



**For Immediate Release  
December 2, 2021**

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## **Gardens of Light Offers Grief Support Throughout Holidays**

Houston Hospice illuminates scenic garden with 150,000 brilliant lights in memory of loved ones

HOUSTON, TX – A rapport between a beautifully lit, fall garden and string duet created a safe space for those grieving the loss of loved ones during the holiday season at Houston Hospice’s inaugural Gardens of Light remembrance event, Tuesday, November 30, 2021.

Families from all generations were in awe as they walked among 80-year-old trees adorned with 150,000 brilliant lights, sipped on warm Wassel, and enjoyed festive treats. Many onlookers reconnected with others, and there were also some who sat and reflected in quiet contemplation. “It is not a surprise that many attendees lost family members over two decades ago, yet still remember how much they appreciated the care and support provided by Houston Hospice,” said Crystal J. Williams, LMSW, Manager of Bereavement Services, Houston Hospice. “Family members shared tears, fond memories and endless appreciation for our staff’s compassion,” she continued.

Expertly crafted by the Garden Club of Houston, this historic space has provided respite for hospice patients and families for over 40 years. Sue Stiles White, Houston Hospice Board Member and Garden Club of Houston Member invited friends who have been in her life for the past 60 years, Rob Bandy, and Nancy Cobb. “My friends and I have lost our spouses but remained friends since high school and have continued to support one another,” said White.

Philanthropist Marilyn Jewell who established the Blackie Wackie, George & Marilyn Jewell Endowment in support of Houston Hospice and its garden joined Vice President of Development and Community Engagement Aida Matic and Long-time Volunteer Joanne Wilton for an evening of gratitude for the care her husband received while at Houston Hospice. Mr. Jewell passed in 2017.

As the lights gleamed outside in the garden, families also found solace inside Houston Hospice’s Virginia Harris Cockrell Chapel. Nearly 100 candles were lit by those who wished to honor the memory of their loved ones. The candles remain available for those who wish to participate in this special act of dedication and the chapel remains open to all visitors.

## Understanding Grief During the Holidays

As the end of the year approaches, many may be experiencing different stages of grief, often a silent and invisible emotion. The holiday season and any celebration can exacerbate this loss, longing, and pain. It is important to understand that there is no right way to grieve and no set amount of time that will help families feel whole again.

Here are a few ways to manage grief during the holiday season for the Houston Hospice Bereavement Team:

1. **Try to continue the holiday.** Even when the voice in your head tells you to cancel your plans, choose not to isolate yourself. Instead, give yourself space to grieve. Spending time with loved ones and participating in activities that you enjoy will help in your journey.
2. **Give yourself some grace.** Tell yourself that it is okay to feel all your emotions - happiness and sadness, elation and anger, and many others. You can feel them all at once and that is okay. Most importantly, loving yourself is the greatest gift.
3. **Spend time with your family or your support network.** We don't all have families to celebrate with but if you have a supportive network or community, spend some time reconnecting with them and allowing yourself to receive love and support.

If you are supporting someone who is grieving, you can try these tips:

1. **Invite your friends over.** Welcoming friends to spend time with you and your family this season will help them to part of something bigger this season. They may decline but leave an open invitation, so they know they are supported during this difficult time.
2. **Be open to listen or sit with them in silence.** Whether over the phone or in person, allowing space for a grieving friend to talk may be appreciated.
3. **Be honest.** Grief is a very challenging journey for anyone. There is no need to try to say something comforting if you don't have the words. A simple statement such as, "This is an awful feeling, but I am here for you," can go a long way!

For more information about managing grief through the holidays, we recommend reading a book such as "How Will I Get Through the Holidays? – 12 Ideas for Those Whose Loved One Has Died" by James E. Miller. Please check your local bookstore or online.

If you would like to speak with a grief counselor, contact Houston Hospice's Bereavement Team at [Bereavement@HoustonHospice.org](mailto:Bereavement@HoustonHospice.org) or 713-Hospice.

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