

# BRINGING grace TO EVERY goodbye

SPRING/SUMMER 2026 NEWSLETTER

The HOSPICE of East Texas

## “Where flowers bloom, so does hope.”



Kaela with her Dad



While simple, this beautiful quote from Lady Bird Johnson served as our inspiration for this year's Hope Blooms event. Lady Bird believed flowers symbolize resilience. Wildflowers return year after year – even after drought, storms and neglect.

Described as gentle but strong, soft-spoken but influential, graceful but determined, Lady Bird's approach mirrors The Hospice of East Texas beautifully. Not loud. Not flashy. But profoundly impactful!

In the context of hospice, these metaphors are especially powerful. Even in seasons of loss, something meaningful can still bloom – perhaps gratitude, reconciliation, love, legacy. Flowers don't shout – they bloom quietly and flourish with love. Hospice doesn't try to stop the inevitable – it dignifies life. Before we get to the rainbow, I need to share the rain.

In early 2010, my daughter's father (and my husband at the time) was diagnosed with stage-four glioblastoma, an aggressive brain cancer. Kaela was about three years old,

and I was a 32-year-old working mother.

Her dad was blessed with an exceptional medical team. He lived for five years after his diagnosis, which was three years longer than the doctors expected. When he passed away, Kaela was eight years old.

My child's only memories of her father are memories of daddy being sick. Let that sink in.

She describes pills lined up on the kitchen counter. Cold hospital rooms.

Eating pizza - a lot.

Experimental treatments that changed how he looked and smelled to her.

And of loving someone who was always trying to get better – but never quite could.

When Kaela's dad passed away, I was still grieving the loss of my own mother, dealing with a depressed father who I had

*Continued on page 2*

Continued from front page

always known to be loving and strong. For five years, I had watched my child's father become somewhat disfigured and experience a personality change due to the location of his brain tumor. My marriage of ten years ended in divorce in the middle of it all. It was everything I could do to get up each day. But I was determined to focus on my child.

I did what many parents do. I asked for advice. I read books. I talked to a counselor – or two. I prayed. I learned quickly that children grieve differently than adults.

About halfway into the illness, my daughter's Pre K teacher called me out of love and concern. She was sharing that during playtime, several of the girls were playing house with baby dolls – and Kaela was pretending her doll had a rock in its head. Because her daddy had explained his cancer to her as a “rock in his head.”

Like everyone, I've had my share of grief, but I consider myself incredibly fortunate. I was blessed that I had resources to

and handwritten thoughts that mattered to her.

They also shared in a balloon release. The children were taught it's okay to cry. It is okay to miss your person. And the balloons served as a visual – of letting go, just a little, when and if they are ready.

When I picked her up that Saturday afternoon, I watched the children outside before the program ended. They were running, they were laughing, they were just being kids!

And, when she got in the car, Kaela looked at me and said something I'll never forget...

She said, “Mawma, I'm not the only one.” Thanks to The Hospice of East Texas and the WINGS program, she no longer felt alone in her tender, young grief. That's what WINGS does. It doesn't rush grief. It doesn't minimize it.

It gives children permission to feel – and reassurance that they are not alone!

Today, I stand before you as a mother who has felt lost and now profoundly grateful for a nonprofit that showed up for my



Johnna Fullen, 4th from left, with the Hope Blooms Committee

*WINGS is an initiative of The Hospice of East Texas and its bereavement program.*

*The program exists to meet children exactly where they are. It gives them language for emotions they don't yet have words for. It gives them space to express grief in ways that feel safe and natural.*

get my daughter professional counseling. I had supportive family and friends walking alongside me.

Still, even with all this support, I remember feeling lonely, lost and overwhelmed. I remember sitting on the edge of my unmade bed thinking, I need help.

That is when The Hospice of East Texas and its WINGS program were introduced to me.

WINGS is an initiative of The Hospice of East Texas and its bereavement program. The program exists to meet children exactly where they are. It gives them language for emotions they don't yet have words for. It gives them space to express grief in ways that feel safe and natural.

My daughter participated in the WINGS program! For a full Saturday, she spent time with other children who had lost someone deeply rooted in their lives.

They didn't sit in chairs and talk like we adults do.

They created.

They played.

They learned.

One of the takeaways she created was a “Coping Box” – a memory box for her dad. Inside are drawings, small objects,

child. Today, Kaela is a 19-year-old college student, thriving at UT Austin.

“Where flowers bloom, so does hope.”

But flowers don't bloom by accident.

Someone prepares the soil.

Someone plants the seeds.

Someone waters faithfully – even when the beauty is not yet visible.

The Hospice of East Texas is that careful gardener in our community.

Flowers are more than decorations – they are declarations. Declarations that life continues. That beauty returns. That even after the harshest seasons, something tender can still rise from the soil. Hospice doesn't deny the season we are in – it honors it. It surrounds families with comfort, dignity and love. And in doing so, it allows hope to bloom!

.....  
Johnna Fullen served as the 2026 Hope Blooms Chair and courageously shared her personal hospice journey at our event in April. We are deeply grateful for her, for her committee, for our local Pop-Up Shop Vendors, for our generous sponsors, and for all who attended... making it a moment to treasure.

# Hope Blooms

AT THE HOSPICE OF EAST TEXAS

## Flowers of Gratitude for our Sponsors



### Rose

Austin Bank Vicki and John Crum Johnna Fullen\* Laurie Rossman Penny K. Stephens

### Orchid

Linda Armstrong

### Azalea

Sandie Propst Southside Bank  
Deborah Race\* Sharon and James Wynne

### Sunflower

Anonymous	R. W. Fair Foundation	Nancy Ireland
Darla Bennett	Mary Lauren and Bruce Faulkner*	Diane Lestor
Mr. and Mrs. Garnett Brookshire	Dr. Laura Ferguson and Mr. Travis Floyd	Ellen and John Musselman*
Herb Buie	Cindy Harper	Cathy Shipp & Associates Realty, LLC
Childress Wealth Management	Sally and Jack Harper	Virginia and Gene Shull
Sherry Dunn	Joanne and Steven Idell	Ted W. Walters

### Magnolia

Barbara Bass*	Kathryn Lake	Texas Bank and Trust
Rev. and Mrs. Wes Bynum	The Moellenbeck Family	Bonnie Tincher
Dowdell Consulting	Dr. Julie Philley and Richard Lee	Elizabeth Wright & Family
	Marjorie Ream and Dr. Steven Cohen	

### Camellia

B. Campbell	Nez Gross	Overhead Door Company of Tyler –
Collin Campbell	Cathy, Johnny and Stacey Hirt	Longview – Mt. Pleasant
Becky Chenevert	Dr. and Mrs. John Hudnall	Bonnie Palmer
Kris and Bobby Curtis	Toui King	Lynn Parnell
East Texas Communities Foundation	Becky and Mike Martin	Judy Sherman
Ashley and Aric Fettig		Agnes and Frank Ward

### In-Kind

Diamond Elite Barricades TYLER TODAY Magazine

Sponsors as of Print Deadline

\* Donor Advised Fund at East Texas Communities Foundation

**Event proceeds benefit the Bereavement Services of The Hospice of East Texas** which provide grief support to Hospice families and the community before, during, and after a goodbye. Services include grief counseling, a monthly children's support group, remembrance events, and specialized grief camps for children. These unique programs rely on private support and are offered free of charge to all who need them.

# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE **HOMEPLACE**



**A SNEAK PEEK  
AT PROGRESS...**



**UNDER  
CONSTRUCTION**  
We apologize for  
any inconvenience



Renovations began in earnest in the fall of 2025 to create new spaces within the building, in honor of Gary Penkilo and his loving legacy.

Lighted portals will transport patient families and friends into a welcoming, relaxing living environment that evokes all the feelings of **HOME** – spaces to relax, to laugh, to cry, to make decisions, to recharge, to reflect, to rest.

Thanks to the generosity of the event sponsors listed to the right, along with transformational gifts from **A. S. Genecov Foundation, A. W. Riter, Jr. Family Foundation, Bernard Foundation, R. W. Fair Foundation** and so many other families and friends, this project is fully funded and scheduled to be completed this summer.

Because everyone deserves compassion, dignity, respect... everyone deserves to feel at home.



# Thank You to Our HomePlace 25th Anniversary Sponsors

## Presenting Sponsors

Friends of Gary Penkilo  
Jasper Family Fund at ETCF *in memory of Jon Jasper*

## Stage Sponsors

Joanne Mewbourne, Ruth Buckley, Julie Greene *in memory of Curtis Mewbourne*

## Invitation Sponsor

The Reverend Wes and Betty Bynum *in honor of The HOET Bereavement Department*

## Jubilee Sponsors

Nikki and Hank Baker  
Dr. Wayne and Sandie Propst

Southside Bank  
Penny K. Stephens *in honor of The HOET Staff*

## Centerpiece Sponsor

Austin Bank

## Platinum Sponsors

PJ and Tom Beets  
Dr. Laura Ferguson and Mr. Travis Floyd  
Gollob Morgan Peddy  
Kathryn, Peter, and Peyton Lake *in memory of Ann Lake*  
Pam and Tracy Lisner

Mewbourne Oil Company *in memory of Curtis Mewbourne*  
Sandy Shepard  
A.E. Shull & Company  
Drs. Nancy and Marshall Windsor  
Sharon and James Wynne

## Gold Sponsors

Darla Bennett  
Derrith and Bob Bondurant  
Dr. Sunni Boren and Mr. Nathan Atkinson *in memory of Mr. Lee Atkinson*  
Christina and Garnett Brookshire  
Linda Broom and Trey Wasser  
Julie and Tom Brown *in memory of Barbara Love*  
Byers Family Foundation  
Beryl Cobb *in memory of Bill George*  
Sherry and Ken Dunn  
Mary Lauren and Bruce Faulkner *in memory of Martha Ann & Bub Lehnertz*  
Henry & Peters *in memory of Gary Penkilo*  
Tana and Francis Kay *in honor of Mr. & Mrs. Ted Welty*  
Marvin Methodist Church  
Carol and Jim Mazzu  
Nita and Byron Meads *in memory of Ila Hawkins*  
Merrill Lynch Wealth Management/Trey Lawson and Jordan Meads

Paddy and Tom Moore *in memory of C.L. Carr*  
Ellen and John Musselman  
Terri and David Nelson  
Dr. and Mrs. Andrew O'Kelley  
Deborah and Mark Race  
Marjorie Ream and Dr. Steven Cohen  
*in memory of Gary Penkilo*  
Laurie Rossman  
Cathy Shipp & Associates Realty, LLC  
Peggy and Preston Smith  
Jan Thedford  
Trinity Capital Management  
UT Health East Texas  
Glenn Ab Walters *in memory of Carol Dean Walters*  
Jamie and Ted Walters *in memory of Chesley Wynne Walters*  
Cecil and Bernie Ward

## Silver Sponsors

Jana and Barry Autry *in memory of Janelle Seabourne*  
DeeDee and John Bufe *in memory of Pat Oge*  
John D. Catlett  
East Texas Communities Foundation  
Charlene and Darrell Forster  
The GoGo Foundation *in memory of Margo Adams*  
Sharon Kay Howell and Kay Howell *in memory of Joe Howell*  
Charlotte and Tommy Hyde *in honor of Marjorie Ream*  
Mary Irwin

Beth Kee  
Maureen and Dave Leming  
Suzanne and Scott Myers  
Nelda Strong and Jim Wallace  
Bonnie Tinchler *in memory of Joe Tinchler*  
The University of Texas at Tyler  
Gigi and Brent Wadle *in memory of*  
*Dremma Throckmorton & Gennie Wadle*

## Bronze Sponsors

Vicki and Micheal Briggs  
Brenda and Dean Cagle *in memory of David Dykes*  
Kris and Bobby Curtis  
Kathryn and Bob Droder  
David Ellington *in memory of*  
*James E. Franklin, Mary Ellington & Cynthia Ellington*  
Cindy and Randy Kidwell  
Nancy and Bill Lamar *in memory of Georgianna & Richard Harris*  
Jeannine Luenser  
Doug McKay  
Laura and Artis Newsome

Nanci and Nick Pollard  
Stephenie and Randy Roberts  
Elizabeth and Paul Sharkey  
Jimmy Siler *in memory of Nancy K. Siler*  
Mary Lynn and Roger Smith  
Jill and Steve Spain  
Stewart Family Funeral Home *in memory of Johnnie & Martha Stewart*  
Rosemary and Andy Swann  
Texas Bank and Trust  
Nancy Ulrich  
Ginger and Paul Wick *in memory of D'Anna Wick*

## In-Kind Sponsors

TAABS Marketing Solutions TYLER TODAY Magazine

Sponsors as of print deadline



## A Message from Christi Baggett, CEO

It is an honor to introduce myself as the new Chief Executive Officer of Hospice of East Texas. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve this remarkable organization, as I have over the past 21 years – and the families who trust us during some of life's most tender moments.

I also want to offer my heartfelt thanks to Marji Ream for her years of dedication and steady leadership. Marji's compassion, vision, and commitment to excellence have helped shape who we are today. She has truly paved the way, and I am thankful to build upon the strong foundation she leaves behind.

To our donors, volunteers, community partners, and friends – thank you for your continued love and support. Your generosity makes it possible for us to provide comfort, dignity, and expert care to those we serve. Because of you, we are able to keep bringing grace to every goodbye.

As we step into this newest chapter, I invite you to continue on this journey with us. Together, we will honor our legacy, strengthen our services, and ensure that every family in East Texas receives the compassionate care they deserve.

*Christi Baggett*



Christi with Marji Ream

## 20 Years of Excellence

*It's more than just a number. It's a testament to resilience, growth, and countless memories forged in the workplace. We honored six remarkable women at our Annual Meeting in February, all of whom have served The Hospice of East Texas for 20 years.*

*Below are words of affirmation, from their colleagues, describing the unique gifts each of them brings to our sacred work. Congratulations and immense gratitude to these beautiful servants. They inspire us all with their steadfast and loving commitment to our patients, our people, and our purpose.*

### **Christi Baggett, President/CEO**

Within her role of operational responsibility, Christi has provided organizational transformation. Even amid financial challenges – in a competitive landscape – she applies keen emotional intelligence and exudes a spirit of optimism and grace.

### **Zeta Hall, CNA – HomePlace**

Zeta's larger-than-life personality, joyful smile and laugh light up any room. She has a twinkle in her eye and adds sparkle to everything she touches. Even her stethoscope is blinged out! Her 20-year service has given her a personal mission to create dignity and beauty in moments that might otherwise feel overwhelming.

### **India Jimison, CNA – HomePlace**

This HomePlace Aide can often be found sweetly singing to her patients, giving tender care, and earning the adoration of her coworkers, patients and families. India is a friend to all – genuinely kind, with the gentlest demeanor. She always looks for ways to shine light into dark situations.

### **Kristy Morris, Vice President of Clinical Strategies**

As “expert scorekeeper” and regulatory specialist, Kristy is both anticipatory and retrospective in her efforts to assure quality and performance improvement. Thanks to her

attention to detail – along with the entire organization's commitment to excellence – The Hospice of East Texas continues to retain the highest 5-Star rating from Medicare's Family Caregiver Survey, one of very few hospices in our state to achieve that status. People may not always remember facts and figures but will always remember how someone made them feel. This is a core attribute of Kristy.

### **Karen Pearce, Outpatient Care Office Nurse**

Karen brings peace, comfort, and confidence when patients and families need it the most. Taking her experience from caring at the bedside of patients, she is uniquely qualified to support our case managers and care teams. She is also the calm, reassuring voice on the other end of the phone when families call in, letting them know, “all is well.”

### **Tammy Shamburger, Health Information Management Technician**

Any given day, Tammy can be seen making others feel warm and welcome with her contagious smile! Though her role is more behind the scenes, her work is important, and she goes about it with diligence – ensuring that all proper tasks are completed and appropriate compensation is received. Tammy makes our mission shine!

## Celebrating 20 Years of Service



Zeta Hall, 2nd from right, with her family



India Jimison, 2nd from left, with her family



L to R - Kristy Morris with Jim Werner and Jennifer Brashear



Christi Baggett and Karen Pearce



Tammy Shamburger, center, with her family

# Light up a Life

*“The Hospice of East Texas is a beautiful place...  
A place of comfort, safety, warmth, peace and love;  
providing the most tender care for  
ALL who enter its doors.”*

These words of gratitude from the Starnes and Lilly families are for you. Your loving gifts to Light Up A Life matter, make a difference, and never go unnoticed. Together, we are bringing peace to our neighbors, our friends, and our family by providing compassionate, comprehensive, coordinated care and support when it is needed most. This past year, our devoted team served over 2,000 patients, traveling over 1.5 million miles for patient care. The need is not going away, and your loyal benevolence ensures our mission endures. THANK YOU for all the ways you make our world brighter.

## Light Up A Life Benefactors 2025

### Platinum

Anonymous  
Lynn Parnell

Bob Walton, in memory of Dana Walton

### Gold

Anonymous  
Jane and Mike Coker  
Kevin P. Eltife

Lavonne Helms  
Charlotte and Tommy Hyde  
Penny K. Stephens

### Silver

Nancy and Mark Abernathy  
Rosemary Beaird  
Darla Bennett  
Jan and Sam Forester

A.S. Genecov Foundation  
Nita and Byron Meads  
Suzanne and Scott Myers

### Bronze

Kathy and Wayne Babin  
Renee' and Royal Becker  
Vicki and Lindsey Bradley  
Marcia Daughtrey  
Dr. Ray and Sharon Gullett  
Jim Harkins  
Betsy and Jeb Jones

Becky and Mike Martin  
Terri and David Nelson  
David H. Nordyke  
Meghan and Rob Renicker  
Jack Robertson  
Debbie and Steve Roosth  
Janet and David Wrather



4111 University Blvd  
 Tyler, Texas 75701  
 903-266-3400 | 800-777-9860



**THE HOSPICE OF EAST TEXAS**  
**2026 Board of Directors**

Sherry Dunn  
*Chair*

Vicki Briggs  
*Vice Chair*

Kelly Eltife  
*Secretary*

Patty Steelman  
*Treasurer*

Garnett Brookshire  
*Immediate Past Chair*

Erin Acker  
 Andrew Adams  
 Nathan Atkinson  
 Hank Baker  
 Rev. Stuart Baskin  
 Dr. M. Thomas Beets  
 Kristen Brice  
 Stanley Cofer  
 Casey Goolsby  
 Sam Greenberg  
 Vicki Jones  
 Ranjit Kodali  
 Dr. Arielle Lee  
 Aaron Martinez  
 Artis Newsome  
 Dr. Suhel Patel  
 Deborah Race  
 Sam Scarborough  
 Pat Stacey  
 Franklin Swann  
 Dr. Frank Ward  
 Don Warren  
 Shaun Wood

Dr. Laura Ferguson, *Ex Officio*  
 Rick Jett, *Ex Officio*

**THE HOSPICE OF EAST TEXAS FOUNDATION**  
**2026 Board of Directors**

Deborah Race  
*Chair*

Ted Walters  
*Vice Chair*

Tom Brown  
*Secretary*

Shannon Dacus  
*Treasurer*

Kris Gusa  
*Immediate Past Chair*

Kim Beckham  
 Bob Bondurant  
 Peter Boyd  
 Sherry Dunn  
 Sam Forester  
 Susan Jasper  
 Kathryn Lake  
 Tracy Lisner  
 Natalie Lynch  
 Fr. Mike Maxwell  
 Andy Newberry  
 Bob Roseman  
 Jennifer Walsh  
 Jay Ward  
 Joseph Woelkers

Rick Allen, *Ex Officio*  
 Rick Jett, *Ex Officio*  
 Christi Baggett, *Ex Officio*

**OUR MISSION**

Hospice of East Texas seeks to enhance the quality of life for individuals and families dealing with life-limiting illnesses and to assist bereaved family members by providing compassionate, comprehensive, coordinated care and support.

**THE HOSPICE OF EAST TEXAS**  
**Leadership Team**

Christi Baggett  
*President/CEO*

Laura Ferguson, MD  
*Medical Director*

Kristy Morris  
*Vice President of Clinical Strategies,  
 Compliance Officer*

Aliceson Wallace  
*Vice President of Philanthropy*

Karen Wilson  
*Vice President of Finance & Accounting*

Carmen Basinger  
*Director of People*

Lana Chapman  
*Director of Access & Palliative Care*

Nathan Denning  
*Director of Facility Operations*

Griselda Escobar  
*Director of Chaplain & Bereavement Services*

Laura Gore  
*Director of Outpatient Care*

July Johnson-Minnick  
*Director of Social Services*

Rachel Kay  
*Director of Pharmacy*

Alison Rader  
*Director of Growth & Marketing*

Jennifer Turlington  
*Director of Inpatient Care*

