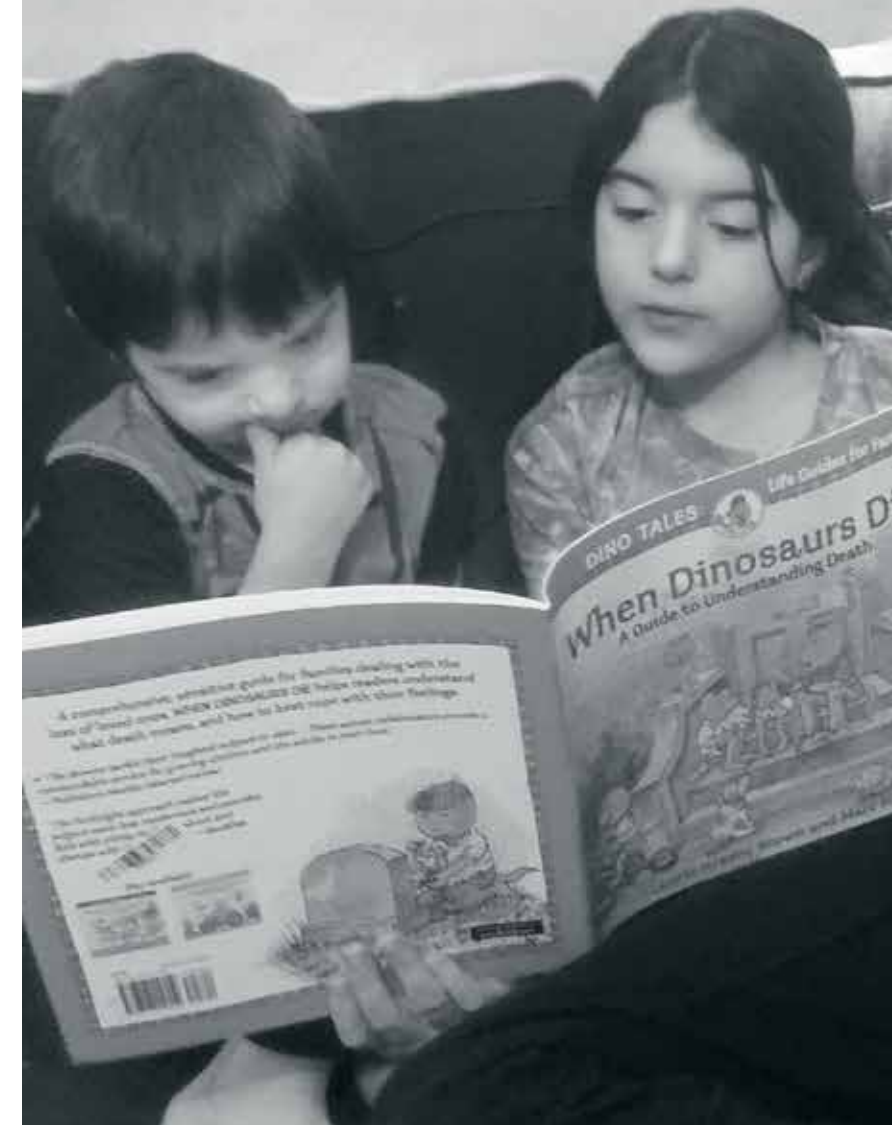
**Right, also pictured on the cover:** Rose Williams, better known as “Grandma Rose,” recognizes Southern Blair County Home Health Aide Andrea Weyandt as one of the reasons she is able to remain at home. While Andrea helps Grandma Rose with daily living tasks she can no longer do independently, they share stories about family, crocheting projects, and careers in healthcare as Rose reminisces about her days as a nurse.

“We have a special rapport,” Rose says. “Andrea helps me do so much, and I live for the days she comes!”

giving hope



## Healing Patch Offers Alternative Support for Grieving Children & Families



Maci Bradley reads *When Dinosaurs Die* to her younger brother Jack. Maci, Jack, their older sister Ella, and their grandmother Jackie have all benefited from the Healing Patch family activity packets mailed to them. The materials have opened the door for healing conversations within their family after the death of both their parents.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Healing Patch Children’s Grief Program staff pivoted quickly to support families virtually when group nights could no longer take place. During “Time Together Tuesdays,” Healing Patch Coordinator Melody Ray and Volunteer Coordinator/Grief Specialist Shalen Steinbugl would share activities on the Healing Patch Facebook page for families to engage together.

As fall approached and in-person gatherings were still restricted, Melody and Shalen developed several options for both returning and newly enrolled families to choose based on their specific needs. All families receive grief activity packets by mail bi-weekly, and they can choose whether to complete as a family or with peers in age-specific “rooms” via Microsoft Teams.





*Left: Healing Patch families receive all the necessary supplies to complete activities as a family unit or part of a virtual group.*

*Above: Six-year-old Lavena proudly displays the luminary bag she created in memory of her uncle. This project and others have been part of the virtual Healing Patch group meetings to connect Lavena with other grieving children her age.*

“Although not the same as our live Healing Patch group nights, the virtual groups allow members to connect with similar-aged grieving peers,” Melody explains. “A benefit has been the ability to serve more local grieving families than we could accommodate in live group nights.”

The power of connecting with peers – even through a computer screen – has allowed participants like six-year-old Lavena to find that they are not alone.

“It really helps her to see that there are other kids going through loss and to be able to talk about her feelings,” explains Lavena’s mom Verene, whose brother passed away in 2018. She realized Lavena needed a way to face the death of her uncle as she got older and started to ask more questions. “Most importantly, she’s been able to open up and talk about the loss instead of holding it in.”

As Lavena completes grief activities like a luminary bag and memory box, she shares with her peers and uses the items to remember her uncle and process her feelings. Using tangible projects is one way the Healing Patch helps participants to heal and share – in-person, virtually, or as a family.

“These activities focus on expressing feelings, coping skills, family changes since the loss, memories, and grief expression,” Melody outlines. “Ideally the activities encourage family bonding and supporting one another in the grief process.”

This has been the experience for the Bradley family of Cambria County, as Ella (13), Maci (10), and Jack (5) lost their mom several years ago and their dad a couple years later. With varying ages and personalities, they all handle their grief differently, according to their grandma Jackie. While Ella coped privately and Jack was very young, Maci found valuable support in Healing Patch group sessions after their mom died and had planned to attend again last fall.

With live group sessions suspended, the family opted to complete grief activities as a family, and Maci led the way with her outgoing personality. Multiple activities have left an impression and allowed the family to talk more openly about their losses. After reading the book *When Dinosaurs Die*, they answered questions about loss, feelings, and ways to remember loved ones who passed away. Another impactful activity was reading *The Invisible String* and creating heartstrings that hang from their beds. A third memorable packet was a grab bag of items with accompanying questions, including a pair of crazy glasses and the question, “How do you see the world now that your loved one passed away?”

“I don’t think we’d be doing as well as we are without the Healing Patch,” Jackie explains. “Ella has come out so much because she’s been able to talk about it, and Jack has been able to be part of the conversation, too.”

“We have all grieved so many losses throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,” Shalen acknowledges. “Not being able to hold our live group nights has been one of those losses for us, but we know that children who are dealing with the death of a loved one need support and the right tools now more than ever. We are so thankful that families have been receptive and embraced the virtual peer support and family group activities as a path to hope and healing in this difficult season.”

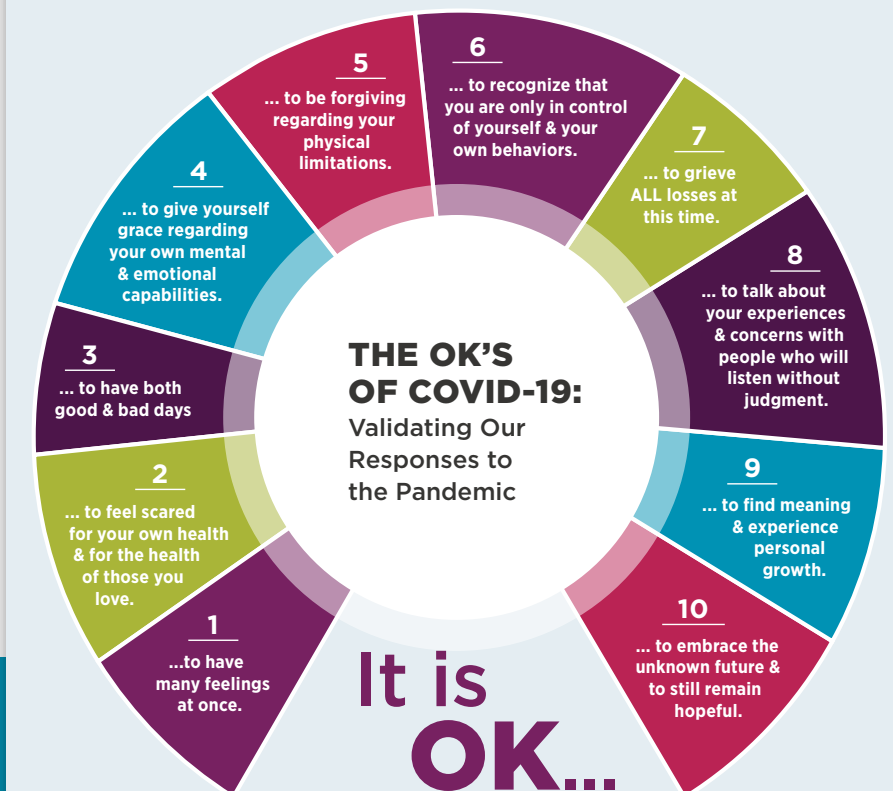
For more information about Healing Patch services, please call 1-800-445-6262 or visit [HomeNursingAgency.com](http://HomeNursingAgency.com).

## Healing Patch Staff Extends GRIEF EXPERTISE

Last spring Healing Patch staff authored a blog post and community outreach tool titled “The OK’s of COVID-19: Validating Our Response to the Pandemic.”

“I feel we at the Healing Patch have an obligation to help the community identify the multitude of emotions that they are having as normal and natural and to put a word to what they are experiencing – grief,” explained Healing Patch Coordinator Melody Ray. “Our hope is that by reading these 10 OK’s of COVID-19, you feel validated in your experience and that you allow more patience for yourself and others.”

Check out the full post online at: [HomeNursingAgency.com/blog](http://HomeNursingAgency.com/blog).





## giving compassion

# FAMILY HOSPICE TEAM

## Adapts & Adopts Through COVID-19

As COVID-19 markedly changed our lives, the Family Hospice team collaborated to do what they do best – make the most of every opportunity to better serve patients and their caregivers.

Telemedicine programs that connect patients with healthcare providers virtually have been growing in popularity, but this was not allowed within hospice until COVID-19. Last year, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) made an allowance for virtual visits of physicians and nurse practitioners to consult with patients.

“If a nurse reaches out with a complicated symptom management issue, we can do a virtual visit immediately,” explains Dr. Amy Swindell, Family Hospice East Lead Medical Director. “This allows me to talk through options and prescribe the right medications quickly to control the patient’s symptoms.”

In addition to symptom management, virtual visits have allowed for more timely admissions to Family Hospice care.

Requirements for face-to-face physician evaluations can be fulfilled real-time with a nurse facilitating virtual visits. Eligible patients can be admitted immediately, giving access to these vital services that hinge on precious hours and days.

While virtual visits have improved patients’ quality of life, social distancing precautions have isolated many patients and caregivers from others who could provide physical and emotional support. As Thanksgiving approached with the prospect of no special dinner in many homes, Family Hospice team members rose to the occasion, personally purchasing and preparing meals for patients and families who were not planning the traditional Thanksgiving meal.

Staff continued in this spirit of generosity through Christmas, as each county’s team “adopted” a Family Hospice family that was impacted by job loss due to COVID-19 or the need to stop working to care for their loved one. Staff contributed personally to provide gifts and food to make holiday celebrations as joyful as possible in a hard season.

As it became clear that the in-person “Widows’ Retreat” would not take place last fall, Bereavement Coordinator/Social Worker Jennifer Cox began working with Donna Marie Todd, facilitator of the previous two retreats, on alternative ways to support those who had lost a spouse. Your support of the Home Nursing Agency Foundation allowed all bereaved spouses to receive a copy of Donna Marie’s book *Navigating Loss*, along with access to videos of Donna Marie sharing candidly as one grieving spouse to another.

“Losing a spouse is ranked as one of the most stressful things someone can endure,” Jen shares. “It was a priority to support those walking this

painful road. Through this format, we were able to touch both men and women – and so many more people than we could have through the in-person retreat.”

As safety remains at the forefront of connecting bereaved loved ones, Jen recently finished the first series of virtual grief support group meetings. She admits that it is not the same as gathering in person but has been pleased with how all participants have benefited.

“Every week I prepared some topics to cover, but we didn’t need them as the participants asked questions and shared with one another openly,” she reflects. Plans are underway to implement virtual groups throughout the service area until in-person groups can be held once again.

To learn more about Family Hospice and grief services, visit [UPMCHomeHealthcare.com](http://UPMCHomeHealthcare.com) or call 1-800-445-6262.



*Bereavement Coordinator/Social Worker Jennifer Cox conducted a special remembrance during the final gathering in a recent series of virtual grief support groups.*

*Right: The Blair County team prepared 14 meals delivered with smiles to nine patients and their family members. Under the mask of “pilgrim” was Bill Williams, Hospice RN, and under the mask of “turkey” was Lori Kratzer, Professional Staff Nurse.*

*Below: Dr. Amy Swindell, Family Hospice East Lead Medical Director, has been utilizing virtual visits to assess patient eligibility and treat patients’ symptoms, as permitted by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) since COVID-19.*





# giving thanks

## RECOGNIZING OUR SUPPORTERS

The generosity of community partners – individuals, businesses, local governments, and organizations – helps to ensure that our mission of providing care and services for those in need will continue.

*Every dollar matters.  
Every gift has a story.*

The following donations of \$25 or more were received July 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020.

We apologize for any errors or omissions to this list. Every effort is made to assure that proper information is recorded. Please call the Home Nursing Agency Foundation at 1-855-GIVE-HNA to make us aware of any corrections or changes.

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## Support Local Patients & Families

You can make a difference for residents of our Central PA region who receive UPMC Home Healthcare, Family Hospice, or other services by making a donation to the Home Nursing Agency Foundation.

Return the enclosed envelope with your donation, or give online at [HomeNursingAgency.com](http://HomeNursingAgency.com). You can also call the Foundation hotline at 1-855-GIVE-HNA to donate by credit card.

For more information about ways you can help, please contact: Kim Hesel, Director of Development/Marketing Communications 814-947-7024 or [khesel@HomeNursingAgency.com](mailto:khesel@HomeNursingAgency.com).

The official registration and financial information of the Home Nursing Agency Foundation may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement. If you would like to be removed from our mailing list please contact the Home Nursing Agency Foundation at 1-800-992-2554.







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UPMC shall accept referrals and provide services to all persons in need in its defined service area regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, creed, limited English proficiency, handicap or disability, ability to pay, ancestry, sexual orientation, diagnosis, infectious disease, or DNR status, if applicable.

# upcoming events

## MERCEDES MOMENT

Thursday, May 20, 2021

A \$100 ticket gives you a chance to win a 2021 Mercedes A 220 4-MATIC Sedan\* or \$30,000 cash. The winner is based on the first 3-digit PA Lottery on Thursday, May 20 at 7:00 p.m. (excludes Wild Ball). **Only 1,000 tickets are sold.**

Call 1-855-GIVE-HNA to purchase your ticket before they are sold out!

*\* Taxes not included.*

### *Mercedes Moment Night at the Altoona Curve*

Each Mercedes Moment ticket buyer receives a voucher admitting TWO people to Peoples Natural Gas Field on Thursday, May 20 for an exclusive Mercedes Moment event with live music and a batting contest on the field.

## DECADES CLUB

Saturday, October 2, 2021

Blair County Convention Center

Save the date for this fun evening of prizes and music to benefit the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program! The \$100 ticket includes one chance for more than \$4,500 in cash prizes (need not be present to win) and admission for two for appetizers, dinner, drinks, and entertainment.

## LIGHTS OF LOVE

November - December 2021

Plan to participate in this interactive holiday giving campaign to honor or remember someone you love.