

# celebrate **GIVING**

Summer 2023  
Issue 14



## WHERE THE HEART IS

UPMC Home Healthcare Team Enables  
Healing in the Comfort of Home



### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Flashlight Egg Hunt | Mercedes Moment Winner | Early Intervention | Home Health  
Family Hospice Grief Support Group | Healing Patch | In The Community





## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

***Hello, my name is Jennifer Vennare, and I am honored to be in the role of President, UPMC Home Healthcare and Family Hospice.***

I previously served as the Vice President of Operations for Family Hospice and am embracing my expanded role to lead both our home health and hospice services within UPMC's new division for Community and Ambulatory Services.

Nursing is a second career for me, as the majority of my experience comes from an extensive history in the airline industry. As a Corporate Educator, Surveyor, and Manager of the Ground Control Tower, I fell in love with the dynamics of flight logistics and controlled chaos while keeping safety at the forefront...which paved the path for my career in healthcare. After the events of Sept. 11th, my future was set into motion by beginning nursing school at Washington Hospital in a diploma program, while working full-time as an aide at St. Clair Hospital. I proceeded to advance my education while working full-time and will soon complete my Doctor of Nursing Practice.

The delivery of homecare today is more challenging than ever before...for our communities and our providers. Staying home is equally as important as healing from an injury or an illness. Whether providing integrated care from an acute care facility close to home or delivering compassionate care at end-of-life, our teams must uniquely adapt to the ever-changing environment of healthcare. While evolving, we will continue to provide the quality care that you know and trust, as you will read throughout this issue.

It is the care of UPMC Home Healthcare nurses and therapists like Katie Partsch and Bob Rabatin that patients like Ross Eberhart rely on for their return to health after an injury or illness strips their independence. The compassion of our Family Hospice team helps community members to find a network of support after a loved one passes away. Our Early Intervention specialists identify those items and therapies that can help a developmentally delayed child like Baby Gus\* be involved in his family's daily life.

While our team provides care, it is you – our supporters – who enable us to meet the needs of those in our care above and beyond what we are paid to provide. Your donations fund grief education for bereaved caregivers. Your financial gifts purchase therapeutic items for Baby Gus. Your generous support allows the free services of the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program to meet the increasing needs of grieving children in our community, including those who participate in a Patch Club group at school. This incredible impact would not be possible without you.

The future is bright. Moving forward together, we are committed to promoting safety, the utmost quality, and a welcoming patient experience for all who are touched by our agency. We are proud and grateful to partner with you in serving our community.

*Jennifer Vennare*

President, UPMC Home Healthcare & Family Hospice

## Flashlight Egg Hunt Brightens the Future for Grieving Children

Rain didn't dampen the spirits of 230 people who participated in the first annual Flashlight Egg Hunt to benefit the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program, held on March 31 at Peoples Natural Gas Field. Raising more than \$4,500 in its inaugural year, the Flashlight Egg Hunt welcomed participants 18 years and older to don a headlamp, grab a bag or strap on a backpack, and scurry to gather as many eggs as possible in the dark in the Altoona Curve outfield. When the lights were turned back on, participants cracked open their eggs to find candy or a number corresponding to one of 150 prizes – ranging from a bag of Starbucks coffee to a weekend stay at a beach condo to a big game hunt in Africa!

If you would like to be added to the mailing list for the Flashlight Egg Hunt in Spring 2024, please call 1-855-GIVE-HNA.







### Congratulations to Robert Brandt, 2023 MERCEDES MOMENT WINNER

Altoona native Robert Brandt held the winning number – 791 – for Home Nursing Agency Foundation’s 2023 Mercedes Moment fundraiser. As the winner, Robert was offered the choice of a 2023 Mercedes GLA 250 or \$30,000 cash prize.

In its 21st consecutive year, Mercedes Moment raised more than \$118,000 to help support individuals and families who have needs beyond normal circumstances and who may need additional resources not covered by insurance. We gratefully recognize the Michael E. Ward Family, who graciously covered the expense of the prize.

This year, the Home Nursing Agency Foundation has awarded \$174,950 in grants to directly impact the lives of Central Pennsylvania residents who are served by UPMC Home Healthcare and Family Hospice. The Home Nursing Agency Foundation supports patients and families in Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Centre, Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata, and Somerset counties.

**If you would like to be added to the mailing list for the 2024 Mercedes Moment, please call 1-855-GIVE-HNA.**

*Pictured with Robert Brandt is his companion Gisella Clubb.*

## Home Nursing Agency Foundation Reinforces Safety and Development for Early Intervention Client

With low muscle tone and developmental delay, Early Intervention client Baby Gus\* is not able to sit or stand upright on his own. This makes it difficult for him to achieve other goals, such as eating by mouth and participating in family activities. Your support of the Home Nursing Agency Foundation has made a big impact for this young boy and his family. Through grant funding, his Early Intervention therapists have purchased several supportive devices that promote his development and safety, as well as enable him to be more integrated into his family’s activities.

Sitting upright in a highchair during mealtime is challenging as Baby Gus leans forward and to the sides. The Tumbleform Feeder Seat provides proper positioning and support so that he can eat and swallow more efficiently and in greater volumes.

The purchase of a small tub with pommel to keep him in place allows him to be bathed safely as he sits in the tub with siblings and enjoys bath time. While playing in his exersaucer, the Huggapod surrounds Baby Gus’s trunk for support.

Gus’s family uses the GoTo Seat so that he can sit safely in a shopping cart and doesn’t need to be carried. Now, he can be part of shopping outings with his family.

The family is thrilled with these items that have made a huge positive impact on his daily routines for mealtime, bath time, play, and community outings with his family. Thank you for making this possible!

*As the Early Intervention team is helping Baby Gus\* to gain strength and muscle control, your support of the Home Nursing Agency Foundation provided a Tumbleform Feeder Seat that helps him achieve a major milestone of sitting at the table and eating with his family!*

\*Name has been changed for confidentiality.



## WAYS TO HELP

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

Return the enclosed envelope with your donation or give securely 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 Helsel, Director of Development/Marketing Communications, at 814-947-7024 or [khelsel@HomeNursingAgency.com](mailto:khelsel@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 1-855-448-3462.





## UPMC Home Healthcare Supports Ebensburg Man in Return to Health

“The first time I saw him, I knew he needed to be admitted to hospice or go back to the hospital...He has had such a vast improvement. He’s a different man from the first time I saw him!”

Despite being legally blind, Ross Eberhart was mostly independent in his Ebensburg home until he fell in September 2022 and fractured his leg. After contracting COVID-19 in the hospital and then pneumonia while in a rehab facility, Ross returned home as a weakened shell of his former self. The team from UPMC Home Healthcare of Central Pennsylvania went into action, with Nurse Katie Partsch making a critical decision.

“The first time I saw him, I knew he needed to be admitted to hospice or go back to the hospital,” she said. “He was so weak and couldn’t keep anything down.”

By Katie’s quick action, Ross returned to the hospital and was diagnosed with a blood clot in his lung. Since then, Katie and her colleague Physical Therapist Bob Rabatin have played vital roles in the return of Ross’s vitality and independence.

After the blood clot issue was resolved and Ross returned home, Katie provided wound care and monitored his condition, teaching his daughter Linda how to log his weight and blood sugars daily, what to look for with changes, and what to report. Bob worked with Ross on getting in and out of bed, transferring to and from the shower, standing, and walking around the house.

Ross was discharged from UPMC Home Healthcare in December 2022 and re-admitted several months later after he had surgery in May 2023 for gall bladder removal and hernia repair. When it came time for him to return home, Linda knew exactly who could help in his recovery.

“Katie and Bob did so well with him the first time,” Linda shared. “That’s why I asked for them the second time!”

Katie cared for his drains post-surgery and kept an eye on Ross’s vitals, closely monitoring his weight and lower extremity edema, as well as some side effects from a recent medication change. Bob was instrumental in getting Ross up and moving once again, helping him to reach his goals.

“His goal was to get back outside, and he achieved that,” Katie said. “He has had such a vast improvement from last fall. He’s a different man from the first time I saw him!”

**To learn more, please visit [upmchomehealthcare.com](https://upmchomehealthcare.com) or call 1-800-445-6262.**

## Family Hospice Grief Support Group Provides Connection and Comfort

*"Family is family, whether it's the one you start out with, the one you end up with, or the family you gain along the way." – Unknown*

The best kind of family is built on respect, caring, compassion, and freedom to share without judgment. Over the past year, a group of women in Huntingdon County created a special family with these tenets as they have linked arms and hearts while grieving the death of their loved ones.

When the Family Hospice Grief Support Group series kicked off in Spring 2022, facilitators Carole Palmer, Family Hospice Volunteer and Bereavement Coordinator, and Karen Kuntz, Social Worker-MSW, had no idea they would be helping to form a lifeline for local women walking through a season of grief.

"Throughout last year's spring group, the ladies became very connected and invested in one another," Carole shares. "After our six weeks were over, they wanted to continue supporting

each other and chose to gather weekly on their own." Since then, they have participated in two additional six-week group sessions, welcomed new participants to the fold, and grieved the loss of one of their own – Minnie Ferrari – who was part of the initial group last year.

"I started coming after my husband passed last year," shares Kim Betz. "These ladies made me feel welcome. There was no judgment. They showed respect, and they cared. They made me feel like I am part of the family."

While several of the members have lost a spouse, one lost her daughter, and two others are grieving the death of their sister. Regardless of the loss, these women have shown up for one another, gathering weekly at the OIP in Huntingdon and sharing phone calls in between as needed.

"This group has really been the ideal peer support group," Karen says. "Ever since they have been established, they wrap their collective arms around new people and make them feel so welcomed and supported. Everyone's grief journey is different, but they have common underlying themes."

Allowing people to connect through the shared aspects of grief is a primary focus of Family Hospice peer support groups. Along with finding a safe space to build connections with others who have had similar experiences, participants can share practical ways they cope with grief in daily life.

As her husband's primary caregiver, Pat Snyder struggled when he passed away last year. She found herself lost in grief and unsure of what the future held. Despite Carole recommending that she attend the Grief Support Group, Pat had no interest in joining. Carole soon knew she needed to take action to help Pat overcome her reservations.

"I knew if I could just get her to the group, it would be the support she

needed," Carole says. "She lives a few minutes from where we met, and I told her I would pick her up! The group did for her what they do for everyone – drew her in, loved her, and supported her."

"These ladies are my family now," Pat shares with a gentle smile, looking around the table at the kind faces. "If I didn't come to this group, I don't know where I'd be."

Family Hospice offers a six-week series of Grief Support Groups during spring and fall in various locations. Those whose loved ones were Family Hospice patients are invited to attend, and the groups are also open to community members. For more information about Family Hospice, please call 1-800-445-6262 or visit [upmc.com/FamilyHospice](http://upmc.com/FamilyHospice).

**Bereavement support is funded in part by donations to the Home Nursing Agency Foundation. To make a donation, please visit [HomeNursingAgency.com](http://HomeNursingAgency.com).**



*Pictured from left are Kim Betz; Karen Kuntz, Social Worker; Jordyn Hamman, Social Worker Intern; Carole Palmer, Volunteer & Bereavement Coordinator; Jean Showalter; Sharon Caufield; Savannah Hall; Judy Gill; Susie Focht; and Pat Snyder. Absent from photo is Sue Benton. Also part of the group was Minnie Ferrari, who passed away in March 2023.*



## Healing Patch Expands School Services for Grieving Children

“There are three needs of the griever: To find the words for the loss, to say the words aloud, and to know that the words have been heard.” – Victoria Alexander

After loss, comfort may be found in many forms: connecting with others through shared emotions or experiences, having feelings validated, treasuring memories of the significant person, or simply being in the presence of a friend who cares.

Since its beginning in 2006, the Healing Patch Children’s Grief Program has been a safe place for grieving children to give voice to their losses and find hope and healing through others. As the needs in our community grow, the Healing Patch recently expanded efforts to reach more



students in local schools. Through Patch Club in-school peer support groups and Grief Education in the Classroom, the Healing Patch is offering comfort and hope to children and adolescents who have lost a significant person to death.

Partnering with school counselors, Healing Patch staff and specially trained volunteers served 64 students from seven school districts through Patch Club groups in the 2022-2023 school year. These groups provide the benefits of peer support through six weekly sessions at the school.

Seasoned Cambria Healing Patch Volunteer Sue Glass graciously agreed to become a Patch Club facilitator, knowing she would pull from her previous experience as a retired teacher and principal. After shadowing Healing Patch Coordinator Melody Ray, Sue was ready to take on a group.

“The group at Central Cambria Middle School ended up being all boys, and I thought they wouldn’t talk,” Sue admits. “Some of the boys knew one another, but others didn’t. It didn’t take long until they were sharing. They were so open!”

During the second session, each participant is given a comfort bag with various items to help in the child’s healing journey, including a blanket made by the St. Francis University Blanketeers and other items purchased through the support of the Ronald McDonald House Charities Mid-Penn Region and the Home Nursing Agency Foundation. They review each item and discuss, opening the door for a conversation about the importance of taking care of yourself while grieving.

“They typically decorate their memorial picture frame at this same session,” Melody explains. “We bring stickers, gems, stencils, and markers that they can use to personalize in honor of their person who died. They are also encouraged to bring a picture if they would like to share with the group. They are given time to share their picture frame and why they decorated it the way they did for their person.”

In the remaining weeks, the Healing Patch facilitator and school counselor provide activities that mirror those done in the Healing Patch centers. These projects serve as a catalyst to begin valuable discussion.

“They like to do the activities and crafts and talk as they work,” Sue shares. “The memory box project is one of my favorites as the boys opened up about their memories. Another favorite was Grief Jenga. It really got us talking, and one of the boys who was initially more reserved asked if they could ask their own questions.”

In the sharing of memories and experiences, the participants form connections. This is displayed visually in the closing activity called the chain link, where students are encouraged to write their favorite activity or what they liked about being part of Patch Club.

One participant shared, “It helps to know I am not the only one at my school that lost someone.” Another said, “I haven’t had a nightmare, and I sleep better since I made my dreamcatcher – that thing works! I love Patch Club. Will we have it again next year?”





In addition to Patch Club groups, the Healing Patch offered Grief Education in the Classroom to 195 middle school students in the 2022-2023 school year. This program helps students to gain an understanding of the feelings and responses often associated with the grief process, how to support a peer who is grieving, and how to seek out supportive services through their school and community.

Expanded school services were made possible thanks to a \$20,000 Grief Reach grant from the New York Life Foundation. The Healing Patch also received a \$25,000 grant from Rutter's Children's Charities to support the free services for grieving children and their families.

**To learn more, please visit the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program Facebook page or call 1-800-445-6262.**

*On the previous spread, experienced Cambria Healing Patch Volunteer Sue Glass was trained to facilitate Patch Club in-school groups. Sue facilitated her first Patch Club group this year with the school counselor at Central Cambria Middle School.*

*At left, Patch Club participants do hands-on projects, such as making dreamcatchers, to open the door for conversations about memories and experiences related to death and grief.*

## IN LOVING TRIBUTE TO *Shirley Pechter* 1920-2023



*Anyone who knew Shirley Pechter knew that her love and support for the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program were endless. From the beginning, Shirley was the Healing Patch's most devoted supporter and ambassador.*

"I have witnessed firsthand how a loss touches every avenue of a child's life," Shirley had shared in a letter seeking funding for the program. "My ten-year-old-daughter Melissa died after being diagnosed with a brain tumor. My children were devastated – all in different ways. My husband, Fred, and I were distraught. We had no place to go for help."

Shirley joined forces with Home Nursing Agency leaders and other community members who were invested in bringing a children's bereavement center to the region. From her very first tour of the Highmark's Caring Place in Pittsburgh, Shirley was confident that its model was the perfect fit for the Agency and its mission.

"I am so proud to be part of it," Shirley had said. "I think it's so important for our community to have a resource for children who've experienced a heart-breaking loss. It has been my goal to see this through."

See it through, she did, as Shirley laid the foundation for Healing Patch centers to become a reality in Ebensburg (2006) and in Altoona (2008). Throughout that time and beyond, Shirley remained a voice of hope to advocate for what she lovingly referred to as a "soft place to fall." Recognizing that it was vital for grieving children to have access to support when they need it, she knew the Healing Patch would be a place to lessen their burden so they are able to cope – now, and later in life.

"There is no escaping grief," Shirley said. "So it's our mission to ensure those grieving will have someone to console them and for someone like me to tell them, 'You will smile again.'"

As we celebrate Shirley's life and the incredible impact she had in our community, the Healing Patch is deeply honored to be among those organizations to whom Shirley dedicated countless hours and support. She and her family chose to build on her legacy of supporting grieving children and named the Healing Patch as the recipient of donations in her memory. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow – grieving children will be ensured of a "soft place to fall" because of Shirley's vision and commitment.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT THE HEALING PATCH:

### COMMUNITY FUNDRAISER NIGHTS at area restaurants

*Dine in or order to-go per the instructions of each restaurant, and a portion of sales will come back to the Healing Patch. Individual events and details are shared on the Healing Patch Facebook page at [facebook.com/healingpatchchildrensgriefprogram](https://facebook.com/healingpatchchildrensgriefprogram). You can also call 1-855-GIVE-HNA for more information.*

#### PRIMANTI BROS.

Thursday, September 7 • 11 AM – 11 PM  
2550 W Plank Rd., Altoona, PA

#### PANDA EXPRESS

Thursday, October 12 • All Day  
240 Park Hills Plaza, Altoona, PA

#### APPLEBEE'S

Thursday, November 16 • All Day  
317 W Plank Rd., Altoona, PA

#### HOSS'S

Sunday, December 3 • All Day  
Two Locations:  
110 Patchway Rd., Duncansville, PA  
4343 Admiral Peary Hwy., Ebensburg, PA

### DECADES CLUB

*Reverse Raffle Drawing & America's Greatest Music to Benefit the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program*

Saturday, September 30, 2023 • 5 PM  
Blair County Convention Center  
One Convention Center Blvd., Altoona

A \$100 ticket includes one chance for cash prizes (need not be present to win) and admission for two for dinner, beer, wine, soda, and entertainment. Only 250 tickets will be sold with more than \$4,500 in cash prizes, including a \$3,000 grand prize. Other exciting games of chance will be available throughout the night, and all proceeds benefit the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program!

### PATCHED TOGETHER

Saturday, November 18 • 2 – 10 PM  
Bavarian Aid Society,  
112 S 13th St., Altoona, PA

Coordinated by a group of committed volunteers, Patched Together is a family-friendly day of live music, raffle baskets, and children's activities, all to benefit the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program. Cover charge is just \$5 for adults and free for children.



# IN THE COMMUNITY

The Healing Patch is a grateful recipient of funds raised through several community events over the past two years. Thank you to the organizers and volunteers of these events for your time, effort, and commitment to support local grieving children and families.



## Hold On to Hope Suicide Awareness Benefit Golf Outing

The first Hold On to Hope Suicide Awareness Benefit Golf Outing was held in August 2022 at the Ebensburg Country Club. This event was planned by Healing Patch Volunteer Kimberly Kaschak, who lost her brother to suicide and wanted to raise funds to benefit the Cambria County Suicide Prevention Task Force, Together With Veterans, and Healing Patch. Healing Patch received \$2,025 from the event. Pictured from left are Buddy McMullen, Joyce Skubik, Healing Patch Volunteer and Hold On to Hope Coordinator Kimberly Kaschak, Healing Patch Coordinator Melody Ray, and Makylie McMullen.



## Nicholas Foreman Memorial Benefit

After losing her son Nicholas unexpectedly in March 2022, Dena (Foreman) Karabinos wanted to honor his life and make a difference. The first annual Nicholas Foreman Memorial Benefit Pool Tournament in February 2023 at the Shovel Head Tavern in Cresson raised nearly \$9,500 to benefit the Healing Patch. Pictured from left are Eugene Slebodnick; Crissy Tickerhoof; Dena and Chris Karabinos; Shalen Steinbugl, Healing Patch Volunteer Coordinator/Grief Specialist; Kim Sieg, Healing Patch Volunteer; and Autumn and Bill Slone.

## Patched Together

The Patched Together Planning Committee raised \$16,500 to benefit the Healing Patch through the 10th Annual Patched Together event in November 2022, along with virtual activities in 2020 and 2021.



## Myers Amusements Golf Outing

The Myers Amusements Golf Outing in Spring 2022 raised \$10,500 to benefit the Healing Patch. Pictured from left are Karen Myers, Ava Myers, Paul Myers, Healing Patch Coordinator Melody Ray, and Kim Sieg, Paul's sister and Healing Patch Volunteer.





# 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 August 1, 2022 – April 30, 2023.

Thank you to the following donors who have helped make a difference in the lives of our neighbors and our communities.

*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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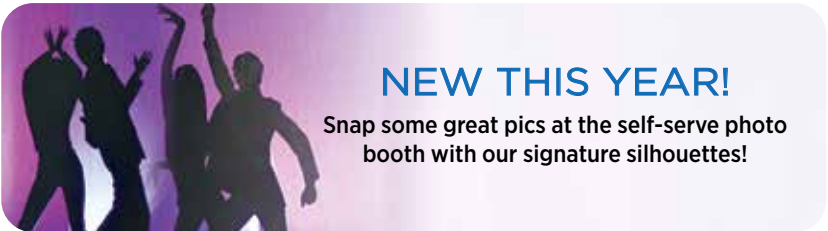
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