

COMPASSIONATE CONNECTIONS

2026 / Summer

The Heart Behind Thursday Breakfast

Every Thursday morning, Susan and John Itell arrive at Talbot Hospice with a purpose.

While most people are just beginning their day, this couple is already working side by side in the Hospice House kitchen. Susan prepares plates with careful attention to detail, while John delivers trays, brews coffee, and helps keep everything running smoothly. Together, they have become known as the "Thursday breakfast people," creating meals that bring comfort, dignity, and a sense of home to patients and families.

Their volunteer partnership may seem like a natural fit today, but its roots stretch back decades. Long before Susan and John became volunteers themselves, Susan watched her mother, Joan Snyder, answer the same call to serve. A dedicated hospice volunteer, Joan prepared meals for patients and supported fundraising efforts, including the Festival of Trees. Susan remembers the care and pride her mother brought to every act of service and the compassion she shared with those facing life's most difficult moments.

Years later, hospice became personal when Joan received hospice care during her battle with pancreatic cancer.

"She put so much care into everything she did," Susan recalls. "And when we had the opportunity to volunteer, we knew hospice was where we wanted to focus our time."

After retiring and settling in Talbot County full-time, Susan and John completed Talbot Hospice's volunteer training together. What they discovered was far different from what many people imagine hospice volunteering to be.



For Susan, hospice volunteering often happens in the kitchen, where a thoughtfully prepared breakfast becomes an expression of care. A perfectly plated meal, a wiped rim, a touch of warm maple syrup, or a smaller plate chosen simply because it looks more inviting may seem like small details. To Susan, they are reminders that every patient deserves to feel valued.

For John, hospice volunteering often takes him out into the community. Through Talbot Hospice's transportation program, he has driven patients to appointments, helped families navigate difficult seasons, and formed friendships that have left a lasting impact. One patient in particular became much more than someone needing a ride. Over months of appointments and conversations, the two developed a meaningful bond that continued until his passing.

"It was just meant to be that we connected," John says. "Anything you can do, just a little bit, can make a difference."

(Cont. on back cover)

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Hello & Welcome

A Note from our Executive Director

As Talbot Hospice celebrates 45 years of service, I am reminded that our story is, at its heart, the story of a community that has always shown up for one another.

When Talbot Hospice was founded in 1981, hospice was not yet a Medicare benefit. There was no reimbursement model to support this work. Yet Dr. Guthrie, Dr. Carney, and other community leaders believed those facing serious illness deserved dignity, comfort, and compassionate care. They didn't wait for a payment structure to make hospice possible. They simply chose to do what was right. That spirit continues to define Talbot Hospice today.



Hospice remains unique among Medicare-certified healthcare programs as the only medical model that requires volunteers as a core part of its framework of care. From our earliest days to the present, volunteers have been at the heart of our mission, offering their time, talents, and presence to patients and families when it matters most.

While hospice services are reimbursed through Medicare and other insurers, the Eleanor A. Koons Hospice House depends on philanthropic support made possible by our community's generosity, including 40 years of extraordinary support through the Festival of Trees. Together, they reflect a community that has always chosen to show up for one another.

As we celebrate this milestone anniversary, we honor the visionaries who founded Talbot Hospice, the volunteers, donors, staff, and community members whose compassion has sustained this mission for 45 years and continues to bring comfort, dignity, and hope to families every day.

I believe Dr. Guthrie would be proud of where we are today. He would see an organization that remains true to the values upon which it was built: dignity, service, and community. As we look to the future, we remain inspired by those who came before us and guided by the belief that caring for one another is among the highest callings of any community.

Thank you for being part of this remarkable journey.



Molly Kirsch, BSN, RN

Molly Kirsch brings nearly 20 years of hospice nursing experience to her role as Executive Director. Molly serves on the Maryland Hospice and Palliative Care Network Board, and is active in Tidewater Rotary. She lives in Easton with her husband and two sons - they can usually be found enjoying sports or outdoor activities.



Years of Compassion, One Family's Story

When the Fountain family faced the challenges of caring for their mother Joan in 2018, they turned to Talbot Hospice for guidance and support. Years later in 2025, when their father Alexander needed care, they knew exactly who to call.

For Brad and Janet Fountain, their relationship with Talbot Hospice has spanned multiple family members and many years. While each loved one's journey was unique, one thing remained remarkably consistent: compassionate, professional care that supported not only the patient, but the entire family.

"It was very important to us to be able to care for our loved ones at home as long as we could possibly do that," Janet shared.

"Hospice care has certainly helped us to be able to do that and not feel like we were completely on our own."

Like many family caregivers, the Fountains found themselves navigating difficult decisions, changing health conditions, and the emotional weight of caring for those they love most. Through each experience, Talbot Hospice became a trusted partner, providing expert care, guidance, and reassurance when it was needed most.

What stands out most to Janet is not a single moment, but the consistency of the support they received over the years.

"Our first as well as our current experience with the staff at Hospice has been compassionate and very professional," she said. "Not only in the care for our loved ones, but also their concern for us as full-time caregivers at home."

That support extended beyond medical care. When Joan passed away, Hospice staff responded quickly, helping the family navigate the many details that follow a death. From contacting the funeral home to arranging for medical equipment to be removed, the team helped ease some of the burdens during an incredibly difficult time.

"Having some of these details taken care of at such a difficult time meant a great deal to us," Janet said.

Over time, another source of comfort emerged: familiar faces. As different members of the Fountain family received care, they often encountered many of the same Hospice team members. Those relationships helped build a sense of connection and confidence.

"Over the years we have dealt with many of the same people at Hospice concerning our different family members, and that certainly helps to make a connection," Janet said. "It is always reassuring to see a familiar face."

As Talbot Hospice celebrates 45 years of serving our community, the Fountain family's story reflects something that cannot be measured in statistics or years of service alone. It reflects trust earned through experience, strengthened through relationships, and reaffirmed each time a family turns to Talbot Hospice during one of life's most challenging seasons.

When another of their loved ones needed care, the Fountain family did not have to wonder where to turn. They already knew.

And for Janet, the advice she would offer to others is simple:

"Without hesitation, please reach out if your loved one is a candidate. It would help alleviate some of the difficulties in dealing with the illness of a loved one."

Snapshots of Our History

Every photograph tells a story. Together, these images weave a rich tapestry that reflects 45 years of dedicated service, caring for our neighbors, supporting families in times of need, and building a lasting legacy of compassion and kindness in our community. We warmly invite you to take a look back at the treasured moments and cherished memories that have collectively helped shape and define Talbot Hospice into the respected and beloved institution it is today.



What began as a vision for compassionate, dignified care more than four decades ago remains the foundation of Talbot Hospice today.





Dr. Eugene "Buck" Guthrie, Hospice House Groundbreaking 1997



Volunteers lending a helping hand, Hospice House 1999

It does take a village, and I
do so much appreciate you
being part of ours.

Grateful Family Member



Hospice House Groundbreaking 1997



Volunteer Appreciation Lunch



Liz Freedlander, Kathy Foster, Dr. Eugene "Buck" Guthrie, Hospice House Grand Opening



Guest Wing Ribbon Cutting Ceremony



Millie Parrott, Rev. George Merrill, Dr. Bill Bremer, Pam Jennings, Donna Stone



Clinical Staff, Hospice House 2007



Touching moment from a Veteran Recognition Ceremony



Marjorie "Pete" Fox



Hospice House 10th Anniversary Celebration, 2008

As Talbot Hospice matured, so did its impact. Through new programs, dedicated volunteers, generous supporters, and strong community partnerships, we expanded our ability to serve patients and families. Each milestone represented an opportunity to strengthen our mission and build upon the vision of those who came before us.



Volunteers serving lunch, Fundraiser 2009



Saints Peter and Paul High School Girl's Varsity Basketball Team, Check Presentation 2003



Ashley Brooks, Virginia Whittington, Ruth Murray, Linda Sturdivant, Joy Murray, and Kara Hope.



Talbot Hospice Team Bowling Night 2019

— ” —

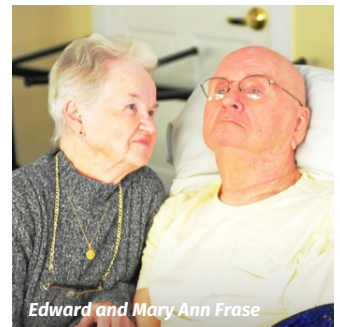
You guided my family with kindness
and expertise, turning our
uncertainty into comfort and helping
us cherish our time together.

— ” —

Grateful Family Member



Dr. Christopher Kerr and Molly Kirsch



Edward and Mary Ann Frase



Emilie Joshi, with a patient in the Hospice House



Talbot Hospice Kid's Grief Camp 2026



Volunteers Dana McGrath and Barbara McCaughey gardening



Colby Hall and Jake

Staff Member Spotlight

Interview Session with Donna Stone



Donna Stone, Intake Coordinator at Talbot Hospice, first joined the organization in 1997 and returned years later after time away, bringing with her decades of experience in hospice care and a deep personal connection to the mission. Over the course of her career, she has witnessed Talbot Hospice grow from a small office in the Department of Health to the facility we are today, while also seeing firsthand how the heart of hospice has remained unchanged. As Talbot Hospice celebrates its 45th anniversary, Donna's story reminds us of the enduring legacy of compassion and empathy that defines the organization. Her journey reflects the dedication and commitment of the many staff members who have helped shape hospice care in our community over the years.

Tell us about your history with Talbot Hospice and how you first came to the organization.

I started with Talbot Hospice on December 15, 1997. Before that, I worked for Hospice of the Chesapeake for five years doing home visits and also worked at a hospice facility near the BWI Airport. During that time I was introduced to Liz Freedlander, who was the Executive Director. She knew I lived on the Shore and encouraged me to apply to become the Guest Wing Manager. I told her I would, because I felt like that job would be mine someday - and eventually it was.

What originally drew you to hospice work?

It was the experience of caring for my husband's grandmother at home. Being able to care for someone at the end of life and just be present with them is really an honor. It's about making sure they are comfortable, cared for, and able to die with dignity. That was very meaningful and rewarding to me.

How did it feel returning after being away? What has changed since you first worked here?

I was very nervous coming back after being away since 2015, but I was welcomed so warmly. The environment is incredibly kind, supportive, and mission-driven.

The biggest change over the years has been growth! When I first started, we worked out of a small office in the Department of Health. I saw the construction of our current building, from a slab of concrete in 1997 to what we are today. Even expanding our census, we are able to care for more people in our community than ever before. But, what has remained the same is the heart of hospice: compassion and dedication to our patients and families.

What are some of your most memorable moments?

There are so many! One of my favorite memories are the holiday meals and gatherings with our patients and their families. One family in particular who continued coming back each Thanksgiving after their loved one passed to prepare meals for patients, families, and staff. It truly felt like home.

What do you think makes Talbot Hospice such a special place to work?

It's the ability to create meaningful, personal moments for patients and families. There is a real sense of home here, where people are cared for with dignity and in a very personal way.

Meet Our Newest Board Members



J.T. Smith

J.T. Is a retired partner in the international law firm, Covington & Burling, and a former public servant in four different cabinet departments. He previously served on the Talbot Hospice Board and as its President, 2014-15.



Sharon Stagg

Sharon Stagg has 45 years of nursing experience, including 30 as a nurse practitioner. She most recently spent ten years with UM Shore Regional Health's Palliative Care Program and earned the Advanced Certified Hospice and Palliative Nurse designation.



Shirl Jenkins

A Senior Human Resource Business Partner at The Boeing Company, Shirl says hospice played an incredibly meaningful role for her family during her mother's transition. Because of that experience, she has a deep appreciation for the mission of hospice care and the profound difference it makes for patients and their families.



Tara Newman-Bell

Tara L. Newman-Bell is a Senior Director of Information Technology and Clinical Application Development at the University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS), with over 30 years of experience leading large-scale technology and clinical application initiatives within a complex health system.

Upcoming Events



Goes Virtual Talbot Hospice **MEMORIAL** *Walk*

Friday July 24th - Monday July 27th 2026

Join Talbot Hospice's 45th Anniversary Virtual Memorial Walk and honor the life of someone special from wherever you are. Whether you walk through your neighborhood, along your favorite trail, at the beach, in a park, or even on a treadmill, you can participate wherever and whenever it works best for you.

Registration is available through our website and includes a commemorative 45th Anniversary T-shirt. Participants can also take part in meaningful 45-themed challenges throughout the event.

Every step tells a story. Every story keeps a memory alive.

Register for this year's Virtual Memorial Walk on our website:
talbothospice.org/events/virtual-memorial-walk-2026.html



Grief Connections: Summer Workshop Series Summer Schedule (July and August)

Healing Through Yoga: Every Tuesday, 8:45 am.

Mindfulness and Grief: July 16th, 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm.

Writing Through Grief: July 20th, 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm.

Caregivers Support Group: July 27th, 12:00pm - 1:00 pm.

Grief Support Group: July 28th, 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm.

All groups meet at 586 Cynwood Drive, Easton, MD 21601.
Questions? Contact 410-822-6681 x 117.

Writing Through Grief: August 10th, 4:30 pm - 6:00 pm.

Finding Light Along the Path: August 13th, 7:30 am - 8:00 am.

Child Loss Support Group: August 19th, 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm.

Caregivers Support Group: August 24th, 12:00pm - 1:00 pm.

***Grief Support Group:** August 26th, 5:00pm - 6:00 pm.

(*Please note the monthly Grief Support Group will now be held on the 4th Wednesday of each month)

Reflections of the Past Two Score and Five Years

A Note From Our Medical Director

My wife, our three sons, and I arrived on Maryland's beautiful Eastern Shore in August 1980 - 46 years ago. I was born in Florida and never imagined I would end up in Maryland to start a medical practice. Yet there we were, starting from scratch in a new place, full of second thoughts and trepidation. Even so, there was something about this town that seemed to whisper, "It is going to be okay."

One year later, thanks to a group of forward-thinking and compassionate individuals, Talbot Hospice came into existence and whispered the same message to the community: "It is going to be okay."

Over the past 40-plus years, what my family and I have witnessed again and again in Talbot County and the surrounding area is this: people here truly care, and they have a remarkable way of making things happen. We have been blessed by the creation of Friends of Hospice and the construction of our hospice home, including the residential wing that cares for nearly a dozen guests, as well as the administrative and meeting spaces that support our mission. Our census continues to grow, and that growth is matched by the expansion of our team with exceptionally competent, dedicated individuals.

One explanation for the origin of the word hospice is that it comes from the Latin word "hospes," which can mean both guest and host. I believe our patients are both. We welcome them into our facility, and in turn, they invite us to join them on their journey. Over these 45 years, people have, of course, come and gone, but the care and compassion have remained the same. Technology evolves and new pharmaceuticals emerge, but sitting with a patient today is just as meaningful-and done in much the same way-as it was centuries ago.

We have a team of professionals dedicated to making our hospice run, but they cannot do it without volunteers. Our volunteers never cease to amaze me with their smiles and obvious enthusiasm for the work they do. It is indeed my good fortune to have been invited to be part of this wonderful organization, and I can only imagine what the next 45 years will bring to Talbot Hospice.



Robert Sanchez, MD

Dr. Sanchez has been a referring physician to Talbot Hospice since its inception in 1981, became Assistant Medical Director in 2015, and then Medical Director in 2020. When not sharing his time and talents with Talbot Hospice, Dr. Sanchez enjoys performing with the Tred Avon Players at the Oxford Community Theatre, boating, photography, gardening, bridge, and most recently pickleball.



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(Cont. from front cover)

Together, the Itells have discovered what many volunteers learn: hospice is not simply about end-of-life care. It is about presence. It is about showing up. It is about helping families create meaningful moments, whether through a birthday celebration, a Valentine's Day dinner, a ride to an appointment, or a warm breakfast served with care.

Their experience has also reinforced something Susan learned from her mother years ago: everyone has something to give.

"Everybody has a gift," she says. "Everyone has the ability to touch somebody's life in a way that another person might not think of."

As Talbot Hospice celebrates 45 years of serving our community, the Itells represent both its past and its future. Susan's mother was part of a generation of volunteers who helped build the organization into what it is today. Now Susan and John are carrying that tradition forward, creating their own legacy of service while inspiring others to do the same.

For 45 years, Talbot Hospice has been sustained by people who choose to care for their neighbors. The faces may change, but the mission remains the same. And every Thursday morning, in a kitchen filled with coffee, conversation, and compassion, that legacy continues.



Joan Snyder, Hospice Volunteer

