



A JOURNEY OF GRACE & GRIT:

Lyle's Story page 4

Wellness News

Dear Friends,

For 35 years, Wellness House has been a place where healing extends beyond medicine and where hope and compassion are woven into every story. Each person who walks through our doors brings their own journey, yet together, we connect to create a network of care that understands and uplifts.

This year, we've witnessed extraordinary moments of resilience and generosity. In May, nearly 3,300 of you came together for our most successful Walk for Wellness House yet, raising more than \$851,000 to fund the free programs that are the heart of our mission. Your steps, your gifts, and your commitment have created tangible impact, ensuring that more than 525 programs across Chicagoland each month continue to support individuals and families navigating cancer's challenges.

Among those whose journey reflects the depth of our mission is Lyle, a longtime participant whose story is featured in this issue. After he and his late wife, Carol, both received cancer diagnoses, Wellness House became a sanctuary where they found care that reached beyond treatment plans. "We didn't feel like patients," Lyle shares. "We felt like people." Through support groups, spiritual care, and meaningful connection, Lyle discovered that true healing touches every dimension of who we are: body, mind, and spirit. Today, he continues to walk alongside others, offering his story as a reminder that amidst uncertainty and loss, there is a path to healing, sustained by compassion, uplifted by fellowship, and underscored by the shared human experience.

As we celebrate this milestone year, we invite you to join us for an evening that honors the legacy you've helped build. On October 18, we will host the 2025 Wellness House Ball-Timeless at The Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel in Chicago: an elegant black-tie event celebrating 35 years of hope, healing, and community. This extraordinary night will gather friends, families, and supporters whose generosity ensures that our mission not only endures but thrives. Details on how to attend and contribute are included in this newsletter.

Your belief in Wellness House—your choice to give, to show up, to walk alongside us—makes every story of hope possible. Thank you for being part of this remarkable circle of support.

With deepest gratitude,



Lisa K. Kolavennu, MA, LCPC
Chief Executive Officer



Stephen Smith
Board Chair



Volunteer Needs

Volunteers are vital to Wellness House. We couldn't do what we do without volunteers! They make it possible for Wellness House participants to enjoy outstanding support during their cancer journey.

Front Desk Volunteers

We are always looking for individuals who are interested in providing exceptional customer service by being warm, welcoming, and relationship-focused to all of our participants, staff, and the Wellness House community. Please reach out if you are interested in greeting and assisting participants and visitors when they enter the house and programs.

Shifts to volunteer weekly/bi-weekly at the front desk are as follows:

Mondays - Thursdays:

9:00 am - 12:00 pm
12:00 pm - 4:00 pm
4:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Fridays:

9:00 am - 12:00 pm
12:00 pm - 3:00 pm
3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Saturdays:

9:00 am - 12:00 pm

The Courtyard Volunteers

The Courtyard, our local consignment and retail store, sells a variety of fine furnishings, with all proceeds benefiting Wellness House. Whether it's helping customers or setting up eye-catching displays, we would appreciate retail or computer support. Shifts are 4 hours long, with a commitment of 1-2 shifts per month.

Program Facilitators

Help us empower and support Wellness House participants. We're looking for professional Massage Therapists, Reiki or Energy Touch Healers, or Yoga or Tai Chi instructors.

If you are interested in signing up for any of these volunteer opportunities or would like to learn more, please fill out our volunteer application at



Wellness House Ball: TIMELESS

Celebrating 35 Years of Hope

Mark your calendars for an unforgettable evening! On **Saturday, October 18, 2025**, Wellness House will host the annual **Wellness House Ball** at the stunning **Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel Chicago**. This elegant black-tie fundraiser will celebrate **35 years of hope and healing** for individuals and families impacted by cancer.

Guests will be welcomed into a breathtaking setting, where brilliant jade and gold accents shimmer against the Chicago skyline framed by 20-foot windows. The evening will begin with a lively cocktail reception, followed by an exquisite dinner surrounded by gorgeous, expertly curated décor. Throughout the night, guests will experience a live auction and paddle raise, and be moved by a powerful story from a Wellness House family. To cap off this extraordinary evening, the band **Deja Vu** will keep the dance floor full until midnight, ensuring the celebration continues. A beloved highlight of the Ball, the **Wine Cellar** will return with a curated selection of fine wines, available for pre-purchase and delivered directly to your table for you and your guests to enjoy.

We are deeply grateful to our **Presenting Sponsor, Burke Beverage**, for their generous support in making this milestone celebration possible.

Don't miss this extraordinary evening of joy, compassion, and purpose. Visit wellnesshouse.org/ball to purchase tickets, learn more, or make a donation.

Can't attend the Ball? You can still be part of the impact by making a donation anytime at wellnesshouse.org/ball.



TOGETHER WE WALKED FOR HOPE

On Sunday, May 4, nearly **3,300 participants** gathered at the Home of Hope in Hinsdale for the annual **Walk for Wellness House**. Together, we raised more than **\$851,000** to fund free programs for individuals impacted by cancer—making this our most successful Walk yet!

This milestone year also marked **35 years of Wellness House**—a legacy of providing hope, healing, and community. The event kicked off with a special program featuring **Dan Wagner and Bob Baum from The Inland Real Estate Group**, **ABC7 meteorologist Greg Dutra**, and an inspiring story of survivorship from Kathryn, a Wellness House participant. Funds raised help support more than **525 free programs each month**, including nutrition, exercise, counseling, support groups, and child and family services.

We are deeply grateful to our **Presenting Sponsor, The Inland Real Estate Group of Companies, Inc.**, our **Platinum Sponsors, Chicago Title Insurance Company and Hallstar**, and all 2025 Walk sponsors for making this impact possible. A special thank you to our **Top 10 Fundraising Teams**—THECROWNROYALSTEAM, Team Inland, The Beautiful Badass, Hallstar Hustlers, Team Eric, Team F U, K & R, Wellness Warriors, Love Like Sean, and Curi/RMB—for their incredible dedication and generosity.

Thank you to everyone who walked, donated, and volunteered. **Together, we ensure no one faces cancer alone.**



Left to right: Bob Baum, The Inland Real Estate Group of Companies Inc., Mahrukh Hussain and Julie Thick, Wellness House Board Members and Walk Chairs, Lisa Kolavennu, Wellness House CEO, Steve Smith, Board Chair, Dan Wagner, The Inland Real Estate Group of Companies, Inc.

At Wellness House, healing is more than a medical milestone; it's a mosaic of spirit, resilience, and connection. Few people embody this truth more deeply than Lyle, a longtime participant whose journey has been shaped by love, loss, and the enduring power of community.

A Journey of Grace and Grit:

Lyle and his wife, Carol, discovered Wellness House in 2018, shortly after Carol was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a nurse at Elmhurst Hospital, herself a cancer survivor, who gently pointed them toward the Hinsdale Home of Hope that, unbeknownst to them at the time, would become a vital part of their story.

"It was providential," Lyle says. "We didn't plan it. But we found ourselves in a nurturing place that welcomed us like family."

where they could speak freely about their fears and their hopes. "Michael created a sacred space," Lyle says. "We didn't feel like patients, we felt like people." They also gained invaluable guidance from Wellness House dietitian staff, whose insights on the role of nutrition strengthened their journey. And they connected with Ellen Nieman, Associate Director of Programs, whose thoughtful presence made an indelible mark. "Ellen was there behind the scenes for so much of our journey," Lyle reflects. "She offered a steady, quiet encouragement that meant the world."

After Carol's treatment ended, there was a moment of light; she was declared cancer-free. But that season of relief was brief. Carol passed away in 2021 from complications that may have been linked to earlier treatment. The grief was, and remains, immense.

But Lyle kept coming to Wellness House.

"I needed it," he says. "In the quiet after the loss, it was the place that reminded me how to keep going."

Today, Lyle still attends programs. He continues to reflect deeply, ask questions, and share his story with those navigating the terrain he knows so well. He speaks of the human body as a miracle; an intricate creation with physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions that must be honored and nurtured.

"What Wellness House offers," Lyle says, "is a recognition that each of us is more than a set of symptoms. They see the whole person, and they respond with care that reflects that understanding."

That resonance, he says, is what set Wellness House apart. Long before they ever walked through the doors, he and Carol had been shaped by a community and a church that emphasized holistic care. But here, that emphasis was underscored and deepened; Wellness House offered a space where disciplines came together in service of healing, where compassion was woven into every offering, and where both science and spirit were welcomed.

"Wellness House brings all the pieces together," he says. "It helped us care for our sacred selves and reminded us how much goodness can come from listening—to our bodies, to each other, and to something greater than ourselves."

Lyle now shares his story not out of obligation, but out of love—for Carol, for their life together, and for others who may be just beginning their own cancer journey.

"If I could tell someone new to all this just one thing, I'd say 'Come to Wellness House.'"



As Carol began treatment, the couple immersed themselves in Wellness House programs: nutrition programs, support groups, educational workshops, spiritual care sessions. It was a time of intense learning and adjustment. Then, just months later, Lyle received a diagnosis of his own: prostate cancer.

In a matter of months, cancer became part of both of their stories.

"We were both in it," Lyle says simply.

Together, they leaned into the people and programs that guided them through surgeries, decisions, and the emotional weight of uncertainty. Carol, a gifted educator and child advocate, found deep meaning in the mission of Wellness House. Lyle, a lifelong learner with a background in science and faith, was drawn to the whole-person approach—care that extended beyond treatment to touch every dimension of the human experience.

In support groups led by Senior Oncology Support Counselor Dr. Michael Williams, they found a place

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



A Week of Fun and Friendship at **Kids Kamp**

This July, Wellness House welcomed 28 campers for a week filled with creativity, laughter, and friendship at **Kid's Kamp 2025**. Each morning, children gathered for activities designed to inspire joy, build confidence, and connect with peers who share the experience of a cancer journey in their families.

The week kicked off with tie-dye T-shirts and fun get-to-know-you games, followed by a nature activity led by our friends from **The Little Red Schoolhouse**. Midweek, kampers enjoyed **yoga and sound meditation** and were inspired by a special visit from **Kids Kicking Cancer**. On Thursday, they cooked up delicious fun in the kitchen and marveled at an exciting **Bubble Show**. The week concluded with water games, a bounce house obstacle course, and the always-anticipated **Kamper Variety Show**, where families joined to cheer on the performers.

Throughout the week, **teen volunteers and Wellness House staff** supported each group, ensuring every camper felt welcome, safe, and included. With crafts, games, and plenty of smiles each day, **Kid's Kamp once again offered a safe and joyful space for children touched by cancer to grow, connect, and thrive.**



Taste of Wellness House: A Day of Nourishment and Connection

On **Saturday, May 17**, Wellness House presented the **Taste of Wellness House Nutrition Fair**, welcoming 174 participants for a day of learning, fun, and community. Guests experienced **cooking demonstrations, nutrition presentations, and local vendors** showcasing delicious, healthful ways to support a cancer-fighting, plant-based diet.

While adults explored the fair, children ages 5–14 enjoyed their own **Kids Corner**, filled with gardening, crafts, games, cooking activities, and plenty of snacks. The day offered something for everyone—engaging programs, meaningful connections, and the chance to discover practical ways to embrace wellness.

This free event, designed for those diagnosed with cancer and their loved ones, was a celebration of healthy living, learning, and support. Together, we continue to create spaces that nourish the body, mind, and spirit.



HOT TOPICS IN BREAST CANCER: Two Events, One Mission of Hope

This June, Wellness House hosted two impactful Hot Topics in Breast Cancer events, providing education, resources, and support to individuals diagnosed with breast cancer and their loved ones.

The series began on Wednesday, June 11, at Malcolm X College in Chicago, where participants gathered for an evening of meaningful connection. Guests explored empowering sessions on breast cancer care and wellness, participated in self-care activities such as chair massage and art-making, and shared a light dinner while connecting with others experiencing cancer.



On Saturday, June 21, the program continued at Wellness House in Hinsdale, where 115 attendees spent the day engaging in expert-led sessions covering the latest updates in breast cancer treatment, managing side effects, and navigating survivorship. Breakout discussions, gentle yoga, and shared meals made the day both informative and restorative.

Together, these events created safe, welcoming spaces where participants could learn, share, and find hope—all at no cost, thanks to the support of the Wellness House community.



Meet Our Experts

Beth Possley

Program Associate

For Beth Possley, joining Wellness House in 2004 was not just a career step—it was a deeply personal journey. After losing her best friend’s seven-year-old son, who was also her godson, to cancer, she was searching for a way to honor his memory and support the family she loved. That path led her to Wellness House, where a friend encouraged her to get involved.

“My favorite part of the mission is that we’re helping all people with cancer thrive. It’s not just about those in our immediate area—we’re reaching people across state lines. I see it every day when I take attendance for online programs.”

Beth Possley

“I didn’t know how to help my friends or how to honor him,” she recalls. “So we started a foundation for cancer research in his name, and I helped organize a golf outing. That experience— learning how to bring people together and coordinate events—opened the door for me at Wellness House.”

Beth began part-time, working 20 hours a week securing in-kind donations for the Walk for Wellness House. Over time, her role expanded to include support for major events like the annual ball and wine auction, eventually leading to a full-time position in the Programs Department. Today, as a Program Associate, she manages participant and professional databases, along with class registrations, ensuring a seamless experience for those who turn to Wellness House for support.

Reflecting on her years of service, Beth notes how much Wellness House has evolved. “When I first started, it felt like a small, grassroots organization—very much like a family. I’d bring my kids with me, and they grew up coming to events and volunteering. Now, Wellness House is a household name. You hear about it everywhere—even in places like Michigan, where I live now. That growth has been amazing to witness and to know we’re making that kind of impact is incredible.”

Beth credits strong leadership and a clear vision for Wellness House’s expansion into more communities, including underserved areas. “I’ve always believed we needed to branch out beyond Hinsdale. Now, we’re doing just that—reaching people not only in Illinois but across the country through our online programs.”

One of Beth’s most memorable moments came during the beloved event Some Enchanted Evening. She recalls watching a couple share a quiet dance in the corner, inspiring others to join. “That night has always been my favorite because it gives participants a chance to have a night out, to feel joy and connection during such a difficult time.”

Stories like these, and even the small daily moments, remind Beth why Wellness House’s mission is so vital. “My favorite part of the mission is that we’re helping all people with cancer thrive.”

For Beth, Wellness House has been more than a workplace—it’s a community. “The friendships I’ve made here have lasted for years. It’s amazing to find those kinds of lasting connections as an adult. We all share the same heart for helping others.”

Beth’s Education:

Bachelor of Science degree in Dietetics from Illinois State University

HONORING DEDICATION AT THE LIFETIME TRUSTEE *Dinner*

Thursday, June 12, 2025



Lauren and Blair Haarlow



Ernie Turcotte



Dr. Jennifer A. Hoag

On **Thursday, June 12, 2025**, **Wellness House** hosted the annual **Lifetime Trustee Dinner**—an evening dedicated to celebrating extraordinary leadership, generosity, and steadfast commitment to our mission.

This year, we proudly named **Lauren and Blair Haarlow** as **Lifetime Trustees**. From Blair's early days on the Wellness House Development staff and later as Board Chair and Foundation Board member, to Lauren's historic role as the first female Board Chair during a period of remarkable growth and transition, the Haarlows have shaped Wellness House in countless ways. Their unwavering "yes" whenever called upon to serve has left a lasting legacy on the organization and the thousands of lives it touches each year.

We were equally honored to present the **Heart of the House Award** to **Ernie Turcotte**, whose generosity of time, talent, and spirit exemplifies the compassion and dedication that sustain Wellness House's mission.

The evening also featured a keynote address from **Dr. Jennifer A. Hoag**, Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the Medical College of Wisconsin, who shared inspiring insights on prioritizing psychosocial wellness in pediatric oncology care.

As we reflected on these exceptional contributions, the evening served as a powerful reminder of what makes the Wellness House community so extraordinary: the enduring support of donors, trustees, and volunteers. Every act of generosity—whether through gifts, leadership, or time—ensures that Wellness House continues to offer hope, healing, and life-changing programs at no cost to anyone impacted by cancer.



Wellness House | Main Location
The Kay & Mike Birck Home of Hope
131 North County Line Road
Hinsdale, Illinois 60521

Creative Ways to Donate to Wellness House

Turn Your Stock Gains into Lifelines for People Facing Cancer

If your stock investments have grown, you can use that success to create lasting good and help ensure no one faces cancer alone. In addition, donating stock that has appreciated in value can offer you several benefits:

Eliminate Capital Gains Tax

Especially in times of positive market performance, investors are left with few options on how to deal with appreciated stock. Indeed, capital gains tax on long-term appreciated securities can eliminate significant value. However, donating appreciated stock to a charitable organization such as Wellness House could allow you to avoid capital gains tax altogether.

Receive a Tax Deduction

In addition to avoiding capital gains tax, donating appreciated stock may result in a charitable deduction from your income taxes at the securities' full fair market value. Not only are you avoiding a loss of value via taxation, but you could also receive a tax deduction at the stocks' higher, appreciated amount.

Donate in a Flash

Donating stock to Wellness House is an easy process. Reach out to your investment advisor and ask that they transfer shares



to Wellness House or have them call the Development Office directly at 630-654-5108. We can work with you or your advisor to facilitate the transfer resulting in a convenient and fast way to make a gift.

Support People Navigating Cancer

Most importantly, a donation of appreciated stock will sustain more than 525 programs provided at no cost every month by Wellness House. Your donation will bring strength and connection to people dealing with cancer.

Donating appreciated stock to Wellness House isn't just a smart financial move, it's a powerful way to bring hope in an otherwise difficult time. It's also simpler than you think and may be one of the most impactful gifts you make this year.

Act now to get a head start on your year-end gift to Wellness House. For more information, visit wellnesshouse.org/planned-giving, or call us at **630-654-5108** for stock transfer instructions.

Thank you to our generous grantors:

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