



Hospice patient Lisa VanBraemer (center front) with 4-year-old granddaughter Emi at Build-a-Bear; Emi's parents Scott (left) and Alyssa; and (back, center) Hospice Foundation Executive Director Steve Manny.

Community Hospice Grants Grandmother's Wish for 4-Year-Old Granddaughter

When Emi had her 1st birthday, her loving grandmother Lisa VanBramer took her to Build a Bear. But three years later now, Lisa, at 69, suffers from congestive heart failure, emphysema, and lives in a nursing home. But despite her health, Lisa got to relive that same joyous experience with granddaughter Emileigh "Emi" again thanks to The Community Hospice which granted Lisa's wish for a trip to Build a Bear for Emi's 4th birthday. Hospice coordinated special transportation for Lisa to and from the nursing home and the store and covered the cost of the bears and all their clothes for both Lisa and little Emi. "I was crying," says Lisa's daughter Alyssa. "My mom still talks about it daily. We were just floored." The Hospice Foundation fundraises year-round for special programs

like the Wish Fund which grants patients wishes to bring joy and meaning to their lives. Alyssa says the family was "blessed" and are thankful for the experience. "To say we are honored and filled with love, contentment and gratitude is an understatement. The dying process is a little bit easier for my mom and certainly less stressful for our family due to the support of The Community Hospice. The incredibly kind and compassionate Executive Director of the Hospice Foundation, Steve Manny, chaperoned this unforgettable experience and hugged us all as we left in tears of joy, gratitude, and of course, sadness for this deeply meaningful event."

Lisa, in Hospice care since August,

receives nursing services, case management, a chaplain, a volunteer. A Hospice music therapist recently came and played the harp for her. "it's all been wonderful!" Alyssa says her family used Hospice last summer when her dad had stage 4 pancreatic cancer. Hospice helped him stay at home, where he wanted to be, before he passed away peacefully four months later. Alyssa's uncle also passed near the height of COVID. "It was a whirlwind. I wouldn't have been able to do it without Hospice. I have received every service that Hospice offers. It has a very special place in my heart," says Alyssa. "It was a very difficult time but I felt I had support, I wasn't doing it alone. It's a beautiful organization."



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Spotlight on Our Community Hospice Foundation Board Members

The mission of The Community Hospice is rooted in compassion, dignity, and support for those who are seriously ill or nearing the end of life. Our dedicated medical teams provide expert care and guidance to patients and families but at the heart of our organization

is another group working quietly behind the scenes to effect impact – our **Community Hospice Foundation Board**.

Our board members are a passionate group of community leaders who generously commit their time, energy, and resources

to ensure that our organization continues to meet the evolving needs of the eight counties we serve. Their leadership helps shape the future of Hospice care in our region, advocating for earlier involvement to maximize the benefits of our services, and

Ron Chen



A Capital Region native, Ron Chen joined The Community Hospice Foundation Board three

years ago shortly after moving back to the area. Recently retired as the Managing Director in the Investments Office of The Rockefeller Foundation in Manhattan after 23 years, Ron has a wealth of experience in investment and asset management from his time at Rockefeller and the New York State Common Retirement Fund where he served as Special Investment Officer.

Ron recalls he had been interested in getting involved in the community when friend and fellow board member Jim O'Connor approached him. Ron recounts how the concept appealed to him because he had known friends and neighbors who had benefited from Hospice services at the end of life. He notes that while he had heard about the work of Hospice, he hadn't known the full extent of what the organization offers. "I was pleasantly surprised," admits Ron pointing out how Hospice is "always trying to enhance the experience," including through music and massage therapies, and other innovative programs he didn't know existed – like Camp Erin, a weekend bereavement program that helps children and teens learn to cope

with loss.

"It's very satisfying," Ron notes of his board service. He is on the Finance and Governance Committees, and volunteers on the Investment Committee for St. Peter's Health Partners (SPHP) Foundation. Ron's parents formerly resided at Beverwyck and Glen Eddy, two Eddy Senior Living affiliates. His dad has passed and his mom currently lives at Eddy Memorial Geriatric Center. All are SPHP affiliates. Ron says helping to find donors and raising more money for innovation programs are ways that he feels he can contribute. "It was easy for me to get on board because Hospice impacts people regardless of race, religion, and politics. I'm behind the mission."

Billie Taft



Capital Bank Vice President and Commercial Lender Billie Taft has long been a champion of

community service. Her journey with The Community Hospice began on an associate board and deepened in 2022 when she joined the Foundation Board—driven by a deeply personal experience.

Several years ago, Billie's mother, who lived in Massachusetts, was

diagnosed with Leukemia. As her father took on the role of caregiver, Billie recognized the need for additional support and encouraged him to consider Hospice care. "They played a huge role in keeping her in the home while she passed," Billie recalls. "It was always her wish that she stayed in the house and not in a nursing home." Billie says the care was "phenomenal" and "a huge resource" that brought comfort and dignity to her mother's final days. The experience left a lasting impact and inspired Billie to become more involved through board membership.

Billie acknowledges the challenges in educating the public about Hospice, especially programs like Camp Erin which support grieving children. "There's a definite need for it but it's often overlooked," she says, as many parents are dealing with their own emotions. She also notes that while end of life care is "something that everyone deals with," no one talks about. Despite these challenges, Billie is proud to be part of the team working to raise awareness and support for Hospice – her story a testament to the power of personal experience in driving meaningful change.

raising awareness about the value of compassionate end-of-life care. Our board members also play a critical role in overseeing the use of donated funds, ensuring that every dollar goes directly into extra support services, including Complementary Therapies like

music and massage therapies, and the Wish Fund. Their stewardship allows us to offer comfort, dignity, and hope to patients and families during life's most challenging times. We are proud to spotlight several of our board members in this issue as we recognize their unwavering

dedication and commitment to touching the lives of our patients and families. For their inspiring leadership, we owe them our profound thanks!

Kevin M. Owens



Kevin Owens, president and CEO of NYSTEC (New York State Technology Enterprise Corporation),

joined The Community Hospice Foundation Board in 2024. A 20-year veteran at NYSTEC, Kevin was appointed to his current role five years ago. He brings with him a wealth of experience in technology and healthcare to our board. Kevin's decision on board service was a deeply personal one. "A number of years ago, my mother benefited from Hospice and I remember that experience fondly,"

he shares, noting the difference it made having Hospice help him navigate the care for his mom. The experience left a lasting impression on him, making his choice to join the board a natural one. "They do great work," he attests.

While Kevin's experience with Hospice was during an end-of-life situation, he's passionate about raising awareness of the many other services that Hospice offers, pointing to Camp Erin, a bereavement camp for children. He says young people are inundated today on so many fronts that it makes great sense to take the kids away and "focus on what they need without the distractions at home or school. A child can feel very isolated and alone, so putting them

together with others who've had similar experiences is invaluable." Kevin says it's important to educate the community about the different types of services that Hospice offers and the meaningful impact they have on the community. "I've had friends who've received services and others who have volunteered," he notes. Kevin hopes his role on the board will provide an opportunity to help reframe the public perception about Hospice care. "As a board member, I think it's part of my responsibility to be an ambassador—in the grassroots sense—with neighbors and friends." He vows to be a part of the solution in facilitating better care and outcomes while serving and supporting our communities.

Finding Light Through Loss: Brooklyn's Journey with Camp Erin

At just age 11, Brooklyn LeClair has already faced the heartbreak of losing two beloved family members. First, she lost her 14-year-old cousin to bone cancer; then her grandfather—with whom she was very close—died on Hospice care in July 2024. The grief was profound for someone so young. "It was the biggest loss in our family so it hit everyone really hard," recalls Brooklyn's mom, Sara. That September, Brooklyn attended Camp Erin—a weekend bereavement camp that helps children and teens navigate grief through healing activities and peer support. The pain was still raw

back then, just two months since her grandfather's passing, but Camp Erin offered a safe space for Brooklyn to begin processing her feelings. This September, Brooklyn returned to Camp Erin, eager to reconnect after time and healing. "She's doing a lot better. She had the time of her life," says Sara, adding that Camp Erin gave Brooklyn the chance to be with other kids who understood her journey. "I'm going to say things she may not understand but Camp Erin opens up a whole other level where they can share stories and experiences and understand that there are other people their age

going through the same thing. It's a great program," says Sara, grateful to all the staff and volunteers who made Camp Erin possible. Brooklyn's story is a powerful reminder of the importance of compassionate support for children. Thanks to Camp Erin, she found not only comfort but connection—and a path forward through her grief.



Brooklyn LeClair (right) and her mom Sara



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Hospice Foundation Executive Director Steve Manny Retires After 24 Years



After an extraordinary 36-year career in nonprofit fundraising—24 of which were devoted to The Community Hospice — Hospice Foundation Executive Director Steve Manny will retire at the end of the year. The Troy native began his career in the nonprofit sector with the Muscular Dystrophy Association where he once shook hands with telethon legend Jerry Lewis. Steve's path then led him to the Leukemia Society and the American Diabetes Association before his roots called

him home to the Capital Region where he joined Hospice.

Steve jokes that his first fundraising foray was asking his father for \$5 – an effort he admits was rarely successful but the experience likely sparked his lifelong passion for helping others. That drive would later fuel his decades of service at Hospice, including funds that supported a range of free compassionate services to patients and families. “It’s been a glorious 24 years,” says Steve. “I’ll miss the people and the work, but especially the friendship and support shared by board members, colleagues and volunteers who have made this journey so meaningful.” Steve’s next chapter is already being written as he plans to spend the first six months of retirement caring for his precious new granddaughter, Loella Joyce, embracing his role as grandpa, diapers and all!

“Steve’s unwavering enthusiasm and deep belief in our Hospice mission have been truly inspiring,” says Michelle Mazzacco, executive vice president of the Continuing Care Division, St. Peter’s Health Partners. “His pride in our services and tireless

dedication to fundraising have helped ensure that patients and families receive the full spectrum of support they need—from our Wish Fund and bereavement services to educational programs, massage and music therapies, and more. We are incredibly fortunate to have worked alongside someone who has embodied a ‘whatever it takes’ spirit all these years,” adds Michelle. “Whether he’s installing an air conditioner in a trailer or orchestrating a once-in-a-lifetime VIP experience at Fenway or Disney, Steve brings the same level of care, creativity, and commitment to everything he does. His passion, storytelling talent, and sense of humor have built lasting relationships with donors across the region, helping to grow and sustain our mission in powerful ways. We are deeply grateful for all Steve has done and wish him the very best in this exciting new chapter!”

Congratulations, Steve! We will miss you!