

1905 Holcombe Blvd.  
Houston, Texas 77030-4123



**VOLUME 22 | ISSUE 1**

The Newsletter is published by Houston Hospice, a nonprofit organization providing comprehensive end-of-life services and education to Greater Houston and surrounding communities.

**SPECIAL FEATURE:  
BUTTERFLY LUNCHEON**



[www.houstonhospice.org](http://www.houstonhospice.org)

713-467-7423

Houston Hospice is a member of the Texas Medical Center

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



# HOUSTON HOSPICE

*Life Matters*

VOLUME 22 | ISSUE 1

## BUTTERFLY LUNCHEON TAKES FLIGHT IN LAUGHTER AND TEARS

On May 6, more than 200 community leaders and hospice supporters gathered at The Junior League of Houston to support Houston Hospice's work and recognize the organization's Butterfly Team— an interdisciplinary group of professionals who provide compassionate care to pediatric hospice patients and their families.

The featured speaker was Kaye Lani Rae Rafko-Wilson, who holds the distinction of being the first registered nurse to be crowned Miss America in 1988. She explained that this honor was quite unexpected, and the description of her pageant's unlikely talent—a Tahitian Dance performance—had event attendees in stitches. Initially, she saw the competition as a viable way to earn scholarship money. But little did she know that her service as Miss America would be a pivotal steppingstone on the path to her ultimate dream of establishing a hospice program in her hometown of Monroe, Michigan.

As Kaye Lani toured the country during her term of service as Miss America, she made nursing and hospice care the focus of her personal platform, touting the opportunity to take care of someone else as the greatest of honors. Kaye Lani shared stories of the incredible courage and strength of patients she met along the way, which reinforced her commitment to helping people during their most vulnerable time in life.

Today, audiences across the country are moved by Kaye Lani's story, touched by her warmth, and inspired by her authenticity. Her message undoubtedly resonated with Butterfly Luncheon attendees, as evidenced by the many tears and sniffles induced by her heartwarming speech and genuine delivery.

Houston Hospice appreciates the support of everyone who made the luncheon such a memorable event. A heartfelt thank you goes out to Butterfly Luncheon Chair Janet McKenzie and Honorary Chair Sarita Hixon.



1. Featured speaker Kaye Lani Rae Rafko-Wilson 2. Sue White, Adele Bentsen, Julie Griffin, Sally Rice 3. Dana Parkey, Robin Burke, Wendy Dalton 4. Board Chair Joyce Salhoot, President & CEO Rana McClelland, Board Vice Chair Al Gatmaitan and Nancy Gatmaitan 5. The Hospice Care team, from left to right: Kami Styron, BSN, RN, IPU Patient Care Manager; Jayne O'Brien, MSN, RN, VP of Patient Services; Arlene Coffman, RN, LBSW, CCM, Director of Clinical Services; Karla Blanton, RN, BSN, Patient Care Manager, Butterfly/Blue Team; Julie Woodward, RN, Butterfly Team; Jason Fernandez, MA, LMSW, Social Worker 6. Maxine De La Cruz, MD and Shalini Dalal, MD



## Make this year's Memorial Day, May 30, 2022 more memorable!

Memorial Day is a time to remember the men and women who have died while serving in the United States military. We recognize the importance of our beloved veterans who fought for and died for this country. That's why we believe our still-living veterans should be treated and cared for with the utmost compassion, respect, and dignity in remembrance of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice.

### HELP SUPPORT OUR VETERANS:

- Fly the U.S. Flag
- Visit a Veterans Hospital
- Recruit Veteran volunteers to support our program
- Refer Veterans to us when in need of quality hospice care
- Introduce us to Veterans programs and events in the community
- Donate to help us honor veteran hospice patients



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW HOUSTON HOSPICE CARES FOR VETERANS THROUGH OUR **WE HONOR VETERANS HOSPICE CARE PROGRAM**, CALL US AT 713-468-2441 OR SCAN THE QR CODE.

## A VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENT REFRESH



Lanise Harris is Houston Hospice's new volunteer manager.

Lanise Harris is Houston Hospice's new volunteer manager. The St. Petersburg, Florida native brings 10 years of experience to the role. Since joining Houston Hospice, Lanise has had her hands full. She coordinated events for Volunteer Appreciation Week, implemented new volunteer tracking systems, and organized a newly transformed volunteer space in Holcombe House.

Most importantly, she managed the re-introduction of volunteers back to the bedsides of patients in the Inpatient Unit and at home—something that has not been possible since the onset of the pandemic.

"I am grateful to join a team of hospice professionals dedicated to patient care," said Lanise. "Together, we will provide love and support to those at the end of their life," she continued.

Houston Hospice volunteers play an instrumental role in providing compassionate end-of-life care. Whether they are running errands for families, sitting with patients so caregivers can take a break or providing special services like pet or music therapy, they make the hospice care team complete and bring

families the added value they have come to expect of Houston Hospice.

Now that COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, the team is reaching out to recruit new volunteers.

"Our core volunteers are very cohesive and like to share their love of hospice care volunteering with others," said Lanise. "We hope to encourage more community members to join our volunteer team and help us meet our goals of serving more patients and families in more communities," she continued.

If you have the time and the desire to help our patients make the most of their final days, visit [houstonhospice.org/volunteers](https://houstonhospice.org/volunteers) to complete an application and sign up for our next training session.

## Houston Hospice Celebrates DR. STRAUCH'S 30 YEAR ANNIVERSARY



Houston Hospice would like to extend its heartfelt gratitude to Elizabeth Strauch, MD, FACP, FAAHPM, Medical Director, and Vice President of Medical Affairs for her compassion and leadership during three-decades of service to hospice patients and families in our community. Dr. Strauch was kind enough to share her journey with us in an interview this Spring.

### HOUSTON HOSPICE:

#### Why did you become a physician?

**DR. STRAUCH:** When I was a toddler, my favorite toy was my little doctor bag; if someone gave me a doll, it ended up bandaged and in traction. I loved first aid supplies, especially

colorful, unusual bandaids. As a teen I took over first aid responsibilities for my 4 siblings and advised my mother on health and remedies. I loved solving the puzzles of illness and injury and making people feel better.

#### HH: Why did you choose hospice? What brought you to Houston Hospice?

**DS:** I was introduced to the hospice concept early in medical school, and I had wonderful mentors, including Dr. David Mumford, who was a board member for the Hospice at the Texas Medical Center, and Dr. Rush Lynch, my Oncology professor at Baylor College of Medicine. They provided learning opportunities and helped me discover my passion for easing the suffering of the terminally ill. I loved managing difficult symptoms on the Oncology wards, and I enjoyed collaborating with nurses, social workers and chaplains to provide psychosocial and spiritual comfort. After completing my Internal Medicine residency, I was offered the privilege of becoming the first Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellow in a joint program offered by M D Anderson Cancer Center and The Hospice at the Texas Medical Center. I accepted a position as Hospice Team Physician

after I completed the Fellowship in 1992, and I became Medical Director in 2000. Our organization's name changed to Houston Hospice during a merger in 2002.

#### HH: Share a story that helped you realize that you found your calling?

**DS:** As a resident on the VA Oncology Ward, I was assigned a patient with terminal liver cancer, who was near death and in terrible pain. Using my newly learned skills I was able to get him comfortable and bring his wife in to say goodbye and hold his hand as he died. Afterwards, she turned to me, still holding his hand, smiling broadly through her tears, and said "I saw him right into heaven!" That's the moment I knew I had to find a way to base my career on this work.

#### HH: What did you learn over the past 30 years?

**DS:** Over the past 30 years, I have watched hospice grow from a grass-roots movement to an official medical subspecialty. I have seen regulatory changes, mergers, changes in leadership, advances in treatment, but one thing remains the same: everyone eventually faces the end of life; they and their loved ones can benefit from the specialized care and support

hospice provides.

#### HH: What advice would you give to yourself 30 years ago?

**DS:** "You have made a wise career choice. Relax, take time to enjoy your work, and in bad times remember that change is always just around the corner."

#### HH: What do you hope to achieve in the future at Houston Hospice?

**DS:** I hope to lay a foundation for strong future medical leadership and to live up to our reputation for excellence. I hope to expand treatments and services to best meet the needs of our community, and I will strive to uphold our mission to provide uncompromising, compassionate, end-of-life care.

#### HH: What do you do for fun?

**DS:** I enjoy reading, cooking, gardening, nature walks, ballet, our museums and local arts scene, supporting animal welfare, visiting with friends, and spending as much time as possible with my adorable husband. And I still enjoy collecting unusual bandaids.

#### HH: Do you have anything more to share?

**DS:** My thanks to Houston Hospice for an amazing 30 years!

## 2022 VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR – JUDY CALABRIA



### CALABRIA FAMILY IN HOSPICE

Judy Calabria's parents were both admitted to hospice many years apart when they lived in Ohio.

The hospice organization was wonderful and took very good care of her mother and father, keeping them comfortable at the family home and when her father moved into a care facility.

Once Judy felt ready to give back, she asked hospice staff to suggest a hospice in Houston to pursue volunteer opportunities. They suggested that she look for a nonprofit hospice, with a certain accreditation, amongst other suggestions. Houston Hospice had all the checkmarks suggested, so Judy applied to be a volunteer. And she has been 'happily ever after' since then.

### FROM COFFEE CUPS TO CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Judy began volunteering in 2009, spending Friday afternoons in the Inpatient Unit (IPU). She visited patients and families, re-supplied the snack bar areas with coffee, snacks, and cups. She also re-supplied the shower stall shelves with toiletries and arranged donated flowers into vases to spread around the IPU. Wherever help was needed, Judy was there.

One holiday season, Judy was asked to sing Christmas carols, accompanied by a CD player, to a young patient. Although Judy loves Christmas carols, she admittedly cannot sing, especially in public. However, the more she sang to her restless patient, the calmer he became. It was spiritually fulfilling for Judy to watch, and it filled her heart with peace. That afternoon, she sang to him for 3-4 hours until the next volunteer arrived. Judy was there to comfort the patient, but the unexpected experience also comforted her.

## THE MORE YOU KNOW, THE MORE YOU GROW

Judy worked in IT for the past 32 ½ years and knew her way around spreadsheets, email, and data. Naturally, she agreed to share her skills in the office to fill in for another volunteer. Her Friday afternoons were now filled with forms, data, and perfecting processes. Her new volunteer training proved to be exactly what was needed and exactly at the right time.

Aida Matic, vice president of philanthropy & community engagement, expressed her gratitude for Judy's leadership skills and experience that helped to keep the volunteer department up and running during the recent administrative transition. With Judy's help, the offices were relocated, volunteers continued to serve, and a new volunteer manager, Lanise Harris, was on-boarded. It is because of the wealth of knowledge Judy received working at a multi-national oil company, her love of teaching, and her compassion for others, that Houston Hospice has named Judy Calabria the 2022 Volunteer of the Year.

## A NOTE OF GRATITUDE FROM VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR 2020

During the recent Volunteer Appreciation event, Rob Henderson said:

*Judy is the only person in Houston Hospice's history to be recognized as Volunteer of the Year more than once. She was the "glue" that kept us together during the management changes to the volunteer organization. And I am proud to share that Houston Hospice's volunteer organization was the only such group in the Texas Medical Center that has been continually active during the pandemic.*

When Judy was asked why she took on this responsibility, she simply replied: It was my love and respect for my Houston Hospice Volunteer Family that kept me going.