



An Intimate Conversation with Former Guests, Robert & Debra Lezanic

Robert and Debra Lezanic stayed at Shadyside Family House in January 2021 while Robert's sister, Linda, received treatment at UPMC Shadyside. As do-gooders in their own community of Indiana, PA, the Lezanic's stay with Family House has made them become life-long supporters. They recently shared their story with us for Family House's Gala: Connecting Worlds, Celebrating Families.



Robert and Debra Lezanic

We have been married for 48 years. We actually met working at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. As retirees, we spend our time volunteering in the community. At our local funeral home, we help out families going through a rough time. We also volunteer at our church and St. Vincent DePaul.

In December of 2020, we found out Linda, Bob's sister, needed treatment at UPMC Shadyside in Pittsburgh. We searched online for hotels nearby—and Family House appeared! We decided we'd much rather stay at Family House than a hotel, so we made a reservation.

When we first walked into Family House, we found it so accommodating. The entire staff was warm and the house was very inviting. Debbie (Fetterman), the Shadyside House Manager, gave us a tour of the facility. We felt immediately welcome. There was a social area, too, where you can gather just to talk to other people in town for medical reasons. They thought of every little thing. All of our needs were met.

When you are from a small town like ours, you are not used to the hustle-and-bustle of a city like Pittsburgh. Coming to the city can be overwhelming. We were concerned about the safety of our surroundings and getting around town. **But Family House made us feel very secure.** They gave us clear directions for getting around safely and quickly, too.

When Linda found out she had to be at the hospital at 4 a.m., Debbie gave us very clear directions on how to navigate in the dark through an unfamiliar and large hospital system. Debbie was so acquainted with the hospital and could direct us to parking, entryways, and elevators! You just don't get this kind of assistance at a regular hotel.

The other thing that amazed us was that people came to Family House from all over the country. **We were there with people from South Carolina, Tennessee, Ohio, New York—they were all there for procedures being done at Pittsburgh's hospitals.** These people said they didn't know what they would have done if they didn't have Family House. They certainly could not afford a hotel for the number of nights they were staying. It just seemed like a "home away from home," a family away from family.

The one thing I want to tell donors is this: the only disappointment we have is that we don't live closer. If we did, we would certainly volunteer. So since we can't do that, we donate. And we already have! We have a list of charities that we donate to on a regular basis, and now Family House is one of those charities. We hope that those who are financially able will see the worth of Family House. Because we can't imagine it not functioning. With our donations combined, we can ensure these services stick around for other families. ●



Linda and Debra sitting at Shadyside Family House.



It just seemed like a "home away from home," a family away from family.



Hope lies in dreams, in imagination, and in the courage of those who dare to make dreams into reality. — *Jonas Salk*

I recently came upon this quote by Dr. Jonas Salk and thought how prescient and timeless it is. The words of this extraordinary physician, researcher, scientist, and humanitarian—Pittsburgh’s adopted and courageous “healthcare hero” of a century ago—so aptly describe the dedication, collaboration, and bravery of countless healthcare workers, near and far, who have spent the past year battling the global coronavirus pandemic. Thanks to their tireless commitment to serve all those in need, this spring represents so much positivity, so much hope as we all have access to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and are able, once again, to begin gathering with loved ones.

Dr. Salk’s words also remind me of the vision that Family House’s founders shared nearly 40 years ago: to provide comfort, care, and support to those in need during times when medical crises unexpectedly strike. What that group of “dreamers” envisioned was a place independent of emergency rooms, intensive care units, and sterile hospital spaces, yet close by those very life-sustaining facilities. They imagined a second home—a “home away from home”—for families and caregivers where they could find comfort, support, respite, and hope during those times of stress brought about by unanticipated and ongoing healthcare challenges.

True to our founders’ vision, the Family House conceived in 1983 continues today.

We persevered throughout the pandemic, remaining open to fulfill our mission and support the thousands of patients and caregivers who traveled to Pittsburgh and needed a place to call home because their medical needs could not be delayed. And as spring brings with it hope and positivity, so, too, does it bring to Family House new and returning guests who are coming to Pittsburgh to receive the medical care many of them had to cancel or reschedule.

At Family House, our volunteers and staff reflect and focus each month on a “guest standard.” For April, that standard is “Show Gratitude.” From my perspective, there couldn’t be a better time for us to express gratitude to our guests for choosing Family House over other lodging options.

Similarly, there could be no better time for me to express my sincere gratitude to you for your continued support. It is because of your generosity that we will continue to “dare to make dreams into reality.”

With wishes for good health,

Jennifer N. March, Executive Director

Family House Gala: Connecting Worlds, Celebrating Families was held virtually on April 17. Presented by UPMC and UPMC Health Plan, the annual spring fundraiser brought in **more than \$116,000 to support Family House’s mission.**

SAVE
THE
DATE!



38th Annual Family
House Polo Match

Saturday,
September 11,
2021

Hartwood Acres

POLO



Guests received their pre-purchased meals from Big Burrito catering with wine from Bella Terra Vineyards at the Neville Family House Celebration Station in the early afternoon and enjoyed a video presentation later that evening. A silent auction and LIVE raffle drawing for a chance to win a week-long trip to Mexico were included in the event. Family House is grateful for Platinum Sponsor Lamar Outdoor Advertising, Dessert Sponsor Hefren-Tillotson, and all others who sponsored and attended the event. ●



Behind the Masks at Family House

Guests at Family House interact with various staff members during their stay and we decided to start this new Q&A section so you can get to know a bit more about those friendly faces seen in the hallways.



First up is Chuck Dunkel, Director of Maintenance, who's been employed at Family House for almost 19 years.

Q: What's a "typical" day for you at Family House?

A: Well, every day is different but generally I check the computer in the morning to see if there were any overnight issues. Then I prioritize my day; attending to guests' needs are always my top priority, then the needs of the building come second. I make sure my associate, Jim Fullmer, has his priorities as well for the day and then we start addressing those issues.

Q: Your job requires you to be in and out of the houses constantly. How did that change once the pandemic started?

A: In the beginning, we really focused on the best ways to disinfect the houses and to try and calm the anxieties of our guests. Because of these measures, daily tasks did take longer to complete but it was worth it to keep everyone safe. As things are starting to return to "normal," we haven't changed our disinfection process because many of our guests have medical issues and we want them to feel safe and comfortable when they are here at Family House.

Q: You've been with Family House for almost 2 decades, which is tremendous! What are some of your favorite things about working at this organization?

A: I truly enjoy interacting with our guests. Many people don't know what to expect when they come to our facilities, but when they walk in and realize how safe and comfortable it is, they relax a bit. I've also enjoyed my involvement with our fundraising events, like Polo and Gala, and the Secret Santa dinner we have every December for our guests. We have such a generous supporter community, and they are all so passionate about the mission of Family House. ●

Next up is Sarah Griggs, Housekeeper, who's been employed with Family House for 2.5 years.

Q: Sarah, what's a "typical" day for you as a housekeeper at Family House?

A: When I get to a house, the first thing I do is clean the public restrooms, empty trash, and make sure the kitchen is clean for breakfast which starts at 8:30 a.m. Then I clean the recently emptied rooms and as the day goes on, the House Manager will call to let me know if there are any other check-outs and rooms to be cleaned. We clean the kitchen from 2 to 3 p.m. every day, then attend to the laundry and fitness rooms in the afternoon. The day goes by so quickly!

Q: Given your responsibility in keeping the house clean, did anything change for you with the pandemic?

A: The most noticeable change at first was wearing masks all day and the 6-foot distancing. We disinfect the house more regularly to make sure our guests and staff feel safe. For me, I didn't hesitate to come in and do my job during the first stage of the pandemic. I knew our guests needed somewhere clean and safe to stay.

Q: You have 30 years of cleaning experience from various hotels and hospitals in the area. What makes Family House so special?

A: I've been lucky to have worked in those different settings throughout my career and I brought that experience with me when I came to Family House. The staff here—my boss, the house managers, coworkers—they are all great to work with. They really care about us. The guests are also so appreciative of what I do and many go out of their way to tell me directly, or share it with the house manager. That means so much to me and my fellow housekeepers. ●



Bringing Hospitality Home

If you are a former guest, you remember the distinct feeling of walking into Family House for the first time. That ambiance of comfort and care sets Family House apart from a standard hotel. For caretakers at home, or those who want to bring some of Family House's hospitality home, here are some tips on creating a thoughtful, warm, and healing space:

Food Prep for Healing

When managing appointments all day, having prepared healthy food available is a game changer. Volunteers and staff ensure Family House kitchens are stocked with pre-portioned meals and snacks. At home, we recommend preparing a large casserole, lasagna, or soup ahead of a busy week to rely on this comfort around your schedule.

Lift Spirits with Flowers

Local grocery stores donate floral arrangements to Family House regularly. If a guest is particularly struggling, staff might move flowers into their room to find when they come back from the hospital. Don't forget the power of flowers in your own space.

Celebrate the Present Moment

Our staff and volunteers try to make every season and holiday special. If you find yourself overwhelmed, try leaning into seasonal or upcoming holiday celebrations to pause within the present moment.

The Power of the Written Word

A group of Family House volunteers write uplifting messages in hand-designed cards. When a guest really needs it, staff will share a note. Keep blank cards around your home, so when someone you know is struggling, you can share uplifting wishes.

Thanks to Chuck and Sarah for their time and dedication to the mission of Family House.



FAMILY HOUSE

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Thank you for supporting Family House!
YOUR HOME AWAY FROM HOME

SPRING 2021 NEWSLETTER

Thank you for your generosity!

This winter, nurses from the **UPMC Shadyside Anesthesiology Department** partnered with **Smallman Street Deli** to have pre-packaged meals delivered to the Shadyside Family House location. This group, and many others, continue to donate these COVID-friendly meals so our guests can enjoy a pre-made meal. ●



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Visit www.familyhouse.org to learn more about how you can support our families.