

Summer 2024 | Issue 15

# celebrate GIVING



# THERAPY DOGS

Connecting with Healing Patch Kids

**ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:**

Mercedes Moment Winner Announced | Family's Fundraiser Tribute to Family Hospice  
Home Healthcare Team Are "Eyes and Ears" in Home | WIC Marks 50-Year Impact



# aligning excellence

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Over the past year, our UPMC Home Healthcare and Family Hospice team has continued to adapt to the changing healthcare system while meeting the needs of patients, families, and the community. Our team provides the right care when and where it's needed most and is always looking for opportunities to better serve those in our care.

As the "eyes and ears in the home," our UPMC Home Healthcare team members have literally saved lives, as you will read in this issue. They consistently observe and identify patients' needs in achieving their goals, and those needs are fulfilled through your support. As your gifts are put into action, patients receive medications, safety equipment, and other resources not covered by insurance. Thank you for supporting Mercedes Moment and other fundraising efforts of the Home Nursing Agency Foundation to give patients this option – often a last resort – for assistance.

The compassionate care of the Family Hospice team makes an impact on families every day. After experiencing this for their son Scotty, Brad and Jess Brua chose to continue his legacy with "Scotty's Smile." This special fundraiser celebrated Scotty's life and raised money to support future Family Hospice patients and caregivers.

In the community, the "pawprint" of the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program grew over the past year, as therapy dogs and their owners were integrated more consistently into family group nights. This additional avenue of connection opened the door for some participants to share more freely about their loss, memories, and grief and find comfort in the presence of these furry companions. The Healing Patch's free peer support services would not be possible without your investment in hope for the next generation.

Equipping expectant and new mothers with education and nutrition access has been the goal of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program since its national inception 50 years ago. Marking 47 years of service locally, the Home Nursing Agency WIC program serves nearly 5,000 families in Blair and Centre counties each year. Your support of the Home Nursing Agency Foundation funds a special program to reward parents as they become more empowered and engaged to make positive choices for their families' future.

In this spirit, I thank you for being part of our family.

Gratefully,

*Jennifer Vennare*

President, UPMC Home Healthcare & Family Hospice



## Mercedes Moment Supports Local Needs as Winner Named

Marking 22 years as the Home Nursing Agency Foundation's signature fundraiser, Mercedes Moment raised more than \$68,000 this year as State College residents Jim and Mary Ellen Kelly were celebrated as this year's winners with ticket #316. As the winners, Jim and Mary Ellen were offered the choice of a 2024 Mercedes GLB 250 or \$30,000 cash prize.

All funds raised through Mercedes Moment support those who have needs beyond normal circumstances or need additional resources not covered by insurance. This year, the Home Nursing Agency Foundation has awarded \$187,550 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 2025 Mercedes Moment, please call 1-855-GIVE-HNA.

## 2nd Annual Flashlight Egg Hunt Bolsters Excitement, Funds for the Healing Patch

Snow flurries may have been in the air while eggs were being dispersed on the Altoona Curve field, but that didn't deter more than 320 participants from joining the 2nd Annual Flashlight Egg Hunt on April 5, 2024 to support the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program.

Most participants donned head lamps as they raced to gather as many eggs as possible in the dark. It took less than one minute for participants to scoop up 6,000 eggs scattered in the outfield. Along with candy, some eggs included a numbered tag that could be turned in to claim a special prize. Prizes included various local gift cards, \$300 cash, gaming chairs, and much more. Before the Egg Hunt began, attendees enjoyed food, cornhole, and music.

Special thanks to Event Sponsors 1st Summit Bank, Cresson House Bed & Breakfast, and [www.MyQuickBuy.com](http://www.MyQuickBuy.com) and Candy Sponsors State Senator Wayne Langerholc, Jr. and Dorman's Jewelry.

Stay tuned on the Home Nursing Agency Foundation Facebook page for updates about next year's Flashlight Egg Hunt.







# Furry Companions Join the HEALING PATCH

As a children's grief center, the Healing Patch focuses on supporting children through their grief, allowing them time and space to express their feelings, to share stories and memories of their significant person, and to connect with same-age peers. A recent opportunity has resulted in a different kind of connection.

When Healing Patch staff were approached by Barb Shoup about the idea of bringing her therapy dog to Blair Healing Patch group sessions, they were very excited. They wanted to be sure, however, that group night goals remained at the forefront, and that the dog wouldn't be a distraction from the group process.

"Any potential worries were eliminated when Barb and her 10-year-old Golden Retriever Mikey entered the building," explains Volunteer Coordinator and Grief Specialist Shalen Steinbugl. "They were met with calmness from the children. Mikey's presence relaxed even the most high-energy children, and more sharing had been done than in previous groups."

Healing Patch Middles Room participant Cameron was immediately drawn to Mikey, as she was reminded of Franklin, her family's Golden Retriever that was re-homed after her mom's unexpected death last summer. Cameron and some of the other children at the Healing Patch were hesitant to share with their peers but found it easier to talk with Mikey in the room.

"Sometimes, they share out loud 'to Mikey' instead," Shalen says. "The power of pet therapy has been truly amazing to witness, and we are grateful to integrate Barb and Mikey into our groups."

"I saw how Mikey is with people, and how people feel when they're with her," Barb explains. "She's special because she's very gentle. Kids who have lost their dog or can't have them anymore connect with her in a special way, and we encourage them to tell Mikey their feelings."

Through the comforting presence of volunteers with and without fur, the Healing Patch provides a safe environment that allows adults and children to realize that they are not alone and that hope and healing are possible.

"I think the Healing Patch is helping them," shares Cameron's grandmother Susan, who attends with her husband and three granddaughters. "I try to use every outlet for them that I can, and the Healing Patch has been very helpful. For my husband and me, we see that there are a lot of people hurting. We can share our grief, and we're not in this alone."

At the Cambria Healing Patch, two teams have come on board to provide the comforting presence of therapy dogs to families: Robin and her therapy dog Hawke and Marycarole and her dog Banner.

"Therapy dogs add an extra level of support at the Healing Patch," validates Healing Patch Coordinator Melody Ray. "They contribute to an environment of comfort and safety for many of our members, allowing them to open up about their feelings and grief experiences. We are thankful for our pet therapy volunteers and their pups for the support they provide to grieving children and their families."

To stay updated, follow the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program Facebook page. To support the free services of the Healing Patch, visit [tiny.cc/healingpatchgiving](http://tiny.cc/healingpatchgiving) or call 1-855-GIVE-HNA.

*On cover, therapy dog Mikey is pictured with Cameron at the Blair Healing Patch.*

*From left, therapy dog Hawke with Dezmond at the Cambria Healing Patch. Jamie and Cameron with Mikey. Cambria Healing Patch volunteer Marycarole with Banner. Blair Healing Patch volunteer Barb with Mikey. Cambria Healing Patch Little's Room volunteers and participants with Hawke.*





# FAMILY HOSPICE Family Gives Back to Help Others

Scotty Brua was still an infant when some of his special medical needs were identified. With several diagnoses, life was filled with doctor's appointments, therapies, and extensive care for Scotty and his parents, Jess and Brad. Characterizing Scotty's life even more than his medical needs was a wide smile of pure joy that touched everyone he met.

Despite making great strides with independence, Scotty began to decline in 2017, resulting in the diagnosis of a second rare genetic disorder. Jess and Brad managed his care as well as possible, but as he continued to decline, they consulted with his physician and decided to focus on his comfort and quality of life, enrolling him in Family Hospice in February 2023. With the support of the Family Hospice team of nurses, aides, spiritual counselor, and social worker, Jess and Brad were able to keep Scotty at home until he passed on March 28, 2023, 24 days after his 19th birthday.

"Family Hospice was so helpful as a resource and with making Scotty comfortable," Jess shares. "The services provided to him, as well as our family, were tremendously beneficial."

Wanting to celebrate Scotty's life and help other families, Jess and her sister Becky planned "Scotty's Smile: A Fundraiser to Benefit UPMC Family Hospice." This inaugural event was held on March 9, 2024, and included a pulled pork sandwich meal and an incredible assortment of 91 raffle baskets, raising \$5,020 to support future patients and caregivers of Family Hospice.

"Scotty was full of joy and love for others," Jess says. "We want to continue this in his honor. Scotty didn't say many words, but he made a difference! UPMC Family Hospice will be able to do a lot of good for those who are going through the hardest (physically and emotionally) times in their lives with the proceeds from our event."

In addition to the care provided to Scotty, Jess has benefited from Family Hospice's bereavement support, including check-ins from Bereavement Coordinator Jen Cox, notes from volunteer Betty Friedenberger, and the monthly Grief Support Group in Huntingdon. The group has allowed her to connect and share with others who are also grieving. Jen, Betty, and many group members attended Scotty's Smile to display their support.

"I never had the privilege of meeting Scotty, but it was clear from the turnout at the event that Scotty was so loved and that his infectious joy impacted many lives," Jen says. "Sometimes, people find comfort in doing something tangible after the death of a loved one. Jess celebrated Scotty's life in such a special way by bringing together her community and supporting future families. Scotty's Smile builds on his legacy of loving others."

To learn more about Family Hospice, visit [upmc.com/FamilyHospice](http://upmc.com/FamilyHospice). To make a donation to Family Hospice, visit [tiny.cc/FHmemorial](http://tiny.cc/FHmemorial) or call 1-855-GIVE-HNA.



From top, Jess Brua (right) and her sisters Becky (left) and Claire (center) pause for a photo during the busy day. An attendee surveyed the diverse assortment of raffle baskets. Jess presented a check for \$5,020 to Kim Hesel, Director of Development/Marketing Communications.

At right, Jess and Brad display their reason for the event.





# UPMC HOME HEALTHCARE TEAM Serves as “Eyes and Ears” in the Home

*“Seek home for rest,  
for home is best.”*

*– Thomas Tusser*

When UPMC Home Healthcare members cross the threshold of a patient’s home, they do so with the intent to help the patient heal from an injury, illness, or surgery. By providing nursing care, therapies, social work, and personal care, they help patients to progress to the next stage of recovery or return to independence. As team members get to know patients and their caregivers as unique individuals, they recognize needs beyond the care plan, and sometimes, that keen observation leads to life-saving interventions.

This year, two UPMC Home Healthcare therapists were recognized as recipients of the UPMC Award for Commitment and Excellence to Service (ACES). Each year, less than 1% of the UPMC workforce is honored with this award, and 2023 recipients, Mike Phillips, Therapy Team Lead, Cambria Home Health, and Laura Stough, Physical Therapist, Blair Home

Health, were nominated for their quick assessments and actions after entering their patients’ homes last year.

When visiting a patient whose husband was typically an involved and present caregiver, Mike didn’t see her husband present. Mike questioned the patient, who told him her husband hadn’t been feeling well for several days and was trying to “rest it out” in bed. After getting permission, Mike found the husband in bed, appearing feverish and verbalizing abdominal pain with vital signs outside of normal limits. Mike asked to call their son and explain the situation, who then convinced them to go to the Emergency Room.

to help him and get him stabilized. Laura then got him as a patient, and he did amazing.”

On more typical days, team members may not take such life-saving actions, but they consistently work with patients at home to help them be successful. Nurses help patients to manage their medicines, symptoms, and safety. Physical, occupational, and speech therapists offer top-notch rehab to help patients regain function at their best level. Social workers connect patients and caregivers to the right programs, like support groups and community resources. Home health aides provide vital support for bathing, dressing, and other daily living tasks.

“We are often thought of as the physician’s ‘eyes and ears’ in the home,” says April McCall, Director, Regional Home Healthcare Services. “Our team meets patients where they are and works with them toward their goals of treatment. In my experience, we see that patients heal better at home with their own environment and support system, especially when we can provide resources that are lacking.”

Identified needs may include tangible supplies like food, utilities, safety equipment, or devices to monitor a chronic condition and avoid rehospitalization. These items are provided through Home Nursing Agency Foundation grants that directly impact patients and their caregivers.

“We are so grateful for donors to the Home Nursing Agency Foundation,”

April acknowledges. “This vital support allows patients to access resources above and beyond what insurance covers. This extension of care is so important in helping them remain safe at home and manage their own health.”

To learn more about UPMC Home Healthcare, please visit [upmchomehealthcare.com](http://upmchomehealthcare.com). To make a donation to support patients’ needs, visit [HomeNursingAgency.com](http://HomeNursingAgency.com) or call 1-855-GIVE-HNA.

*At left, Mike Phillips, Therapy Team Lead, Cambria Home Health, is pictured with Katie Partsch (left), Clinical Manager, and Shannon Bettwy, Therapy Coordinator. At right, Laura Stough (center), Physical Therapist, Blair Home Health, is pictured with Brian Shope, Clinical Manager, and Shannon Bettwy, Therapy Coordinator.*



“We later learned that this man was in septic shock, and the ER staff said he probably would not have survived another day without care,” shared Mike’s supervisor in the ACES nomination submission.

In a similar situation, Laura observed her patient’s husband come out of the bathroom, falling against the wall and showing signs of difficulty breathing. After the spouse fell to the ground, Laura attempted to pull him to the couch and checked his vital signs. Sweaty and confused, he had elevated blood pressure and heart rate. Laura asked her patient what medications he could have taken and learned that he had been put on a new muscle relaxer. He had mistakenly taken three times his prescribed dose over the previous four days.

“Laura looked up overdose side effects and immediately called 911,” her nomination shared. “Paramedics arrived and transported him to the ER. From the ER, he was life flighted to Pittsburgh, where the poison control doctors were able



# WIC MARKS 50 YEARS of Nutrition Access for Pregnant Moms and Children

This year, we recognize an incredible milestone in the evolution of maternal and child healthcare — the 50th anniversary of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. Since the opening of the first clinic in Kentucky in 1974, WIC has been an unwavering beacon of support, committed to improving public health outcomes for women, infants, and children.

Home Nursing Agency WIC has been serving families in Blair and Centre counties since 1977 and has cultivated an inclusive community where families can learn, connect, and feel a sense of support while making informed decisions about their health and the health of their baby. Last year, the Home Nursing Agency WIC program served 4,972 families, and each month hosts a combined 2,800 appointments at the Altoona and State College offices.

With several dedicated staff marking more than 20 years of experience each, the Home Nursing Agency WIC program has seen tremendous growth since 1977. The tenured staff reflect on positive advancements made possible with technology, such as virtual visits and the transition from handwritten checks to printed checks and now to an electronic card that can be swiped at checkout like a debit card.

While many people may think of WIC as a food program, Nutritionist Supervisor Marjorie Mearkle points out that it's

much more than that. "WIC is not just a program that gives free food and formula," she shares. "We provide free health assessments, one-on-one nutrition counseling, farmers market vouchers, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to other services in the area."

WIC Program Director Tracy Kelley reiterates that the program's biggest impact goes beyond food access: "We take care of the youngest and most vulnerable population at a critical time in their growth and development. We try to empower our participants with education to make good decisions when it comes to feeding and taking care of their families. Through referrals to other services, we want to make sure that all our participant needs are being met."

This level of empowerment is made possible in part through support of the Home Nursing Agency Foundation. In recent years, Foundation grant funding has provided diapers and training pants for clients to receive when they keep their children's one- and two-year recertification appointments. Extended enrollment translates to more education and healthier children and families long-term."

"WIC makes a huge impact on the health of children at a critical time for brain development," Marjorie says. "WIC provides specific foods to target nutrients lacking in the low-income population. Our nutrition education and referrals are

focused on each participant's unique needs rather than just providing general information to the whole population. Also, WIC provides screenings for anemia and lead poisoning and offers immunizations."

While participation is based on income, Nutritionist Kathy Hart points out that it is best to check the guidelines for family size. "Many working people do not realize that they may qualify for WIC based on their income."

To learn more about WIC, visit [HomeNursingAgency.com/WIC](http://HomeNursingAgency.com/WIC) or call 814-943-0481. To support additional resources for WIC families funded by the Home Nursing Agency Foundation, visit [HomeNursingAgency.com](http://HomeNursingAgency.com) or call 1-855-GIVE-HNA.

*Home Nursing Agency WIC has evolved significantly while serving young families over the past 47 years. WIC is marking 50 years nationally this year.*





# 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 \$100 or more were received May 1, 2023–February 29, 2024. Donations of all amounts can be viewed online at [tiny.cc/HNAFoundationSupporters](http://tiny.cc/HNAFoundationSupporters).

Thank you to the donors who have helped to 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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**HEALING PATCH  
 IN HONOR OF:**  
**Kent Tonkin**  
 Mr. Joseph Coray

# HEALING PATCH DONATIONS/EVENTS

The Healing Patch Children's Grief Program gratefully acknowledges community supporters who have donated over the past year to ensure grieving families have access to services now and in the future!



The 2nd Annual Nicholas Foreman Overdose Awareness Memorial Benefit was held in February 2024 and raised \$7,204.50 to support the Healing Patch.



The Hold On to Hope 2 Golf Outing in August 2023 raised \$3,000 for the Healing Patch, along with support for several other local organizations. Pictured is Melody Ray (left), Healing Patch Coordinator, with Kim Seig, Healing Patch volunteer and event organizer.

The Patched Together Planning Committee raised \$11,525 to benefit the Healing Patch through the 11th Annual Patched Together event in November 2023. Since inception, Patched Together has raised more than \$145,000 in support of the Healing Patch.



## 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.



Wanzek Construction employees made donations to purchase holiday gifts for some Healing Patch families in need. They purchased all of the families' wish-list items and more. They also raised an additional \$700 to donate to the program.







P.O. Box 352  
Altoona, PA 16603-0352  
1-855-GIVE-HNA



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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.

coming up



**Saturday, September 28, 2024 • 5 PM**  
**Blair County Convention Center, Altoona**

A \$100 ticket includes ONE chance for cash prizes (need not be present to win) and admission for TWO for dinner and entertainment, along with drink tickets. 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 evening. All proceeds benefit the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program.

