



Contributor

Expanded Infusion Suite Means More Opportunities for Healing

Since 2005, Benefis Sletten Cancer Institute has blazed the trail for advanced cancer care.

With your support, we will forge new paths to prevention, early detection, and survivorship. **Join us in letting cancer patients know they don't walk alone.** Just return the enclosed giving envelope or donate online.

As her stomach ached and exhaustion left her dragging through her days, Aurora Weythman, 29, wondered if she'd developed a gluten allergy.

"I'm a high-energy person, and I was barely getting out of bed for months," she said.

A scan showed the Belt, Mont., mother and nurse had a mass on her colon and a liver covered in tumors. Within a week, her course of chemotherapy had begun. Aurora spends six hours every other Wednesday in the Sletten Cancer Institute infusion suite. It's a swirl of activity around her as she reads, visits with her parents, and braces for the energy crash that follows her chemotherapy.

The infusion suite is a place of healing, where our patients bring their hopes for recovery and our nurses bring their compassion and their skill. And it's a place we've outgrown. **For patients like Aurora, Benefis is working to expand the capacity of the infusion suite to offer more opportunities for healing and to increase the size of the SCI pharmacy.**

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These days, chemotherapy is more often customized and milder. That's great for patients, but it requires more space to prepare and more time in the chair to receive treatment. We see more people developing cancer, even young people, and the infusion suite just isn't big enough anymore. Our nurses have some innovative ideas to make the space work better, too.

Stephanie Fehres, RN, is part of Aurora's care team and one of those nurses with big ideas for making the infusion suite better. Her nickname is "Scooter" for the way she zips around SCI.



"We're growing and need more space," she said. "With more space, it will be easier to schedule people. It will be easier to keep up with changes in doctor's orders," she said. "The pharmacy expansion will be a gamechanger, too, expanding our capacity to treat more people."

The plan also places oxygen ports in the right place for more efficiency and heated massaging seats for a more comfortable patient experience. For now, she must wrestle uncooperating leg rests and deliver heated blankets.

"Patients get cold, and they're going to adore the heated massage chairs," Steph said. "They will feel spoiled, and they deserve it."

Steph brings joy to the infusion suite and finds inspiration in the patients she tends. They get to know the staff at SCI, as the staff comes to know them.

"They keep tabs on us, and they care about us as much as we care about them," she said. "Joy is my thing, to bring joy to be people and to be there for them. I go home energized and fulfilled knowing I gave great care."

People who don't have a place like SCI can face a tremendous burden trying to navigate care, Aurora said. Even when she had to be hospitalized, her family brought her to SCI and said, "Fix her."

"They jumped into action immediately, and it was seamless," she said. "I can't say enough good things about Benefis and the team at Sletten Cancer Institute."

Aurora has been a student of life in a new way since her cancer diagnosis. While she wouldn't go so far as to call it a good thing, it has been educational and helped her and her family adjust their priorities.

"It's one of those things where you don't know what would have happened if life hadn't gone the way it did," she said. "Maybe I would be more selfish and less thankful. Now everything is a gift."



First Part of SCI Revision Debuts to Acclaim

Thanks to donors' generosity, the first phase of the revisioning project at Sletten Cancer Institute debuted this spring.

Rows of wigs in a rainbow of colors await patients who stop in the revamped Sletten Image Center in the Jorgensen and Wylder Families Salon, sponsored by the Lapee Family Foundation and Ed and Sue Warren.

"It is beautiful," cosmetologist Kathy Hubbard said. "I had no idea it would be this magnificent."

The new space is bright and organized, with a salon chair and a sink chair. A watercolor mural adds beauty to the space, and the nearby waterfall adds a tranquil quality.

"It feels good in here, peaceful," Kathy said. "It was so well designed and feels so good to be in here, and everyone comments that."

Kathy helps patients work through their hair plan, which may be a hat, a wig, or a shave. She can match their hair or try something new, whether it's a patient's dream hair or something wild. She also does fittings and teaches hair care. Patients receive a discount on the wigs, and no one is turned away because of an inability to pay, thanks to donors' generosity.

Besides the new salon, the revamped spaces include a new teaching kitchen to help cancer patients stay nourished for the fight of their lives, a beautiful waiting area for patients who need bloodwork, and a genetic counseling suite.

"Helping someone with their hair is so very personal and rewarding. You can really put a smile on their face."
Kathy Hubbard, cosmetologist



Meet Jamie Wood!

What an honor it has been to join Benefis Foundation as the new development director.

My first few months were heavily focused on the extremely successful Mayfaire event. Seeing the generosity of donors in Great Falls and the surrounding communities was inspiring. I now look forward to the employee giving campaign, Impact, in the fall.

Before coming to Benefis, I worked for nearly a decade at another local nonprofit, Special Olympics Montana. Working for organizations with a mission like the Benefis Foundation and Special Olympics Montana gives me purpose and a desire to do more for the community where I grew up.

When not at work, I can be found at the family ranch fixing fences, spraying weeds, checking livestock, and enjoying all the beauty Montana has to offer.

I look forward to working alongside my co-workers, the Foundation board, and our outstanding donors to achieve great things for the residents of northcentral Montana.

Thank you to everyone for the support and gracious welcome during these first few months. For those I have not yet met, I look forward to connecting with you.

Jamie Wood

Jamie Wood
Development Director,
Benefis Foundation





Camp Francis: 30 Years of Tears, Bravery, and Roadmaps for Life

On a license plate he made to honor his mother, Tyten Hickman, 12, pointed out elements honoring his mom's love of winter, cooking, camping, and the Lorax. He was 4 when she died, and he followed his siblings to Camp Francis.

Benefis Peace Hospice's beloved Camp Francis marked 30 years in 2023 of providing a sanctuary for children who have lost a loved one.

"It helped us by teaching us to talk and be more open about what we were feeling," Tyten said. "It's about learning how to grieve while having a good time."

Camp Francis began with a dream and a shoestring budget. A local grocery store was willing to donate some bologna, so campers had bologna lunches. Since then, donors ensure the campers, who range from age 6 to 12, can attend at no cost, and the food is better, too.

Nurse Carol Holoboff founded Camp Francis and named it for her son, Francis, who died three years before the first camp. She also founded the Children's Bereavement Program and the Talking About Grief teen group. She wanted children to have a place to talk about grief and a community of people who shared in similar losses, something she didn't have after losing her mother at 11. Darcy's Hope teen retreat began in 2008.

The spirit of Camp Francis is in ceremonies such as the annual lighting of the luminaries and release of balloons, but it's also in the small moments – s'mores around the campfire, a hug from a camp cook, the feeling of warm grass, and the relaxation of being in nature.

"Our life is a journey, and our grief is a journey, too," she said. "Your counselors will be your pilot cars this week."



Murphy Polsak, a kid group organizer, told the campers he had to find a new pathway on his grief journey.

"It was like I hit a dead end," he said.

Celebrating her birthday at camp for the 14th time, Hertense Klein, now the camp nurse, remembers the pain she brought to her first camp as a 10-year-old who had recently lost her dad to suicide.

Camp has grown into a place that impacts entire families as they grow and learn together, helping transform gut-wrenching pain into celebrating good memories of loved ones, said Kathy Van Tighem, camp director.

"As soon as I experienced camp, I knew it was something unique, something purposeful," Kathy said. "Every ceremony, every craft, every conversation, and every presentation was powerful and aimed to walk with kids through their grief and allow them the opportunity to experience it and to learn from it."

Laura Gilligan became a teen volunteer at Camp Francis after losing her mom to cancer. She called it a "life-changing opportunity" at a "magical" camp in an essay she shared.

"The truly miraculous part of camp took place at the ceremonies each night. The volunteers and campers had the opportunity to speak the name of their loved one aloud, to share their whole story, and to light candles in honor of those whom we have lost," Laura wrote.

"Hearing a 6-year-old share the story of how he lost his grandfather and sister to a fire he barely escaped himself, or seeing two brothers hug each other after lighting candles for their mother and father would bring a grown man to tears," she wrote. "Everyone cries at Camp Francis, but the kids are taught that tears are not a sign of weakness. These kids have experienced things most adults never have to, and they do it with a brave face."

Your gifts will make a child's grief easier to bear.

Supporting the Children's Bereavement Program at Benefis Peace Hospice helps children cope all year.



Ruth's Handprints Were a 'Victory' at Sletten Cancer Institute



Five sets of handprints in the tunnel below Benefis Sletten Cancer Institute trace Ruth Rozokat's cancer journey.

"The handprints for her were her trophy, her victory," Ruth's son Bill Rozokat said. "It was a reminder for her and her family of what she went through. Hopefully other people will see that, and it will help them. You can beat cancer."



In 2009, Ruth, a retired nurse and SCI volunteer, survived breast cancer and celebrated by adding a set of pink handprints to the tunnel's Handprints of Hope mural, where survivors and their loved ones have left their marks since 2007. Ruth's story inspired others to add their handprints this year.

In 2013, Ruth added a set of upside-down black handprints near the floor on the day of her last melanoma treatment. Green handprints followed in 2015 as she celebrated surviving liver cancer. She added white handprints in 2017 after losing a quarter of a lung to cancer.

Ruth found strength in the handprints as well as a sense of accomplishment. She never quit. She lived life to the fullest. You'd never know all she went through during her treatment, and she was an inspiration to those who knew her.

"She fell in love with this building, with the Institute, with the people here and what they did for her," Bill said. "I remember her telling me there's none finer."

After Ruth died in November at age 85, her son, Bill, added one a last set of handprints in light purple paint for pancreatic cancer. Bill said it was hard to return to the tunnel without her but that she taught her family to do hard things.

"She explained what the handprints were, and I passed that on to my family," he said. "You have to stay together. You can't do it by yourself. You can't do it with just your doctor. You have to be there for each other, good days and bad days, for support."



Mission Moment

"Serving on the Foundation board is how I show gratefulness for the wonderful care Benefis and its staff have provided my family."

Randy Boysun
Benefis Foundation Board
CPA, Douglas Wilson & Company PC



Mayfaire Donors Light the Path for Sletten Cancer Institute Patients

The abiding love our community has for Sletten Cancer Institute and the patients treated there was on full display as Mayfaire 2023 gala-goers and golfers gave generously.

The 24th annual Mayfaire, Benefis Foundation's signature fundraising event, raised an outstanding **\$925,000** and enabled us to swiftly reach a \$300,000 match.

As Benefis Foundation celebrates its 25th anniversary, a new tradition began at the Mayfaire gala: the presentation of Luminary Awards, a recognition of those whose generosity, leadership, and vision shine a bright light in our community. The 2023 recipients are the Sletten family and Gene and Jane Thayer.

Sixty-nine teams, some very soggy from a rainstorm, took part in our golf tournament, with the Mayfaire Cup going to Blue Cross Blue Shield No. 2.

In 2000, the inaugural Mayfaire raised \$15,000 for Gift of Life Housing, which provides a free place for people to stay while undergoing cancer treatment or while caring for a baby in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. The event has grown into a grand celebration of generosity, making a tremendous impact in just one weekend.

We are so grateful for the generosity of our sponsors and donors who supported Mayfaire this year!



Scholarship Supports Students at Our Community's New Medical School



When the doors open July 31, 2023, to welcome the inaugural class of future doctors to the Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine Montana, Erica Bonilla of Great Falls will step inside and begin the next big phase of her life.

Erica, a physical therapist, thought she was finished pursuing her dream of becoming a doctor when she became a mom. Then a medical school came to town.

"I'm excited for my daughter to watch me do this even when it's hard. I want her to know she can do what she wants and that it's never too late," Erica said. "And I'm excited to represent Montana."

Erica received the Great Falls Medical Achievement scholarship, which was designed to assist a Benefis employee with all four years of medical school tuition at Touro COM Montana.

Paul and Lori Husted established the medical student scholarship, along with a nursing scholarship honoring Paul's mother, Jane M. Buckman Husted, RN.

"We've always believed in investing in people," Paul said. "You can change their lives by creating opportunities, by giving someone an edge when they need it. We've seen a lot of positive change with this approach."

Paul remembers the \$100 scholarship he received because of a basketball coach who believed in his potential. He's also been buoyed by all his financial clients who trusted them with investments as he built his business.

He's hopeful this investment in the next generation of doctors will pay dividends for the community's long-term health.



"I'd like to see more young people grow up and say, 'I could go to medical school. I could stay here and serve my community,'" he said.

Erica said she's grateful for the support and looks forward to the day she can tell the Husteds, "I did it!"

"Paul is cheering for local people like me," she said. "I want him to know some day that I did this – with his help."

Your gifts can be an investment in healthcare's future.

Your support for the medical, nursing, and physical therapy students through Benefis Foundation's scholarship program helps ensure there will be caring professionals on the job in the future.

Please accept my Scholarship Program gift:

- in the enclosed giving envelope.
- as an online donation given today at Benefis.org/Give or by scanning the code.

