



Updates for our friends and supporters

news

Winter 2021



Luminaries of Life Goes Virtual ... and more luminous than ever

The annual gala is a traditional staple of most nonprofit fundraising plans. But 2020 made such tried-and-true strategies unworkable. As large gatherings became impossible in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, non-profit organizations across the world struggled to find new strategies. Many cancelled the year's fundraising events altogether.

Yolo Hospice took a different approach. Across the organization, we came together to forge a new path forward - to continue to provide our high-quality care, to engage fully with our community, and - just as importantly - to continue our fundraising efforts, one of the keys to organizational and program stability.

We knew we had to pivot. And pivot we did.

Luminaries of Life 2020 - COVID-19 Edition was originally planned as a live event at Park Winters in October 2020. When it became clear that just wasn't going to be possible, we moved the entire event online.

With the help of our expert auctioneer, Keith McLane, of KLM Auctions, we created a virtual party that allowed us to gather, present our honorees with their well-deserved awards, and hold a live auction, with everyone participating from the comfort of their own home or office computers.

Planning an event is never without its hitches, but Louise Joyce, Director of Community Development, and her dedicated team flexed and shifted with every challenge they faced. Though everything about the virtual event world was new and unfamiliar, the team jumped in with both feet and a can-do spirit. They quickly came up to speed on virtual event platforms, video creation, technical logistics, and innovative ways to create a fun and engaging online event. They set up ways to assist guests who might struggle with some aspect of the online platform. Finally, having tested the technology and gathered the guests, it was show time.

The result? A highly successful virtual Luminaries of Life, attended by over 100 people, which raised over \$80,000 for our programs. In fact, the evening netted even more funds than last year's in-person event!

We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our donors, sponsors and community for helping us create a triumphant outcome in less-than-perfect circumstances. We continue to be humbled by the love and support Yolo Hospice receives from our community and we are deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve the Sacramento Valley with the highest-quality end-of-life care.

In One Mother's Embrace, Thousands Find Comfort

The first time Diane Lewis went to a dementia care facility to distribute lap blankets and prayer shawls, she sat in her car afterward and cried. In many of the recipients' faces, she saw her beloved, late mother, Alice Figueira. That first visit in 2014 was the culmination of years of loss, grief, and creativity. The journey began in 2005, with Alice's Alzheimer's diagnosis.

"I had learned to knit in 4-H as a child," remembers Diane. "But I hadn't knit for years. When my mother was diagnosed, I wanted to do something special for her, so I knit her a blanket. It was a comfort for her." As the disease progressed, knitting became a form of relaxation for Diane, helping her fill the void as she began to lose the mother she knew.

Over the past 15 years, what started as a personal expression of love has morphed into a thriving nonprofit, providing beautiful, handmade blankets and shawls to Alzheimer's patients throughout California. It is Alice's Embrace, and it is putting smiles on the faces of many people who desperately need to smile.

It Began With Gratitude

Toward the end of Alice's life, Diane wanted to do something special for her caregivers. She found a vintage-style Vera Bradley handbag called the Alice. Diane began to



Rachael Miller, Volunteer Manager; Betsy Figueira;
Diane Lewis & Lisa DeSantis

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purchase several of the handbags, collecting 20 in a year.



She wrote a poem to her mother's caregivers, expressing the thanks she knew her mother would give if she could.

In 2011, Alice passed, and Diane and several family members delivered the colorful handbags to Alice's caregivers, a copy of the poem tucked into each. The caregivers were delighted.

A year later, Diane had the opportunity to meet Barbara Bradley Baekgaard, co-founder of Vera Bradley, and share the story of the handbags. Barbara's husband had died of Alzheimer's, and she was helping to open an adult day center in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The two women connected over their shared losses, and Diane knew she wanted to do something special for Barbara and the adult day center.

She remembered the blanket she had knit for her mother, and the seeds planted years before began to blossom into Alice's Embrace.

Creating a Legacy

Diane decided to knit some blankets and shawls for the adult day center. She and her siblings called the enterprise Alice's Embrace, celebrating their mother and the comforting memories they shared. The items were delivered to Fort Wayne in early 2013, just in time for the adult day center opening.

But Diane was just getting started. She built a website, alicesembrace.org, and started creating knit and crochet patterns with her partners. In all, Alice's Embrace has created 32 patterns - commemorating her mother's birth year, 1932. Each one is named for a specific memory Diane has of her. The website includes photos of each stitch pattern, the story behind the pattern's name and the written pattern for both the blanket and shawl.

Alice's Embrace made that first emotional delivery through a partnership with Eskaton's memory care facilities in 2014. Today, Diane's shelves are stacked with beautiful offerings from hundreds of knitters and crocheters. She categorizes them by color, and her website and Facebook page (facebook.com/AlicesEmbrace) are filled with gorgeous photos of each item.

The organization has received over 6,200 blankets and shawls, handmade by donors from 49 states across the country.

(Mississippi, Diane would love to hear from your knitters and crocheters!) "Alice's Embrace was created with the recipients in mind," says Diane. "But I am told over and over how fulfilling it is for our knitters and crocheters to give these beautiful gifts."

A New Partnership - Yolo Hospice

Unfortunately, 2020 has left no one untouched, and COVID-19 has put a halt to deliveries. Memory care facilities can't let Diane and her helpers in to share the blankets with patients. She needed to find another way to help.

Diane began partnering with hospices, most recently Yolo Hospice of Davis. She delivers the items to the hospice, and nurses deliver them to the patients.

In an effort to continue to serve patients in need during the COVID-19 restrictions, Yolo Hospice Volunteer Manager, Rachael Miller, reached out to Diane about a potential partnership between the organizations.

"We recently had two patients turn 100 years old on hospice," says Miller. "Nurses Karin Kasuga and Donna Dandridge knew their patient's favorite colors and chose lap blankets for them. The patients absolutely loved them. We're deeply grateful to Alice's Embrace for helping us give comfort to our patients and their families."

As Alice's Embrace touches more and more people, Diane is secure in the knowledge that she has honored their mother in just the way she would have wanted. "I know my mom would absolutely love it. She was always a gracious and giving woman, so I feel she is with us every step of the way." What a beautiful legacy for a much-loved woman, comforting those most in need of a mother's warm embrace.



Donna Dandridge shows one of the blankets before taking it to a patient