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Decision Spawns Five Years of Service to Gravelly III

By Jennifer Wake



George Bruns, Jr., 90, looks over pictures of Bruns House 5th Anniversary Celebration with Hospice of the East Bay CEO Cindy Hatton, RN, MSN Photo Jennifer Wake

S.N. describes the facility as "the ICU of hospice."

"When we bring [patients] into Bruns House, families can be a family. A wife can be a wife, a daughter, a daughter. It gives people that last bit of time left to give quality time to their loved ones."

While medical symptoms are addressed, the facility is "very much a home," Bruns said. "People come and prepare meals, walk in the gardens . . . it's home."

The facility was dedicated to Bruns' son, Air Force Lieutenant George Bruns III, who was killed in an automobile accident in 1967 at the age of 24.

"He was killed on his way home from Long Island, New York as he drove back to Wright Field in Ohio, hurrying back to see his girlfriend," Bruns said. "That's how it always is: A boy rushing home to see his girl."

Brunns started the Lieutenant G.H. Bruns III Foundation after his son passed away.

"The house is an honor to Mr. Bruns' son," Hatton said. "Everyone here tells his story."

The house is not a sad place. Often times, it's joyful, Hatton said. "Kids are always running around, or we might have a large group of people here. We've held weddings, anniversaries, and even a naturalization ceremony where one patient became a citizen."

And patient's pets are welcome. "One woman even had her horse in the backyard during her stay," she said.

All the rooms open to the backyard garden, which was designed by Lafayette resident, retired hospice physician and Hospice of the East Bay board member Anne Steinmann. The garden includes a large labyrinth that patients and families walk for peaceful meditation. Bruns House is also home to Toby, a poodle who can regularly be seen sitting on the laps of doctors or nurses as they fill out charts, or panting happily in the arms of one of the doctors as he talks to families.

Patients range from young adults to elderly and typically stay only a short time. When patients come from a hospital, it's a transition to their home and the family is given time to learn how to care for their family member in a home environment, with the supervision of medical staff on site. Others who come from a home care setting to Bruns House do so because they need medical care beyond what can be provided at home.

"This is a needed level of care," Hatton said.

For Bruns, who will celebrate his 91st birthday in September and who has been involved in philanthropic efforts throughout his life, his involvement with Bruns House has been more personal. "I feel part of the family," said

When Lafayette resident George Bruns, Jr., sat across from then Hospice of the East Bay CEO Cindy Siljstrom at a dinner table over five years ago, he had no idea how many people would be touched by his decision to fund the first freestanding adult hospice facility in the East Bay.

"Cindy and I were at dinner and she brought up having a facility down in Alamo," Bruns said. "I had always been interested in hospice. I used to read a lot about it, and it always stayed in my mind. It seemed like a good idea."

Brunns House opened in 2004 and provides 24-hour medical care to approximately six acutely ill patients at a time in comfortable, medically appropriate, private rooms, while offering families a relaxed atmosphere where they can interact with their loved-ones with unlimited visiting hours. Since the facility opened, more than 1,500 patients have benefited from Bruns House services, including pain relief and symptom management by qualified nurses and physicians, as well as medications and equipment related to the patient's illness, and transportation and meals according to the wishes of the patients.

Current Hospice of the East Bay CEO Cindy Hatton, R.N., M.

Bruns, who regularly visits the facility, although not as frequently lately. Then joking, he adds, "It's my house. It has my name on it. I can go down there anytime."

As for the people who have benefited from Bruns House, Mr. Bruns struck a more serious tone. "Fifteen-hundred people have been to the facility over five years? I didn't realize that," he said. "I think it's great; I think it's working."

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