



HOUSTON HOSPICE
Life Matters

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Media Contact Line: 713-677-7118 (not for publication)

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Email: media@houstonhospice.org

Website: www.houstonhospice.org

Twitter: [@HouHospice](https://twitter.com/HouHospice)

Facebook: [Facebook/houhospicelifematters](https://www.facebook.com/houhospicelifematters)

A Major Figure in Houston Hospice's History, Nina Wickman to Receive Community Spirit Award

On behalf of Spirit Award Chairmen, Vivie and Chris O'Sullivan, we are thrilled to announce that Nina Wickman will receive the **2019 Laura Lee Blanton Community Spirit Award on October 15, 2019** at a festive dinner celebration at the River Oaks Country Club, 1600 River Oaks Blvd.

"Nina is one of the most integral people early in Houston Hospice's history at the Texas Medical Center," said Cynthia Nordt, Houston Hospice Vice President of Development and External Affairs. "She was the right person at a time when hospice needed to be brought to the forefront. She helped many important stakeholders realize the greater need for a place like Houston Hospice to serve terminally ill patients. The establishment at Texas Medical Center, the connections she made with institutions like M.D. Anderson and throughout the community make her so instrumental in galvanizing support. If she were not involved, Houston Hospice might well not have ever entered the community when it did or gained the vital presence we now enjoy today in healthcare. She helped make possible our ability to serve all of the patients and families who sought our care over three decades and counting."



The story of Wickman's significant connection to Houston Hospice begins in 1982 when Marion Wilson, influenced by her own personal loss of her children and close family members, researched the idea of beginning a hospice in Houston after reading about the hospice movement in the United Kingdom. Leading a group under the name New Age Hospice, Wilson felt that an inpatient facility to serve hospice patients was lacking. Indeed, a facility that could serve patients under the care of nurses, social workers, aides and doctors was desperately needed.

After years of serving patients in temporary locations, the organization hit a milestone in 1985, gaining a permanent home when New Age Hospice approached the Texas Medical Center about property where former Houston Mayor Oscar Holcombe's Tudor-style mansion sat and served as residence for medical students following his death in 1972. With the M.D. Anderson Foundation's support and help, New Age Hospice became a part of the Texas Medical Center in 1989 which eventually led to its transformation to The Hospice at the Texas Medical Center and then Houston Hospice. The move brought the ability to serve more patients with increased capacity in facilities and staff.

With an inspiring vision of how hospice could serve the community, Wilson was able to enlist the late former First Lady Barbara Bush to serve as honorary chairwoman of the hospice board. Bush then led Wilson to Wickman, who was a former fundraiser for the Houston Ballet. Wickman immediately went to work, helping the group organize support and public relations while directing a \$14 million capital campaign that financed the building of the current inpatient care center, the chapel and the renovation of the Houston Hospice offices located in the Holcombe House.

Further, Wickman saw an opportunity to enhance, steward and enliven the property's lush grounds and formal gardens, bringing in the Garden Club of Houston and Wortham Foundation to restore two and half acres on the estate of Holcombe Mansion. To this day, the Garden Club still maintains Houston Hospice's gardens. The beloved landscape is characterized by magnificent oak trees, rows of azalea bushes, a water fountain, paved walkways, a variety of colorful plantings and vibrant tulips which blossom every spring.

Operating on property now dedicated to Houston Hospice, on January 12, 1995 the new inpatient care center opened as the Margaret Cullen Marshall Hospice Care Center, a three-story facility with 22 beds and the space for 11 more to be added in 2013 after another capital campaign brought additional funding to build out its unfinished third floor.

Wickman, now 80, is credited with the facility's design which Mrs. Bush called the finest hospice care facility she has seen in her travels around the world. Wickman commented during the ribbon cutting ceremony that "the Care Center is a 'home-away-from-home', a calm and comforting environment where patients nearing death and their families can be together without sterile and intrusive surroundings."

"The environment and setting that Nina wanted to achieve has thrived," Nordt said. "Houston Hospice not only receives consistent high marks on our service to patients and families, we get great feedback about the interior and exterior elements of our facility and how welcoming it feels. All of which makes for a comforting experience especially during a difficult time, whether in our inviting common areas or sitting on our garden benches outdoors. This year's Spirit Award is a tribute to Nina's legacy and impact on Houston Hospice and all of the people we have served since our humble beginnings."

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