

Our House

News from the Pay-It-Forward House

719 Somonauk Street, Sycamore, IL 60178

Summer 2009

www.payitforwardhouse.org

A Successful Summer

While temperatures this summer have been mild, the Pay-It-Forward House has been sizzling hot. Yes, we have certainly had a busy summer! Throughout May and June, dedicated volunteers gave the front yard and the back Serenity Garden special TLC in anticipation of being showcased on the DeKalb County Master Gardeners' Garden Walk on July 11.

It was a beautiful day for community members to admire the hard work that transformed the front yard into a no-mowing-needed treasure trove of perennials and the back yard into an oasis of peace and quiet. House guests now regularly enjoy the sounds of birds singing, squirrels chattering, and maybe the occasional, idyllic cricket chirping.

House documentarian Mona Hamilton did a fabulous job, with the help of gardener John Swedberg, in blowing up pictures from 2004-2005 so visitors could contrast the pictures with the beautiful reality of our gardens today. Our hope is to have a similar presentation on our web page in the coming months. For the time being, you can see pictures of the Garden Walk on the web at our website.

The very next weekend, the House grounds were crowded once again as we welcomed supporters, guests and new friends to our fourth annual **Meet Me at the Fair** fundraiser, an old-fashioned family fair with games, food, and more. We were fortunate that our date coincided with the community garage sale. People who were out bargain hunting stopped to see what was going on at 719 Somonauk.

It was an excellent opportunity to explain the Pay-It-Forward House's mission and the *pay-it-forward* philosophy to people from all over the area. Our volunteer tour guides, Marge Johnson and Dixie Zander, shared stories and statistics, without a break, throughout the three hours of the Fair. What wonderful dedication!

These two were not the only ones giving their time

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The Best Father's Day Ever

The forty-six miles between Sycamore and Hebron, Illinois are a fairly easy drive: south on IL-47 for twenty-five miles and west on IL-64 into town. It's not easy to get lost, but when your mind is on your wife of thirty years who has suddenly been knocked off her feet by Legionnaire's disease, the drive seems overwhelming. That's how Bob felt when his wife, Dawn, was transferred to Kindred Hospital-Sycamore.

Dawn and friends had gotten together for a girls night out that included some relaxing time in a friend's hot tub. That is believed to be the source of the bacteria that left her gasping for breath and needing the support of a ventilator. "It was touch-and-go for awhile. I've never been so scared in my life," says Bob.

Like many patients transferred to Sycamore, Dawn did not like the idea of being left alone in a strange town. The first weekend Bob spent at the Pay-It-Forward House, he was joined by his teenage son, John. He appreciated being able to be close to his mom. For Dawn, knowing that her husband and son were just one hundred steps from the front door of the hospital, able to sleep in real beds instead of hospital recliners, was a decent compromise, a good alternative to having them at her bedside in the hospital room with her.

In all, Bob and/or John spent 25 nights at the Pay-It-Forward House, one of which included Father's Day. All three of the boys came down to celebrate Father's Day with Bob and to rejoice at Dawn's progress. "It was the best Father's Day I've ever had. We were all together and Dawn was able to be a part of the action. I'm so grateful! And having this place to stay and the friendly volunteers to talk to, and the other guests to share with, what a blessing!"



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Steering Committee

Diane Breunlin
Bookkeeping

Mary Lou Eubanks
Executive Director

Phil Eubanks
Board Liaison

Dave Hamilton
Insurance

Mona Hamilton
Communications

Marge Johnson
Gardens

Craig Mathey
Building

Joyce Mathey
Community Relations

Diane McQueen
Lois Self
Volunteer Coordination

Amy Voigt
Kindred Hospital & Fundraising

Dixie Zander
Member-At-Large

* * *

Proud Member of

National Association of Hospital Hospitality



A Letter from our Executive Director

Dear friends,

Did you know that the Pay-It-Forward House went from vision to reality in less than 12 months—11 months and 23 days to be exact. That is much faster than the national average. According to the National Association of Hospital Hospitality Houses (NAHHH), it generally takes 6 to 7 years to raise money, draw up plans, build or remodel, and open a hospital hospitality house.

One of the reasons we were able to move quickly is that we instituted a two-tier oversight structure: a small, 3-person Board of Directors for efficient decision-making on major issues, and a larger Steering Committee for the day-to-day, hands-on operational issues. This system has worked well for the past four years, but with time and success, our needs have changed. This spring, we expanded the Board of Directors to better reflect the success that the Pay-It-Forward House has had. We are pleased the Board now includes Chris Thompson and Tim Suter.

- Chris Thompson previously served on the Steering Committee as our accountant and has moved to the Board. Her tax and accounting advice will be tapped regularly.
- Tim Suter, President of the Suter Company, brings years of business experience and a love for our community.

I am confident that the five member board will keep our organization solid, focused and reflecting our community's caring spirit.

Two other major structural changes also took place this year.

- We switched our accounting software to Quicken and welcomed Diane Breunlin to the Steering Committee to handle the bookkeeping.
- We switched our tax reporting period from a calendar year to a fiscal year to align better with our grant-funding cycle. From now on, all revenue from our holiday season Adopt-A-Day program will be reflected in the same fiscal year instead of being split between two accounting periods. This will help us better explain our financial standing to our supporters.

Time's passing has brought one last significant change. Trish Williams, the driving force behind the transformation of our landscape (see page 1, col. 1) has resigned. Steering Committee member Marge Johnson has stepped into that role. Marge has been active at the House since shortly after opening. We are thrilled she agreed to co-chair the Beautification Committee with Trish this year and to take over the job after the Garden Walk. Trish is confident the gardens are in good hands and we are, too.

Trish's decision to resign was not an easy one, but it makes enormous sense. When I first met Trish four years ago, her youngest of four children, Olivia, was small enough that I could give her piggy back rides and her oldest son, Jake, was not yet a teenager. With her children growing up so fast, Trish has made the decision to leave her position at the Pay-It-Forward House, in order to spend more time with them and her husband, Tom. We're glad she plans to come back and dig in the dirt once in a while, but we will miss her joyous laughter, unceasing kindness and *pay-it-forward* spirit. Thank you, Trish, for sharing your talent and your family with us. You truly will be missed!!

Mary Lou

2009 Board of Directors

Philip Eubanks
Phillip Langsdorf
Joyce Mathey
Tim Suter
Chris Thompson

Volunteer Spotlight: Dixie and Paul Zander

After retiring from her second career in private home healthcare, Dixie Zander was looking for a place to give of herself and her time. Her friend, Janet Medernach, suggested the Pay-It-Forward House. Dixie took a tour of the House with Board President Joyce Mathey and thought, "This might be the right place for me." She attended the one-hour orientation and then the one-on-one training to be a Friendly Face greeter. From there she signed up for her first shift alone, and soon Dixie's name was showing up on the calendar every week. "I like that things are well organized and easy to follow, but what is really important to me is that there are days when I go home feeling like I've done something really important. I've chatted with a guest who just really wanted to talk to someone and made him or her feel important by listening. I like how I feel when I help someone out in that way."

Dixie is now our regular Wednesday morning (first shift) Friendly Face at the Pay-It-Forward House. When she arrives, she goes through the usual Friendly Face drill: checks the guest registration forms to see who is staying at the House and where they are from; balances the petty cash box against the petty cash log; reads the Operations Log to see what's been going on since her last shift; verifies that the bathrooms and other common areas are clean and adequately stocked; puts away any clean linens left by guests who vacated their room outside of volunteer hours. From there, she figures out what's next.



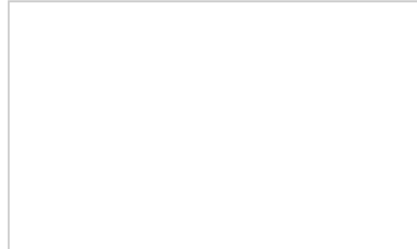
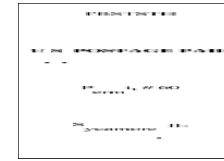
But all of those house management tasks become instantly low priority if there is a guest in the House. Like so many of our Friendly Faces, Dixie has a talent for making guests feel welcome. She joins them at the kitchen table and next thing they know, they have shared their life story with her. And like our other volunteers, Dixie keeps that story confidential, respecting the guest's privacy.

It wasn't long before Dixie's willingness to do extra projects got her the on-going responsibility for tallying the number of nights of rest that the Pay-It-Forward House provides. Once a month she counts up the total number of people who have stayed during the month as compared to the number of rooms that were occupied, as well as the number of people who were—unfortunately—on the wait list. That means they had to wait for a room in the Pay-It-Forward House. She also tracks the number of nights the building is empty (0 between January 1 and July 31 this year!) and other demographic statistics such as race, approximate age, distance from home, etc., required on many grant proposal forms. Dixie's responsibilities just keep adding up, as she was recently elected to the Steering Committee as a member at large. Her input will surely be helpful !

As a result of her in-depth knowledge of the House operations, Executive Director Mary Lou Eubanks approached Dixie to fill in as Acting Executive Director during one of Mary Lou's absences for a business trip (Mary Lou is also a French Interpreter/Translator.). Dixie now does this regularly. She enjoys checking on the guests each morning and doing her best to meet the demand for rooms. "It's feast or famine a lot of the time. Juggling the wait list is not fun. I'd rather we never have to turn someone away. But our policy of asking people who are long-term guests to take a break so another family can stay on the weekend means we accommodate people pretty well."

Like many wives do, Dixie volunteered the aid of her spouse, Paul, who is a wizard on MS Excel and Access. He has now got us tracking our data in ways that make trends and patterns easy to spot. That is how we know that that by July 31, 2009 we had 149 wait list nights in seven months versus 50 all year in 2008. This is also how we know that, as of July, we hit a milestone: sometime during the month—we provided our five-thousandth night of rest! That's 5,000 times someone has found rest and respite at the Pay-It-Forward House instead of driving two hours to get home, or sleeping in their car in the parking lot, or wincing as they hand their already maxed out credit card to the desk clerk at a local hotel.

If you are reading this, you and lots of people like Dixie helped make that possible! THANK YOU!!



**Be a House ambassador:
Carry a tote bag with our new logo,
designed by Morningstar Media Group, Ltd!
On Sale for \$5 per bag at the
Pay-It-Forward House!**

(Cont. from p. 1, Col. 1) and energy. This year, Cathy Pivonka stepped into the key role of volunteer coordinator as she trained Marcia Watson and Cathy Brancato to handle her old job of coordinating entertainment. Lois Self joined forces with Committee Chair Amy Voigt to solicit and organize items for the Silent Auction, and Bart Desch handled games and prizes.

The committee set a healthy goal of raising \$7000, slightly lower than past years, given the economy. Through their hard work and dedication, we actually exceeded that number! Our sincere thanks to all who helped, to all who attended and to our sponsors: Astor level—Ideal Industries, Vanderbilt level—Resource Bank. Carnegie level—St. Mary’s Sycamore and Suter Company, and Fields level—Curran Contracting, and Northern Rehab! Thank you all for making a home-away-from-home available to guests like Bob and John (see page 1b.)

(Cont. from p. 1, Col. 2) For Friendly Face volunteers, each day was marked with photos as Bob used his cell phone to capture each significant milestone of Dawn’s journey—her first breaths off the ventilator, the first time she stood up, her first solid meal, her first walk down the hall.

It was a true pleasure for Executive Director Mary Lou Eubanks to see the transformation in Bob over the course of his stay. “The first week, Bob was so worried and anxious. As Dawn’s health improved, Bob’s energy level and cheerfulness did, too. By the end, Bob actually had a bounce in his step!”



By the end of his stay, Bob had really caught the *pay-it-forward* spirit. Over the 4th of July weekend, he vacated his room for another family from Southern Illinois. His generosity was repaid a few days later when he reached the end of his three-week stay and people were on the waiting list. Dawn was doing well; it was time for Bob to give someone else his room. But what goes around comes around. Another guest graciously offered Bob the extra bed in the Edward Room and he was able to remain close by. Dawn was discharged a few days later and is now recuperating well at home.