

FACES OF WELLNESS

Cancer can have many faces, from a young woman with colon cancer to a middle-aged man with breast cancer.

But the faces in this pictorial are faces of wellness — people with cancer and their loved ones who have found hope at Wellness House in Hinsdale and those who have helped them, from a volunteer to an oncologist and a host of people in between.

Not everyone who receives a cancer diagnosis recovers physically, Jeannie Cella, executive director, points out. But Wellness House can help those diagnosed and their families experience emotional and spiritual recovery.

Just look at these faces and see the difference Wellness House is making.

— stories by Polly Rix and Pamela Lannom, photography by Jim Slonoff

— *Making a Difference is a yearlong partnership between The Hinsdalean and Wellness House to increase awareness about the organization, which works to encourage, educate and emotionally support people working to overcome the effects of cancer.*

Making a Difference



Rob Wallin, breast cancer survivor

What does Wellness House mean to Rob Wallin?

“It was my shelter in the storm, especially when I was first diagnosed,” the Hinsdale-born cancer survivor said.

He has taken advantage of a variety of classes.

The Mind Stress program has offered

him a lot — “I keep taking it over and over.”

“The course On the Mend was a great one,” he added. “It was a great guide. Plus I was surrounded by many folks in the same situation as I was in. That gave me a lot of power.”

But Wallin — who was born with physical birth defects — already has dealt with

so much.

“With all the challenges I had growing up, this didn’t add up to much.”

Then again, Wallin’s attitude is about as positive as one can be.

“Some people know the exact hour or the exact minute they were diagnosed,” he said. “But it’s not important. I’m too busy looking ahead.”



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Tracy Anderson, board member

Talking about Wellness House is deeply emotional for Tracy Anderson, who had no idea her involvement with Hinsdale Junior Women's Club would lead her there.

But it did, and today she serves as a board member. "Every two years the Hinsdale Juniors pick a different philanthropy," the Hinsdale mom said. "The year we voted for Wellness House was the same year that my oldest son's teacher passed away from cancer." At the memorial for The Lane School teacher Natalie Klusak, her husband talked about what a wonderful resource Wellness House was for Natalie and their family.

It was then that Anderson knew she wanted to remain involved with Wellness House.

"I see it as a place where you can let down. All these people going through cancer have to be brave for those around them. Here they feel comfortable and can talk about their real feelings."

Marta Quist, therapist

Marta Quist believes strongly in Wellness House's holistic approach to treating cancer patients and their loved ones.

This is why Quist, a program associate and marriage and family therapist, joined the staff in January 2007.

"I really thought this place was special — all the things they provide, taking care of the person — the physical, the nutrition and stress reduction."

Quist, who leads a variety of support and bereavement groups, uses art, music and words to help those touched by cancer express their feelings.

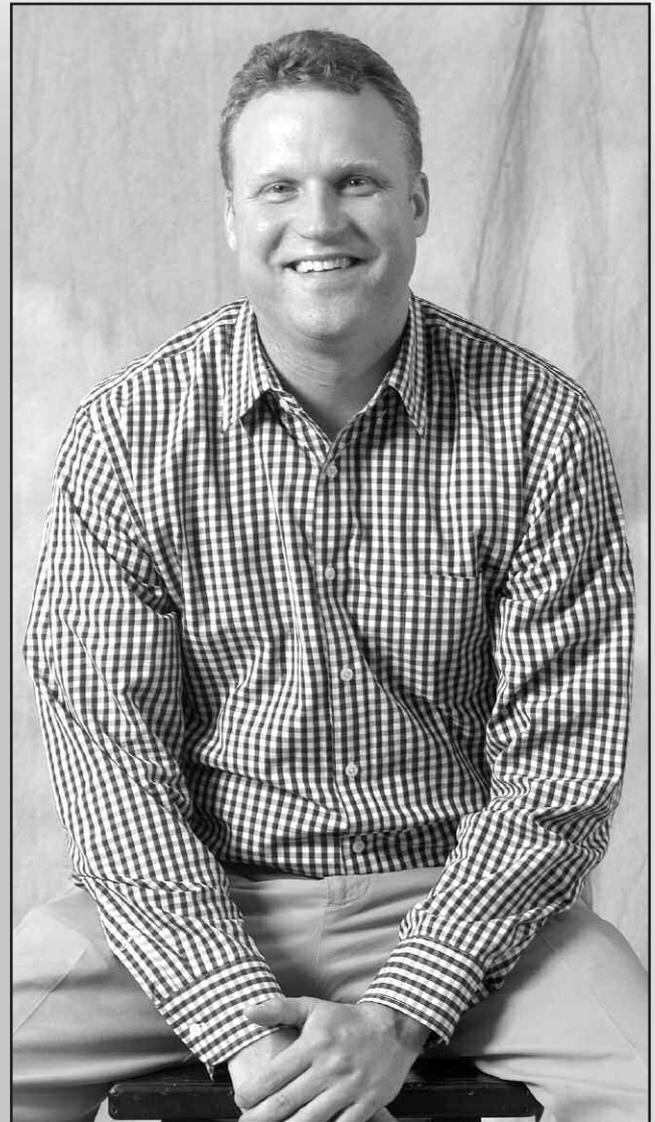
She also appreciates working at a place where there are so many wonderful people who are helpful and caring.

"I see things different now. My reactions to people have changed a little bit," she said, reflecting on her work environment.

"The people I've met here have taught me: live your life, appreciate every moment, live one day at a time."



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Dave, Charlotte and Celia Chorzempa, participants

Almost every week, Dave Chorzempa and his daughters, Charlotte and Celia, spend an evening at Wellness House.

The girls, 7 and 5, meet with other kids in Turtles, a bereavement group for children. Meanwhile Dave shares his feelings about losing his wife in a support group meeting for adults.

Chorzempa learned about Wellness House from a counselor at Charlotte's school after Carrie, 38, died of colon cancer a little more than a year ago. The weekly meetings have been good for all of them, he said.

"You have a lot of feelings of anger or other feelings you may be

embarrassed about," Chorzempa said, mentioning feelings of inadequacy. People in the group feel the same way and understand.

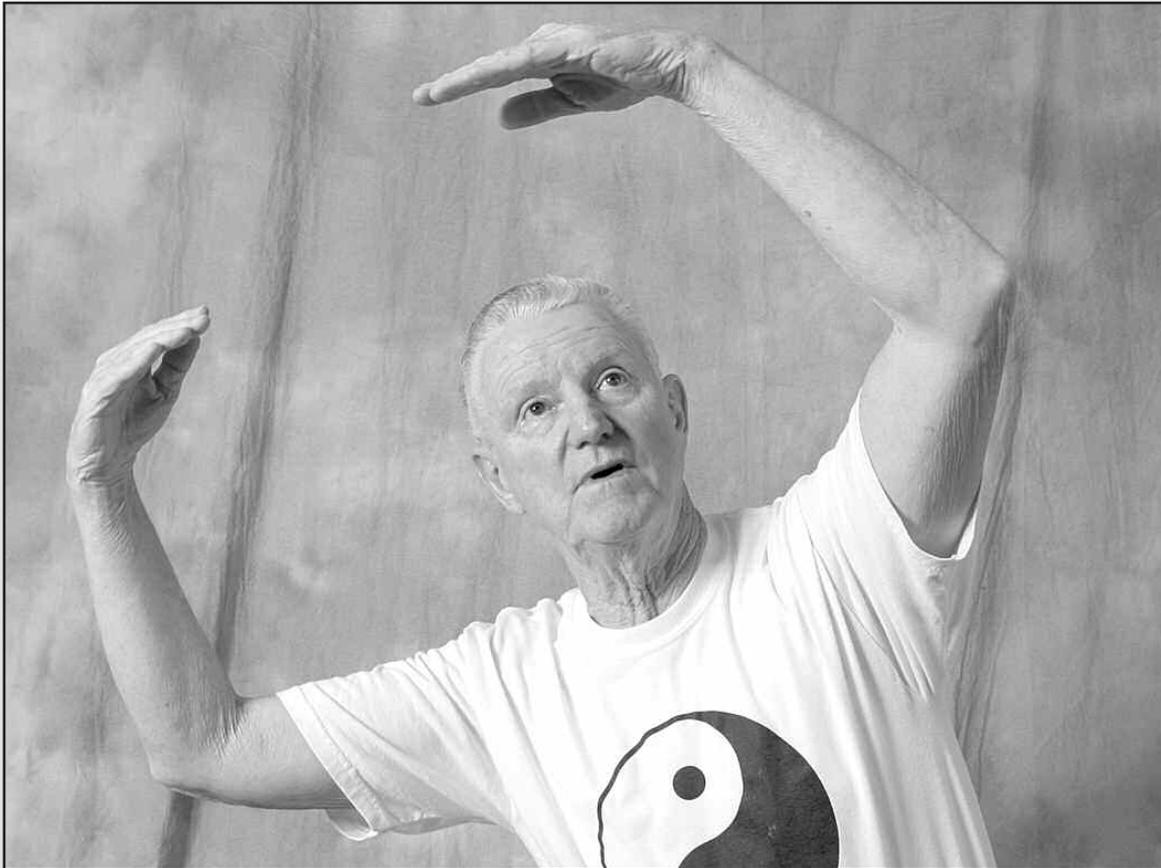
Charlotte will remember how prepared her mother always was and Celia thinks about how she always helped them. They can talk about these things in Turtles, and meeting with other kids who've lost a parent helps them realize they're not alone, their dad said.

Being a single parent is challenging but not as hard as learning to live without the friendship of the woman to whom he was married for almost 10 years. But his children help him every day.

"I couldn't get through it without them," he said. "They make you laugh and put you in your place."



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Frank Wells, volunteer

Frank Wells learned qigong 25 years ago, never imagining he would one day teach the healing art to Wellness House participants.

“It’s medical qigong where you move your own energy,” he said.

Although his students have all had a cancer diagnosis, they bring wonderful energy to class.

“When you’ve been playing around with energy for years, you get to feel good and bad, and the energy in the house is so good,” the Darien resident said.

A former Marine who worked for IBM for 30 years, Wells also teaches tai chi chuan and mindful meditation. He’s also happy to help shovel snow or sweep the floor — whatever is needed to help out.

“Anything you do in the present providing a service will make up for past bad karma,” he said. “I know it’s the old cliché, but you get back more than you give.”

Gayle Perzek, volunteer

Being a welcoming face or friendly voice on the phone makes Gayle Perzek feel good about the work she does at Wellness House.

Perzek of Hinsdale came to Wellness House two years ago. She had been looking for a volunteer job that was meaningful.

“I wanted something that had patient contact. Wellness House gave me that opportunity. I enjoy coming here. It’s a welcoming place.”

Perzek also shares her passion for looking good, leading the Look Good Feel Good program that the American Cancer Society sponsors. During class they offer tips about hair and makeup.

“I love to oil paint, so it was a natural for me.”

She hopes that she passes on some hope, also.

“My mom is a 28-year breast cancer survivor. When she was diagnosed they basically gave my mom a year.

“People ask, ‘Are you a cancer survivor?’ I say, ‘No, but my mother is.’”



Karen Kinahan, pediatric oncology nurse

Pediatric oncology nurse Karen Kinahan of Hinsdale knows the value of support when it comes to a diagnosis such as cancer.

Kinahan coordinates the S.T.A.R.

(Survivors Taking Action and Responsibility) coordination program for adults who have survived childhood cancer at Northwestern Medical Center in Chicago. The program follows survivors through adulthood focusing on their special medical and psychological needs.

Services are provided in a clinical setting with an emphasis on patient care, education and research.

Kinahan admires Marnie McHale and all those who have built Wellness House.

“From a local perspective I’ve referred people here for support — support for the patient and their family,” she said.

And she shows her support by participating in the annual Walk for Wellness each fall, hoping community members become aware of the resource they have in their back yard.

“I don’t think you know it until you use it,” she said.



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Charlotte Mehuron, breast cancer survivor

Charlotte Mehuron smiled big. “This is cancer hair,” she said as she scrunched her short, curly pewter gray hair with her hand.

“I love it.”

Her hair grew back with a completely different color, style and texture after she completed chemotherapy for breast cancer.

Three years ago Mehuron moved from Virginia to Hinsdale — where she is closer to her grown children. In August 2007 her breast cancer was diagnosed.

“My daughter-in-law brought me over here,” she said of Wellness House. “It is a wonderful resource. People come from all over to get here.”

The Women in Treatment sessions were of the greatest personal benefit.

“It was the most wonderful part of my treatment,” she said. “We all would come together each week. We supported each other and learned from each other. It was a place we felt we could bare our soul — and I miss it.”



Dr. Donald Sweet, oncologist

When hematologist and oncologist Dr. Don Sweet delivers a cancer diagnosis, he always talks about Wellness House.

“This whole concept started about 20 years ago. It was tailored after a concept that began in Santa Monica, Calif.”

“I was the only physician they got to buy into it,” he said.

Then builder Phil Dressler donated the materials and labor that built the house at 131 S. County Line Road.

“It’s remarkable development from when we started in 1989-90,” he said.

As the concept was developed, so were the programs. “What was neat about the Wellness House, the people running it always wanted it to be something more.

“It’s been a support program that’s evolved continuously. The people who run it are fantastic, honorable human beings — dedicated, enthusiastic and passionate.”

Wellness House is a special place for all who enter. “The patient gets special attention. The spouses get special attention. The children get special attention.”

