



# LOOKHOMeward

A publication for the supporters of Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta • Fall 2007

## Care for the Caregiver

# Respite Provides a Break When Alzheimer's Takes its Toll

Taking your young children to visit Zoo Atlanta and the Georgia Aquarium over Spring Break might be typical for some families, but for one Georgia father, family outings are a rare break in a life spent sandwiched between caring for his aging mother and his two young children, one of whom has special needs. Thanks to the Alzheimer's

Program at Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta, this family and 39 others received over 15,000 hours of specialized, compassionate care in 2006.

There are no funds available for Alzheimer's care from Medicare, Medicaid or private insurance, so this service is supported entirely by donor funds and by patient fees, which are paid on a sliding scale based on financial assessment. There is an ongoing wait list for services. The Alzheimer's Program at Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta combines skilled nursing care with psychological support and respite, to bolster not only patients but also their caregivers, during what is typically a difficult journey.

"The level of physical care that a patient may need progresses along with the disease," explains Sarah Wood, R.N., manager of Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta's Alzheimer's Program. "But the emotional and psychological stresses for the caregivers begins on the day of diagnosis."

The progression of Alzheimer's disease can make caring for a loved one particularly stressful, as memory fades and safety and security become a serious concern. However, many families are committed to

*(continued on page 4)*



*On October 6th, Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta will celebrate the 20th Anniversary Hospice Atlanta Gala.*

For many months, members of the gala committee have been preparing for what will be a memorable evening that recognizes the "Seasons of Life." See full story on page 8.

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# From the President



Mark Oshnock, President  
Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta

## Visiting Nurse Ranked in Top 12% Nationwide

I trust you had a wonderful summer and found some reprieve from Atlanta's heat wave! During the summer, we found some time to evaluate our performance year-to-date against competitors and our annual business plan. I am very pleased to share the following 2007 highlights:

- Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta continues to set the standard for quality home health care in Atlanta. *HealthInsight*, a Quality Improvement Organization, recently ranked us in the top 12% of home health companies nationwide and as the top comprehensive provider in metro Atlanta.
- Hospice Atlanta continues to be among patient satisfaction leaders according to national benchmarks. Our hospice team consistently scores very high in their efforts to help terminally-ill patients and their families manage stress and anxiety. This is a great testament to Hospice Atlanta's mission-driven work of providing outstanding end-of-life care.
- Our Care Management Services team has again been awarded new contracts with the Community Care Services Program (in partnership with the Atlanta Regional Commission) and with Fulton and DeKalb Counties to provide care management services to over 3,500 clients at risk for costly nursing home placement.
- We have successfully launched **Patient Connections**, our initiative to infuse technology into care delivery to improve patient outcomes, extend the caring reach of clinicians, enhance communication among the care delivery team and raise patient and family satisfaction. Thanks to the continued generosity and loyalty of our supporters, over \$730,000 has been raised since January for this critical three-year, \$3-million plan.
- Our loyal donor base continues to expand. Since January, over 100 individuals, foundations and corporations have contributed over \$1000 for the first time. Over 20% of these contributors are first-time major gift donors, donating over \$320,000 in support of our operations and our plans to continue improving services and facilities.

Our Alzheimer's Program is currently celebrating its 17th year of offering care and support to patients and their families in their homes. November is Alzheimer's month and we recognize the over 15,000 hours of compassionate care our team provides annually. We also salute the families who care for their loved ones affected by the disease and thank our supporters who enable us to extend this service to the community.

I hope you can join me and over 400 other Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta friends and supporters on October 6th at what promises to be a fun and inspirational 20th Anniversary Celebration of the Hospice Atlanta Gala!

Sincerely,

Mark Oshnock

# Touching Lives

## Staying Connected When Alzheimer's Steps In

A carrier pilot who studied first at Harvard University and then at the Naval Academy, Brad Daley was in what could be considered a dangerous occupation. He and his wife, Mary, talked many times about end-of-life decisions, and Brad was most adamant that he never go to a nursing home. His biggest fear was Alzheimer's disease.

"Unfortunately, that's what happened," says Mrs. Daley, of Brad's diagnosis. "I kept my commitment to care for him at home, but the care did begin to wear on me." Mrs. Daley remembers a trip to the doctor as the turning point.

"The doctor took one look at me and said he was more concerned for me than he was for Brad," she said. When the doctor offered to send a visiting nurse, she accepted. When the nurse from Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta arrived, she seconded the doctor's opinion that the care was too much, and asked if Mary had ever considered hospice care?

"Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta's hospice team was incredibly comforting," says Mrs. Daley. "The most important thing they did was to come every week and reassure me that I was doing all the right things. I had never experienced a death so intimately, and when Brad began to decline, I was afraid to leave his side for even a moment." The hospice nurse walked Mary through the stages of death and helped her anticipate the experience, giving her the time and space she needed to sit with Brad and hold his hand and talk.

The experience was one of grace and dignity; one that was a tribute to the life they shared for 58 years. Today, Mrs.

Daley enjoys the comfort of her five children, 14 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, who are scattered from Spartanburg to Seattle and everywhere in between. And, she also promotes an exercise video that she and her daughter, Lynn, created when Mr. Daley was diagnosed with

Alzheimer's disease. Below is an excerpt from an article that originally appeared in Columbia, South Carolina's newspaper, *The State*:

... when her husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, Mary Daley, 81, found herself in a situation common to many whose loved ones have Alzheimer's – getting to a point where there aren't many things they can do together.

"I was desperate for something I could do with Brad – something relational," Daley said. So in a bid to stay connected with her husband, with whom she has spent many hours puzzling out brainteasers and word games, she seized upon the idea to make an exercise and massage DVD they could use together.

Daley created YourXercise, billed as a prescription for Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers. In the DVD, the couple's 52-year-old daughter, Lynn, a personal trainer, demonstrates exercises that target major muscle groups. Nationally certified massage therapist Janie Richardson shows massage techniques.

"This is something that not only helps the patient, but also helps the caregiver feel that they are contributing to the well-being of the loved one, as well as doing something together again," said Jan Bequeath, president and CEO of the Georgia chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, who previewed Daley's DVD.



Mary and Brad Daley celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary.

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*Care for the Caregiver*

# Alzheimer's Respite Provides a Break

*(continued from front page)*

aring for their loved one at home. That's where Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta comes in.

"Providing not just medical care but also respite for family members and other caregivers is the backbone of our program," said Ms. Wood. "The physical and emotional demands of caring for someone 24 hours a day take their toll over what may be a 10 year period of time as the disease progresses. By giving the caregiver time for themselves, we are extending their ability to care for their loved one." Keeping patients from entering long term care institutions is the number one concern for most caregivers, and Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta structures its program to help meet that goal. Ongoing RN assessments also decrease hospitalizations for chronic conditions.

The family mentioned above was in a particularly stressful situation when they first contacted Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta. "The adult son was caring for his 83-year-old mother at home, along with his two young children," explains Ms. Wood. "When we first started, the patient was sleeping most days and nights with little or no activity." Within weeks, Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta was able to meet the client's physical and emotional needs while also providing respite care for the family. The client regained enough strength to rejoin her church community and to engage in meaningful conversation with friends and loved ones. With encouragement, she also became able to perform many of her daily tasks.

In addition to providing community-based care for

patients, Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta is partnering with Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health and Georgia's Division of Aging to decrease the disruptive behaviors in clients with dementia.

"Disruptive behaviors can range from unpleasantness to serious safety concerns," explains Ms. Wood. "And they are the

number one reason a family will look for institutional care."

The collaboration, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is called "Specialist Providers in Teams for Dementia Care (SPRINT-D)," and is based on a model of collaboration between care managers and service providing agencies, where family caregivers and home-care aides receive culturally-appropriate, skills-based training.

"Giving caregivers coping skills improves everyone's experience and quality of life," said Ms. Wood.

Another collaboration designed to strengthen the capacity of the family caregiver is in the works, and involves collaboration with the Georgia Department of Human Resources' Division of Aging Services and the University of Wisconsin.

"The premise of the project is that, as family members move into the caregiving role, that role begins to take precedence over all other former roles – spouse, adult child, etc.," Mrs. Wood explains. "Counseling caregivers to understand and cope with the role change can help alleviate much of the stress of caregiving, and keep their other roles in the family intact."



*Sarah Wood, RN, manager of Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta's Alzheimer's Program, visiting with patients in the program.*



*Wyven Draper (left) is able to stay in her home thanks to the care coordinated by Kathy George (right), a Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta case manager.*

## United Way Continues to Invest in Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta

Helping seniors and people with disabilities avoid institutional care is a goal that Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta shares with United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, who recently awarded Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta with a \$685,000 grant for its Home Health program.

“The United Way’s 2007-2008 Community Impact Fund is investing \$2.1 million in 43 Atlanta programs to help people with disabilities and senior citizens live independently; people who may otherwise be forced into institutional care,” said Mark Oshnock, president of Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta. “As one of the United Way’s largest grantees in metro Atlanta, we are receiving \$685,000, acknowledging the key role we play in providing this type of care in Metropolitan Atlanta.”

Mr. Oshnock went on to say that, “This is tremendous recognition for the work our team does to keep a

significant number of people in their homes and in their communities. In 2006, we served 14,614 through our Home Health program.”

In addition to providing compassionate, innovative and cost-effective skilled nursing, rehabilitation care and care management services, Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta must closely track a set of outcomes to be eligible for United Way funding.

“United Way has indicated to us that they believe our outcomes tracking systems can help them achieve their goal of not only measuring their community impact, but also learning where they can improve their efforts,” said Mr. Oshnock. “With this in mind, they established a set of expectations for grantees around conducting evaluations and reporting results. We were flattered when the United Way asked our organization to share the lessons we have learned with other grantees.”

*Hospice Atlanta Supports Growing Community Need*

## New Executive Director Myra Downs Brings 30 Years of Experience to the Job

**M**yra Downs joined Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta earlier this year as director of education and staff development but, according to Mark Oshnock, president, it was quickly apparent that her 30 years of experience as an administrator, clinician and educator would be better applied at Hospice Atlanta. In addition to faculty positions at Georgia State and Emory Universities, Ms. Downs' experience includes development and management of multiple hospice programs in Alabama and Georgia. She served as an accreditation site visitor for home health and hospice programs throughout the country and she has been an author and speaker on the topic for many years. "Hospice Atlanta is the perfect place for the next "swan song" of my career... always good to end on a high note!" smiles Mrs. Downs.

"Hospice Atlanta was the first hospice in this area and consequently pioneered end of life care in our community," explains Ms. Downs. "There is an ever present and growing need for quality hospice care in Atlanta. The compassion of our community, combined with the advances in technology and care practices, means that we are well positioned to continue to meet the growing need for quality hospice care."

According to Ms. Downs, the community expectation for quality care is chief among the opportunities facing Hospice Atlanta in the coming years.

"Our consumers are educated and expect the highest level of care and to that end, Hospice Atlanta continues to closely monitor the care given by the staff in both the Center and the home program," said Ms. Downs. "We know that those involved in the process of dying have a variety of physical, spiritual, emotional and social needs."

That's why the Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta team of caregivers includes a full time medical director, board certified in hospice and palliative care. Dr. Linda Britton has dedicated her practice to providing the professional medical care and sophisti-



*Myra Downs, MSN, RN – Hospice Atlanta's Executive Director*

cated symptom relief needed by hospice patients.

"Because of our stellar reputation in the community, we are able to attract experienced, committed staff of all disciplines who provide personalized services based on the patient's wishes and the family's needs," said Ms. Downs. "Our staff realizes that the nature of dying is unique so the goal of the hospice team is to be sensitive and responsive to the special requirements of each individual and family."

Hospice Atlanta also strives to anticipate the rapidly changing needs of our community and to develop new services and processes to meet those needs.

"Technology and communication are paramount to the success of a community based program; consequently, Hospice Atlanta will benefit from *Patient Connections*, a new suite of technological tools that enhance the caregiving team's ability to spend more time delivering care to patients, spending less time on paperwork," said Ms. Downs. Having the ability to communicate electronically across the various departments will not only aid in

staff communication, but will make transfers, care planning, and a comprehensive approach to care more easily attainable.

"Hands on care" is what we are privileged to provide, and the more time our team can devote to the patients and less time they are tied to documentation the better the outcomes will be," explained Ms. Downs.

As the new technology is installed at the Hospice Atlanta Center, facility structural changes will be made to efficiently accommodate the new processes. For example, nurse's stations are being redesigned to provide the necessary workspace for the different approach to documentation.

"The dedication of our staff to the program and the intense effort they give their jobs are greater than one finds in most other organizations," said Ms. Downs. "It is our goal to continue to provide superior service through an uncompromising determination to achieve excellence in everything we undertake. Deep gratitude and commitment are the order of the day for those of us who are called to assist in the challenge of providing hospice care."

(Look for more information on the improvements at Hospice Atlanta in future issues of *Look Homeward*.)



## Notes from the Field: Linda Britton, M.D.

*Dignity, Choice, and  
Elizabeth Barrett  
Browning*

We come from a generation that may never have seen a doctor in our homes, but to Linda Britton, M.D., medical director of Hospice Atlanta, home visits are not just a part of her job, they are a privilege.

“People are so gracious when you come into their homes,” said Dr. Britton. “Recently, an elderly patient recited a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning to me. It was amazing.”

After an early career as a ‘hospitalist’ at Piedmont Hospital – physicians whose focus is hospital medicine – Dr. Britton went into private practice in internal medicine. But early experiences where patients and families struggled around end-of-life situations stayed with her.

“Families would bring in an elderly loved one, suffering from end-stage dementia, and feel that they needed to pursue aggressive intervention,” explains Dr. Britton. “When I explained that they had choices, and that one choice was to simply make a patient comfortable, the relief was palpable.” For the last four years, Dr. Britton divided her time between her internal medicine practice at Piedmont, and Hospice Atlanta.

Quality of life is paramount to Dr. Britton, who now spends her days visiting with terminally-ill patients and their families in patient homes or in the 36-bed inpatient Hospice Atlanta Center. At any given time, Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta cares for 150 patients in its hospice program. Every week, Dr. Britton meets with the hospice team which includes nurses, medical social workers and chaplains, discussing every patient, their wishes, their choices, and most importantly, their right to die with dignity.

“Just because we can intervene medically, does not mean we always should,” explains Dr. Britton. “If our intervention doesn’t allow quality of life, we owe it to our patients to provide alternatives.”

To that end, Dr. Britton coordinates care with the referring physicians, and develops treatment plans for symptom control and pain management. She is one of only 32 physicians in Georgia accredited by the American Board of Hospice and Palliative Medicine.

## When Alzheimer’s Steps In

*(continued from page 3)*

The DVD does not have models doing high-energy, high-repetition exercises and keeping time with throbbing disco music. It’s just Lynn sitting in a chair showing you what to do.

“I wanted it to look as if a personal trainer were coming to your home and talking to you and telling you how to do the exercise – and that’s what we got,” Daley said.

Initially, Brad could read, hold a conversation and understand what he saw on television. But through the years his mental function declined, his behavior became erratic, and he was confined to the couple’s home. Mary cared for her husband daily, with the help of hospice workers and nurses.

“You don’t know how many things you have to overcome,” she said. “You give up your life, overcome depression, learn nursing skills – but the big thing is you lose your companion.” YourXercise helped her regain some of the companionship.

Lynn, the daughter in California who has been a personal trainer for 12 years, happily took on the challenge of coming up with exercises for the DVD.

“I did this out of love,” she said. “It wasn’t an economic venture for me. It was out of love for my parents.” Another daughter, Ann, did the voice-over for the DVD. She speaks instructions slowly and repetitively to help patients understand what she is saying.

The Daleys did the DVD exercises for about 15 minutes in the mornings or afternoons. When Mary tried to help Brad with some of the moves, he would say, “Don’t help me. I can do it.”

Mary was heartened, especially when a neurologist told her it mattered more that her husband was paying attention and trying, rather than getting everything right.

Eventually, Brad became bed-ridden and could no longer do the exercises. He passed away on May 18, and the family held a small ceremony in his memory.

Mary hopes the project she shared with Brad will help other patients and caregivers. She has already touched the lives of many people whose paths crossed hers through the DVD. “That woman is such an inspiration,” said Richardson, the massage therapist, who did not know the Daleys before working on the project. “Her love and devotion will bring you to tears.”

# Advancement Roundup

2007 Gala leaders enjoying an outing at St. John Boutique at Lenox Square. Host Committee Chair Elizabeth Spiegel, Publicity Chair Joanne Chesler Gross, Junior Party Co-Chair Sherry Ranck, Gala Chair Judy Schmidt, Southern Seasons Social Editor Betty Hollister and Eula Carlos, Gala Advisory Committee and Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta Board member.



## Fall Gala Marks 20th Anniversary with *Seasons of Life*

The 20th Annual Hospice Atlanta Gala, scheduled for October 6th at the Piedmont Driving Club, will feature a black-tie dinner party, dancing with Class Act Band, a festive Junior Party and Atlanta's finest silent auction. And, at the end of the evening, one guest will go home with a little sparkle in their step, thanks to the new Diamonds and Champagne raffle.

In a poignant and festive tribute to the families whose loved ones have been cared for

by Hospice Atlanta, the 2007 Gala features a "Seasons of Life" theme. Gala Chair Judy Schmidt and her committee have been working hard to create a memorable celebration. Honors for the evening go to a long-time board member and volunteer with more than 30 years of service to Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta, Dot Cohen. Transforming the Piedmont Driving Club ballroom into an elegant and memorable evening is once again in the capable hands of Atlanta event designer

Tony Brewer. *Southern Seasons Magazine* is proud to be the media sponsor of this year's event.

Thanks to the tremendous dedication and hard work of the executive team of Genuine Parts Company, the Gala is welcoming more corporate support than ever before. Thomas Gallagher, Chairman, CEO and President of Genuine Parts Company is serving as the Gala Corporate Chair and his Genuine Parts team members include Jerry Nix, Frank Howard and Bruce Clayton.

Patrons of the Hospice Atlanta Gala enjoyed a pre-party in honor of the 20th Anniversary Gala. On September 11, over 80 patrons of the Gala enjoyed a festive evening at the beautiful new offices of venerable Atlanta law firm of King & Spalding.

The annual Hospice Atlanta Gala raises funds to support the compassionate and specialized end-of-life care provided to Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta's patients and their families in their homes and in The Andrew and Eula Carlos Hospice Atlanta Center. In 2006, more than 1,000 patients benefited from the medical, emotional and spiritual support provided by Georgia's most experienced and largest nonprofit hospice organization.

Tickets for the Hospice Atlanta Gala are \$250 per person for the Gala and \$100 for the Junior Party. For more information on the Hospice Atlanta Gala or Junior Party, please contact Laurie Nappier, Advancement Specialist, at 770-936-1172 or [Laurie\\_Nappier@vnhs.org](mailto:Laurie_Nappier@vnhs.org).



## *Through the Years:* Dot Cohen's Legacy of Community Service

She's a licensed marriage and family therapist and mediator, with a degree in professional counseling.

In other words, Dot Cohen is a woman you can go to, and Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta has, again and again over the past 30 years. In honor of her selfless service to the organization, Dot is being recognized as the Honorary Chair of the 2007 Hospice Atlanta Gala.

"Dot combines her personal passion for people with a helping profession," said Mark Oshnock, president of Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta. "Our organization is just one of many in the community who have been touched by her dedication and compassion." Mrs. Cohen's history of community service includes not only her 30 years of service to Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta (20 as a board member), but also service to many community groups that share the organization's commitment to family empowerment and community based health care.

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### **Bubbles and Bling**

*The 2007 Hospice Atlanta Gala will also feature a fun and fabulous new event, the Diamonds and Champagne raffle. Five champagne flutes will be on display at the Gala, each featuring a full pour of bubbly AND a stone – either a diamond or a cubic zirconium. Guests will have the chance to purchase a ticket and a guess as to which of the five glasses holds the diamond. Excitement will mount until the close of the evening, when one name will be drawn for each glass. One at a time, winning guests will have a chance to drink from the flute they have chosen, while Atlanta jeweler (and diamond donor) Bob Knox looks on. Only one will win the diamond, but the other four winners will also keep their high quality stones. Tickets will be available at the Patron Party and during the Gala, for \$50 each or five tickets for \$200.*

# Advancement Roundup



Fall Gala

*Seasons of  
Life*

## 2007 Gala Leadership

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## In the News

Clinicians with  
Compassionate  
Hearts

Statistics show that the African-American and Hispanic/Latino communities have a higher risk for cardiovascular disease than Caucasians and are less aware of their cardiovascular risk factors. The American Heart Association is working hard to address this disparity through a faith-based program called “**Search Your Heart.**”

Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta clinicians Rose Foster, RN and Mary Thrash, HHA proudly accepted the responsibility of implementing "Search Your Heart" within their respective churches, Mt. Tabor Baptist Church and Lamb of God Missionary Baptist Church. Through a grant, Rose and Mary brought two of the program modules to their communities - modules that provided professional health screening and taught participants about stress management.

Thank you, Rose and Mary, for ensuring that others in the community are heart healthy. We recognize your caring and compassionate hearts.

# Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta Supporters

Please note the layout of the donor list. We feel it is important to list not only the donors but also those who have received gifts in their honor or memory. Many thanks to the generous contributors who support Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta. We apologize for any omission or errors in this listing. Please call (770) 936-1170 to make us aware of any problems. Thank you.

May, 2007 - July 31, 2007

In Memory of

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*Camp STARS  
for Children  
Planned for  
November 2-4*



*"I enjoyed camp.  
The group sessions helped me  
understand more about death  
and that it is normal for people  
to be sad and shocked for a  
while." - Camper*

*This year's Camp STARS for  
Children will take place November 2-  
4 at Camp Twin Lakes in Rutledge, Georgia.  
Camp STARS for Children, founded in 1994, is  
a bereavement camp designed to help children understand that  
they are not alone and that their feelings of loss are normal.  
Children have an opportunity to meet others in similar  
situations and grieve in a safe environment.  
The three-day camp offers activities such as field sports, arts  
and crafts, games, entertainment, fishing and boating. Children*

*of similar ages are placed in cabins under  
the leadership of experienced counselors. A spe-  
cial service of remembrance gives each child a  
creative way of remembering his or her loved  
one. Registration is currently open for November's Camp  
STARS for Children. Space is limited.  
If you know of a child between the ages of 7 and 17 who  
has suffered a loss through death and could benefit from Camp  
STARS, please contact Barbara Moore at 404-869-3086.*



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***Look Homeward***

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