



impressions

LEGACIES OF LOVE AND FINGERPRINTS ON THE WORLD

**PATIENT'S WISH IS TO
SHARE GRATITUDE**
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PATIENT'S WISH IS TO SHARE GRATITUDE

Donors help patient to celebrate caregivers who have become friends



One year after her diagnosis, one year after that day when Denise Bernath learned she had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, she had a party -- a really big one.

More than 250 guests attended Denise's party in the Knights of Columbus Hall in Perrysburg last fall. As part of Senior Independence Hospice's Make it Happen program Denise had asked for this party — not for herself, but to celebrate all of her caregivers, family and friends.

Not a penny of cost came from the family; charitable gifts to the Make it Happen

program and in-kind donations provided everything. And she made sure not to forget her son's 16th birthday; the staff made a cupcake cake for him and everyone joined in celebrating his milestone day.

The donations of homemade food were overwhelming and delicious. It was a wonderful evening for all, full of laughter, tears and dancing, something Denise had always loved to do.

Before ALS robbed Denise of her ability to speak she had explained why she wanted what she dubbed the "ALS Diagnosis Party." She said, "If I didn't have ALS, I never would have met all these nice people."

The hospice team, Denise's family, and many friends and supporters, went into high-flying party mode to make it all happen.

Denise was determined to emphasize the joy of her life, not her disease. Her best friend, Susan Marie Peth, said, "When I think of Denise, I think of laughter, determination and her amazing smile.

"She was a mom first and foremost. Cameron and Kyle meant the world to her. She loved to laugh and have fun with them, and with her friends. She lived every day with a gusto that would take anyone's breath away."

The family had already suffered a tragedy when Denise's husband died of leukemia. She had been caring for him and their two sons when she began having problems with finger dexterity so troublesome that she could not continue to work as a dental hygienist.

"If I didn't have ALS, I never would have met all these nice people."

- Denise Bernath

ABOVE, LEFT: Denise Bernath and her mother, Marsha Kurek (at right) with some of Denise's hospice caregivers. Shown from left: Jennifer Wilson, MSW; Lashea Middlebrook, STNA; Brittney Johnson, STNA; Kris Romp, RN.

ON THE COVER: Denise Bernath with her friend, Dianne Harbauer. Denise hosted an "ALS diagnosis party" to celebrate the friendships she's made due to her diagnosis.

Denise, a 20-year resident of Perrysburg, also started falling in 2013. At first her symptoms were attributed to the stress of her husband's death, but just five months after his passing, the ALS diagnosis was made. Denise was 46. She died Jan. 15, 2015.

Her mother and her sons had cared for her as the disease wasted her muscles. She also received support and strength from friends at St. Rose Church.

Susan said Denise left behind a legacy of courage. "Having known Denise my whole life, I have many fun memories of road trips, hockey games and luaus on Long Lake, but the way she lived her last year and three months of life is amazing to me," she said. ●

RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM: *Denise's family and friends help her enjoy the music and the dance floor despite her ALS.*

BELOW: *Denise with her family; sons Cameron and Kyle, and parents Don and Marsha Kurek. Denise shows off a gift from her caregivers, an autographed photo and sweatshirt from Jimmy Kimmel.*



MEMORY BEARS KEEP LOVE ALIVE

Thoughtful volunteer helps make memories for children of all ages

For many, disposing of the clothing of a loved one who has died can feel like giving away memories. One volunteer is doing something to help.

Warm hugs and bedtime stories are woven into plaid flannel shirts and soft yellow robes. Volunteer and talented seamstress Amanda “Mandy” Ferrell takes these beloved items and creates teddy bears for families. The bears help keep the memories alive, and the hugs go on.

Volunteer Coordinator Jennifer VanVorhis said it all began when Mandy asked if there were any sewing project gifts she could create. She made a sample bear for Jennifer, who loved the idea right away.



The bears have caught on and orders keep coming, with supplies paid for by donations to the Make it Happen program. The bears are about 14 inches tall and capable of withstanding serious, prolonged attention from young children who miss grandma.

“It’s not just a piece of clothing in a box. It’s something they can actually love and hug on,” Jennifer said.

In a thank-you note to Mandy, Eleanor Riffle, a member of another hospice family, wrote about her bears. “We are eternally grateful.

You will never know how much they touched our lives,” she wrote.

Mandy works full time as a chemical engineer but gives as much time as she can to hospice, especially in creative projects.

“I love working with my hands,” said Mandy. “I wanted to find opportunities that would allow me to use the talents I have in a positive way. I have also made crocheted and knitted hats for cancer patients, quilted wraps for foster pets (to prevent marking), and most recently the teddy bears and dignity scarves,”

she said. Dignity scarves are bibs for adults which are designed to look like scarves.

Mandy said it gives her a wonderful feeling to know that she can give someone

a huggable, sweet little bear with which to remember a loved one.

These custom-made teddy bears and some unexpected balloons helped one grief-stricken family in particular. Tracy Fortain and her family were grieving for her mother, Ruth Hundsrucker. To everyone’s surprise, balloons were delivered to Ruth’s funeral.

To help her young grandchildren get through what could have been a scary event for them, Ruth had set this up before she died.

She had asked Jennifer to carry out the plan and keep it a secret. Jennifer kept her promise but was worried about having balloons sent to a funeral.

When Tracy saw the balloons and someone quickly explained, “they’re from your mom,” she understood. Her young son didn’t cry again after the balloons arrived.

“Leave it to my mom to know what to do for my kids and to always think of them first. I’m so grateful to Jennifer for following through with my mom’s wishes,” she said. The children later wrote messages to grandma on the balloons and let them go, heaven bound.

Three unique teddy bears also helped Ruth’s grandchildren feel better.

Mandy had taken Ruth’s pink fleece robe and made it into two bears for her two granddaughters, incorporating sleeve embroidery detail on the feet, slightly different on each pink bear. One of grandma’s soft blue robes became a bear for Tracey’s young son.

The oldest child, age 9, understood what the bears represented when those gift-wrapped boxes were opened at Christmas time, and cried.

“They love them. They sleep with them every night and don’t go anywhere without them,” Tracey said. ●



ABOVE, TOP: *A dignity scarf, a bib for an adult designed to look like a scarf, made by volunteer Mandy Ferrell.*

ABOVE, BOTTOM: *One of the memory bears made by Mandy out of a hospice patient’s robe.*



DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

*By Sue Brookins, MSN, RN, ACHPN, CNS
Corporate Director of Hospice*

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING

I've come to believe that being present at someone's death is among the most intimate experiences we can have as human beings. It is both a privilege and an honor.

You might be surprised, but I find moments of beauty in hospice care. It is in these intimate moments we bear witness to the true beauty in humanity, at its most fragile and vulnerable.

The most beautiful thing I've ever seen is a grown man or woman climbing into bed with mom to hold her as she died. That expression of love, of solace, of giving everything within us for the comfort of another, is beyond measure.

When hospice employees or volunteers hear the words spoken, feel the love given, and see the comfort of presence that families give to their dying loved ones, they can't help but be changed for the better. And that is a beautiful thing, too. ●

"For years I heard Hospice referred to as "personal angels," "caring and helpful," "loving and gentle," "such a comfort for the entire family." And finally, Senior Independence came to my family with its caring, helpful, loving, gentle ways.

Personal angels? Yes! You made my husband's final journey peaceful, all the while including the family in every step, gently explaining away our fears of the unknown, helping us help him die in peace, with dignity.

Thank you for guiding all of us to that moment."

~ A grateful family

READER OPINION SURVEY - PLEASE RESPOND

We strive to provide you with the information that you want to know, and personal stories that you love to read. Let us know if we're hitting the mark! Please take three minutes to complete this brief survey and return to us in the enclosed envelope. Thank you!

1. How much do you enjoy reading Impressions?

Not At All

Somewhat

Very Much

2. What specific types of content do you like to read? (check all that apply)

Make it Happen events for patients and families

Staff perspectives on hospice

Donor profiles and why they choose to give

How charitable gifts are helping patients and families

New hospice services (alternative therapies, etc.)

Volunteer profiles

Donor list

Comments from grateful families

3. What other topics would you like to see included?

4. Which description best matches how you feel after reading Impressions?

Discouraged, Sad or Depressed

Indifferent

Uplifted, Hopeful or Inspired

5. What else can we do to make Impressions better for you?



Thank you for helping us improve our work for you! Please return in the enclosed envelope.

Thank you for your generosity

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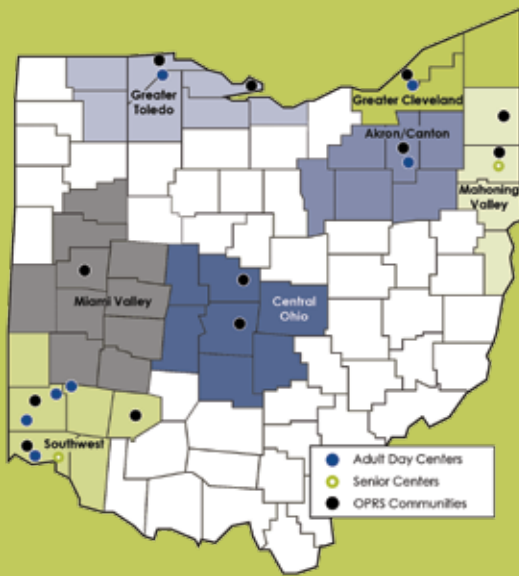
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DONORS BRING MOTHER AND SON TOGETHER

A mother and son, both dying and separated by distance and fragile health, had a single wish — to see each other one last time. Donors helped Senior Independence Hospice to bring them together for a few final moments in each other’s company.

“We knew as a hospice team that we had to find a way to get this mother and son together to honor this end of life wish,” said Cara Lageson, volunteer coordinator. “Thanks to donations from the community to our Make it Happen program, we were able to fulfill this most meaningful wish,” she said.

The mother had begun to transition from life to death. Her son lived an hour away and was also very ill, unable to sit upright.

“We decided to hire a medical transport company to bring him to see his mother and say goodbye,” Cara explained.

The family kept the meeting private and quiet, just letting mother and son spend time together. She died two days later. Her son died three months after those special moments with his mother, something that might not have happened without heartfelt help from donors to Make it Happen.

“The entire hospice team feels blessed to have been part of this touching moment,” said Cara.

“Words cannot express what this meant for my mother and brother to see each other again,” said a family member in a thank-you note to hospice. ●