



Determined Donor's Destiny Fulfilled at Family House

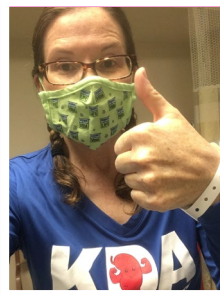
Family House established itself as the place to stay for transplant patients at its founding in 1983 and continues to provide the care and support needed for transplant donors and recipients. Rebekah Thomas, a two-time living organ donor and recent Family House guest, shared her journey with us.

Rebekah decided to become a living organ donor in 2019, and in that year she made the journey from Vermont to Pittsburgh to begin the donation process. During her evaluation process at UPMC Transplant Services, her social worker suggested she stay at Family House.



As soon as I walked through the doors, I felt at home. This was the right place for me over a hotel.

The Family House Neville location became her home for a few weeks as she began her liver donation and recovery. While she was there, she engaged in art projects, even painting a few pumpkins during the fall months. She bonded with staff, who regularly made time to check in with her, even while being busy with other tasks. Guests who started out as strangers quickly became Rebekah's friends. They chatted about their shared experiences at Family House and created a community that relieved the stressors of being in a strange city for a medical procedure.



Rebekah on the morning of her kidney donation and birthday, September 25, 2020

Rebekah returned to Family House in September 2020 to begin her second organ donation—her kidney. The timing happened to coincide with her birthday. At first, she wasn't sure that her dream of being a kidney donor would happen due to COVID-19 precautions. "I was delighted that UPMC was still performing transplants during COVID. When I called to make my reservation at Family House, I was told of the updated safety protocols so I knew what to expect when I came back. **I had no worries, as I always felt safe at Family House.**"

The security and community found at Family House was so important to Rebekah. There was a feeling of calm when she stepped off her shuttle and opened the door, once again, to Family House. "I was greeted with familiar faces, and I even

started giving tours to other guests as I became more familiar with the house." While staying at Family House, fellow organ donors whom Rebekah met in an online group came to visit her. She was never alone during her recovery.

For Rebekah, her journey as an organ donor was positive and life affirming. She met both her organ recipients and enjoyed a picnic with her kidney recipient in the spring of 2021 (*as seen in above photo*). Being able to rely on Family House's services provided a relief that she could not find anyplace else.

"This is the place to stay when you're coming to Pittsburgh for any medical need. You'll be well taken care of, comfortable, and most importantly, safe. **Everyone goes above and beyond making you feel like family.**"

As an avid donor advocate, Rebekah traveled to Mt. Kilimanjaro this March with a group of living donors from Kidney Donor Athletes to celebrate World Kidney Day. "Our goal is to promote the gift of life through living kidney donation among active individuals and athletes by building a community that inspires, supports, and educates people about the experience of kidney donation. The purpose of the climb was to show people that it's possible to thrive with one kidney." ●



Rebekah and Kidney Donor Athletes group at Mt. Kilimanjaro, March 2022

Family House recognizes April as Donate Life Month with our partner CORE (Center for Organ Recovery & Education). To learn more about becoming an organ donor, visit core.org.



What an incredible and historic year 2022 is shaping up to be at Family House!

Since I last wrote to you at the end of 2021, the organization has been on a trajectory unlike anything I ever could have imagined. Let me share with you a few of the highlights.

First, the transformation of the former Shadyside Courtyard by Marriott hotel into what now looks and feels like the

future and forever Family House we have envisioned has progressed at an incredible pace. Interior demolition was completed months ago. Renovations are nearly complete and just a few finishing touches remain as we prepare to welcome patients and caregivers to the new Family House this summer. **It is a dream come true that all Family House guests, volunteers, programs and staff will be joined together under one roof!**

As part of this transition into a single location, Family House vacated its University Place location in March. Since 2009, we have hosted thousands of patients and caregivers in that facility. We are so grateful for the partnership that Family House built with the University of Pittsburgh over the past 20-plus years, including the countless number of student volunteers who served our guests at U-Place with great compassion and care throughout our time there.

We are also delighted that many of those U-Place volunteers remain committed to Family House. They are serving the patients and caregivers who are staying at Neville and Shadyside houses throughout this transitional period, and will continue with us when we open the new Family House this summer.

Speaking of volunteers, April is National Volunteer Month. To celebrate Family House's dedicated volunteer corps, we hosted a special reception earlier this month at The Oaklander Hotel. **Volunteers have been the bedrock of Family House since its opening nearly 39 years ago.** What a pleasure it was to acknowledge their generosity—together and in person—for the first time in over two years!

Family House will host its annual spring fundraiser, **The Grand Opening Gala**, on May 21 as a tented event, held at the new Liberty Avenue location. Attendees will have the opportunity to get a sneak peek of the new house as well as hear details on some exciting news about *The Campaign for Family House*, which has already garnered incredible community support for this historic project.

These are but a few of the highlights of the past several months. I encourage you to follow the news of our continuing progress online on Facebook and Instagram. And if you're in the neighborhood, stop by and see for yourself. I am confident that, like all of us at Family House, you will agree that the organization will thrive in this new location.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the continued generosity of Family House's thousands of loyal friends, partners, and donors like you. On behalf of the Family House Board of Directors, all of my colleagues, and the thousands of patients and caregivers your generosity will enable us to support this year, thank you for all that you do for Family House.

With springtime wishes for continued good health,

Jennifer N. March, Executive Director

Updates on Family House Liberty Avenue

Renovations are well underway at Family House's new location!

As the conversion from hotel to home takes place, Family House and architecture firm, STRADA, have taken the utmost care in creating the homelike feel that has been synonymous with the organization for nearly 40 years. With lounges on every floor, a dedicated reflection space, apartment-style rooms, and many more new additions, this is truly a move that will support Family House long into the future. ●



Community Room



Dining Room



Lounge & Fireplace

Behind the Masks at Family House

Family House guests interact with various staff members during their stay. This series helps you get to know a bit more about those friendly faces seen in the hallways.



Muryum Zaheen, our Guest Experience Manager, has been employed at Family House for 10 years.

Q: Describe a “typical” day for you at Family House.

A: At the start of my day, I help guests check out and find transportation. Then we quickly pivot to preparing for a new batch of guests to check in while volunteers help set up rooms. You could be ordering supplies and linens, prepping for volunteer groups, or helping guests navigate their situation in Pittsburgh. Many guests aren't from Pittsburgh. They are overwhelmed and don't know what to expect. We help them get settled in the house and understand their transportation options from the house to the hospitals. I want guests to feel like they are in good hands.

Q: April is Donate Life Month. How has it been working with many guests who are organ transplant donors and recipients?

A: When I started at Family House, most guests were long-term and waiting for an organ. People stay for months or sometimes years, coming from around the country or even the world. I remember a family stayed from Italy for months! You get to know them more intimately than other guests. And then they continue to come back for their follow-ups. Sometimes you don't recognize them when they come back, years later, looking healthier.

Q: Do you have a favorite memory while working at Family House?

A: Yes—a mother was staying with us while her daughter was in the hospital. They were waiting for an available kidney donation. One night, we were just chatting in the kitchen when she got the call that her daughter's organ donation was available. It was a tearful moment! We hugged and then she rushed away to be with her daughter.

Tami Ribar is a Guest Experience Specialist and has been employed at Family House for eight years.

Q: Describe a “typical” day for you at Family House.

A: Two days a week, I assist the Housing Department on making reservations for incoming guests and their families. Three days a week, I work at the front desk checking guests in, greeting families, organizing check-in lists, solving problems, multitasking, working with volunteers and our housekeepers—all to create a welcoming environment!



Q: April is Donate Life Month. How has it been working with many guests who are organ transplant donors and recipients?

A: It's awe-inspiring when a donor and a recipient arrive at the same time. I'm so impressed by the people who get evaluated to become a living donor without knowing who the recipient might be. I think that is pretty amazing. And then there is the entire population who is waiting for an organ. You feel such excitement when they receive their donation. And we always support the caregiver as they stay at the house, cheering on their patient. The organ transplant process is so life changing—the entire experience.

Q: Do you have a favorite memory while working at Family House?

A: I really loved the Memorial Day Picnic University Place arranged for guests! We borrowed a grill from our neighbors at Bellefield Presbyterian Church and enjoyed a special day outside with guests and colleagues.

Also, Family House has an Easter tradition of putting bunny paw prints around the house for children to find. During the pandemic, we had two families staying with us and their kids loved this activity. They went through the entire house looking for paw prints and we made them special baskets. ●

Thanks to Muryum and Tami for their time and dedication to the mission of Family House.

UPCOMING EVENTS



FAMILY HOUSE
GRAND
OPENING
GALA

Saturday,
May 21, 2022

6:30pm – 11pm
5308 Liberty Avenue
(Future Family House)

PRESENTING SPONSORS:
UPMC and UPMC Health Plan

PLATINUM SPONSOR:
Lamar Advertising

DESSERT SPONSOR:
Hefren-Tillotson

Tickets on sale now at:
familyhouse.org/gala

POLO

39th Annual Family
House Polo Match

PRESENTED BY:
First National Bank

Saturday,
September 10, 2022
Hartwood Acres

Tickets on sale
in summer 2022



FAMILY HOUSE

5001 Baum Blvd. | Suite 545
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PITTSBURGH, PA
PERMIT NO. 2414

TO GIVE

- > Online at: www.familyhouse.org/support
- > By phone: 412-647-5893
- > Designate Family House through your workplace:
United Way: #859

TO VOLUNTEER

- > Email us at: volunteer@familyhouse.org
- > By phone: 412-647-4917

TO BOOK YOUR STAY

- > Visit us online: www.familyhouse.org
- > By phone: 412-647-7777

TO CONNECT

  @FamilyHousePGH



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

SPRING 2022 NEWSLETTER

Thank you, volunteers!

Every six weeks at Family House, our guests are in for a special surprise from MSA Safety. Dedicated volunteers from the local company have been volunteering for an evening to prepare and serve wonderful dinners in our kitchen. MSA Safety spares no hospitality, arriving with fresh cut flowers, charcuterie platters, and even ice cream sundaes. Thank you for making our guests feel special, MSA Safety! ●



To host a volunteer dinner for Family House guests, contact Marian Emanuelson at memanuelson@familyhouse.org.

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A recent guest shares her story about her multiple living organ donations

Behind the Masks

Two Family House staff members discuss how they support organ donors who stay at Family House

Save the Dates

Two upcoming events to put on your calendar

and more...