

# Reflections Newsletter

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## Cherish Every Moment

### In this Issue...

For hospice patient Rod Gatzke, Gilchrist helped make possible one of the most meaningful experiences of his life. **Also in this issue:** hospice enables a patient to treasure her remaining time with her young grandchildren; fulfilling a patient's wish to leave the hospital and come home despite enormous obstacles; and introducing Gilchrist's new therapy dog. Don't miss Gilchrist 'Top Docs,' the latest news, our Year in Review, and upcoming events and support groups.

Above: Stars from Phantom of the Opera made a surprise visit to one of the show's biggest fans. Top row (from left to right): Gilchrist music therapist Lacy Kidwell, performers Emma Grimsley and Derrick Davis; Bottom row: Hospice patient Rod Gatzke (right) with wife, Kathryn. Story on page 2.



# A Moment That Will Last Forever

Gilchrist hospice patient Rod Gatzke received the surprise of a lifetime when stars from Phantom of the Opera visited him at home while in town performing at the Hippodrome Theatre last October. Performers Derrick Davis, who played The Phantom, and Emma Grimsley, who played Christine Daaé, sang stunning renditions of “Music of the Night,” “Think of Me,” and “All I Ask of You,” leaving Rod and his wife, Kathryn, overcome with emotion.



Rod Gatzke and his wife, Kathryn, react to the beautiful voices of the ‘Phantom’ performers during a surprise visit to their home.

“This is beyond belief...I could never, ever, have imagined what just happened,” said Rod through tears. “It was the most beautiful thing I have ever experienced.”

The idea for the cast visit originated with Gilchrist music therapist Lacy Kidwell. During her music therapy visits with Rod, who had heart disease, Lacy played and sang songs from ‘Phantom,’ and he was moved to tears. It was his favorite musical—in no small part because it was the first Broadway show he and Kathryn had seen together. Knowing how much it would mean to Rod, Lacy and a colleague worked behind the scenes to arrange a surprise visit from the ‘Phantom’ cast.

It may be surprising that a hospice would go to such lengths for a patient. But helping families to cherish every moment is an integral aspect of Gilchrist’s care. Lacy knew that one of Rod’s goals was to spend time making memories that his family could hold on to, and to live his best life with the days he had left. A visit from the ‘Phantom’ cast members was the perfect way to accomplish this.

It is fitting that Rod was on the receiving end of this act of kindness, as he has spent much of his life helping others. Rod was a counselor for more than 30 years, first as a minister and then as a pastoral counselor. After he retired, he watched his young grandchildren once a week from the time they were infants up until three years ago, when his health declined.

*“You will never know the gift that you have given to us and our family.”*

*—Kathryn Gatzke, Rod’s wife*

Rod’s love of music began at an early age through listening to his parents’ radio. He developed a taste for opera and loved to sing. He was accepted to Peabody and sang in the boys’ choir.

On the day of the Phantom visit, Lacy stayed afterward to visit with Rod and Kathryn. Rod was reminiscing about his time in the boys’ choir in the 1940s. He still remembered one of the songs he sang all those years ago: “Again” by Doris Day. Lacy played the song and Rod was 8 years old again, singing along.

Only this time the words had special meaning: “We’ll have this moment forever/But never, never again.” Rod held Kathryn’s hand all through the song. When it was over, they smiled at each other through their tears.

*Rod died peacefully at home on November 22, 2019, with his family by his side.*

**To learn more about Gilchrist Music Therapy, visit [gilchristcares.org/musictherapy](http://gilchristcares.org/musictherapy).**



Performers Derrick Davis and Emma Grimsley chat with Rod and Kathryn about Rod’s love of music.

# Choosing How to Live

Vicki Shearer, 56, had been struggling for two years with pulmonary arterial hypertension—a progressive illness affecting the lungs and heart—when she developed a blood infection last summer. Once in the hospital, she learned that her kidneys were failing. The only treatment was ongoing dialysis.



Vicki Shearer (left) with Gilchrist hospice nurse Susie Hoerl and niece, Tina Toney.

"I talked to the doctors about what would happen if I didn't have dialysis," says Vicki. She understood that her condition would grow progressively worse. But she also understood the tradeoff. "If I did dialysis I would need to do it every other day. I would be tired and not have much quality of life left," she explained. "I didn't want to stay in the hospital—I wanted to come home."

## Ready for Hospice

Normally the transition from hospital to hospice is straightforward. However, Vicki's situation was unique. Her condition requires an infusion pump, which pumps medication directly to her heart. It is vital for her day-to-day survival. But because her illness is so rare, few clinicians have the expertise to manage it. And if something were to go wrong with the pump, Vicki's oxygen would cut off in minutes.

Some hospices would not accept her because the care she required was too specialized. But the staff at Gilchrist were determined to find a way.

Behind the scenes, Gilchrist sprang into action, coordinating with the hospital, the specialty pharmacy, the insurance company and Vicki's pulmonary clinic to ensure she could be transferred safely home from the hospital, maintain her infusion pump treatment, and have it covered by her insurance. Gilchrist arranged

specialized training for Vicki's hospice nurse, Susie Hoerl, about Vicki's condition, her medication and the complications that could arise.

"Vicki's situation is an example of how committed Gilchrist is to ensuring people can choose what kind of care they want—and don't want—when recovery is not possible," says Susie, "even when there are enormous obstacles in their path."

## Home Sweet Home

When Vicki arrived home, Gilchrist had everything prepared for her, including a hospital bed, a wheelchair and comfort medications. Her Gilchrist team visits several times a week to provide nursing care, personal care and emotional support.

***"You don't know how much you miss something until it's gone."***

*—Vicki Shearer, Gilchrist hospice patient*

After being in the hospital for 40 days, unable to eat food she enjoyed or even go outside for fresh air, Vicki now appreciates every moment. She relishes simple comforts, like home-made food, a warm shower, sitting on the front porch, and just spending time with her family.



Vicki and Susie discuss the joys of being home instead of in the hospital.

"It feels wonderful to finally be home," says Vicki, who is cared for by her niece, Tina, in addition to her hospice team. "You don't know how much you miss something until it's gone."

*Vicki died peacefully at home on November 1, 2019, with her family by her side.*

**To learn more about Gilchrist's Hospice Care, visit [gilchristcares.org/hospice](http://gilchristcares.org/hospice).**

# When Family Means Everything



Gilchrist hospice nurse Cheryl Brown and hospice aide Felecia Brown help patient Janet Fischer maintain her beloved family time.

When Janet Fischer learned that her breast cancer had spread after a period of remission, she was reluctant to pursue aggressive treatment. She had been through chemotherapy and radiation years before, and didn't want to undergo another grueling treatment regimen. Her goal was quality of life. And for her, that meant being with her family.

Both of Janet's parents had received care from Gilchrist, so she already knew the many benefits of hospice. But Janet's daughter-in-law, Britt, was surprised at how kind and knowledgeable the hospice team was. She had no idea how helpful hospice could be. "From the moment my mother-in-law was evaluated by the Gilchrist staff, they have been there for us like a second family," she says. "We know we are in great hands."

Under Gilchrist's home hospice care, Janet receives care at her son and daughter-in-law's house. "What I appreciate most is that I get to see my grandchildren every day," she says. "They come in and are so full of joy. I can't help but be happy."

Janet's hospice nurse, Cheryl Brown, does everything in her power to help Janet have the highest quality of life and to help her family care for her. "Cheryl says 'Text me anytime' and she then replies right away," says Britt. "That gives us so much peace of mind." Cheryl always spends time talking with the family, and before she leaves, she hugs everyone and plants a kiss on Janet's forehead.

The family is grateful for their entire team, including their hospice aide, Felecia Brown, and their social worker, Erin Thalheim. They make day-to-day life less stressful, not only through their visits, but by offering resources. It was especially helpful when the team arranged respite care for Janet so her family could go on vacation.

Janet has many friends, and before becoming ill, had a full social calendar and a busy life. She worked for 23 years as a research assistant for T. Rowe Price. She also ran a daycare. She was heavily involved in her church, teaching CCD for many years and delivering communion to the sick. For a time, she volunteered at a homeless shelter.

Cheryl describes Janet as having a beautiful spirit that is visible to all who meet her. "From the moment I walked in, Janet's incredibly positive attitude just radiated throughout the room," she says. It was clear that she was happy, content to be at home with her family.

***"What I appreciate most is that I get to see my grandchildren every day."***

*—Janet Fischer, Gilchrist hospice patient*

It is said that working in hospice is a calling, and for Cheryl, that rings true. She finds deep meaning in being able to help people like Janet realize their goals and live life to the fullest until they die. "Gilchrist is definitely a job that came from up there," Cheryl says, as she nods at the sky. "There is no question in my mind that it's a calling for me...I can lay my head down at night and know I've at least done something good for someone."

*Janet died peacefully at home on October 26, 2019, with her family by her side.*

**To learn more about Gilchrist Hospice Care, visit [gilchristcares.org/hospice](http://gilchristcares.org/hospice).**

# Gilchrist Physicians Named 'Top Docs'



**Delia Chiaramonte, MD**  
Gilchrist  
Integrative & Palliative  
Medicine Medical Director



**Marian Alessandroni, MD**  
Gilchrist  
Hospice Admissions  
Physician

Two of Gilchrist's physicians have been endorsed by their peers as Baltimore's best physicians in *Baltimore* magazine's 2019 'Top Docs' list, released in October. Delia Chiaramonte, MD was recognized in the categories of Palliative Medicine and Alternative/Complementary Medicine and Marian Alessandroni, MD was recognized in Palliative Medicine. Gilchrist Board members Paul Celano, MD and Timothy Doran, MD also were named 'Top Docs.'

To derive the list, the magazine surveyed more than 13,000 physicians in the region asking them which doctors are the best in their specialties. Only about five percent of all the MDs in the area received the overwhelming peer support needed to make this prestigious list.

To learn more, visit [gilchristcares.org/news](http://gilchristcares.org/news).

# Sub-acute Unit Ranked Among Nation's Best Nursing Homes

The GBMC Sub-acute Unit, with medical care provided by Gilchrist, was one of only three Baltimore nursing homes that received the highest possible rating on *U.S. News & World Report's* 2019 list of the Best Nursing Homes, released last October. The report ranks nursing facilities nationwide on a 1-to-5 rating scale, based on evaluations from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, considering factors like patient care and safety outcomes, staffing data and health inspection reports. Only 19 nursing homes in Maryland, out of 226 evaluated, earned the highest rating of "5." *U.S. News* rated over 15,000 nursing homes to come up with the list.

The Sub-acute Unit, located at GBMC, is a 27-bed unit licensed as a skilled nursing facility. It serves patients who need short-term rehabilitation following a hospitalization, with the goal of returning to their prior level of function and independence.

To learn more about Gilchrist's rehabilitation services, visit [gilchristcares.org/emc-rehab](http://gilchristcares.org/emc-rehab).



# Therapy Dog Helps People ‘Cherish’ Every Moment of Life



Meet Gilchrist’s newest team member, Cherish. Cherish is an 8-month-old Labrador retriever who is training to become the resident therapy dog of Gilchrist Center Towson. Her job will be to offer comfort to those at the end of life, support to the family that is saying goodbye and joy to the staff who are providing care.

## Benefits of a Therapy Dog

If you’ve ever had a pet, you know how much joy animals can bring. Beyond making us smile, studies show that the presence of animals can lower heart rate, blood pressure and anxiety. A therapy dog can provide comfort and a calming presence to people who are feeling stressed, lonely, scared or sad—emotions that Gilchrist patients and families routinely feel.

Cherish does all this and more. She brings unconditional love to all who meet her, and she is already making a difference. During a recent visit, Cherish sat with two little girls whose mom was dying. The girls had been crying, so Cherish gave them kisses and made them smile and giggle. It didn’t take away their grief, but for one brief moment, they felt joy.

Because Cherish comes to the hospice center each day, she and the patients who have extended stays get to know each other. Cherish had visited one patient multiple times until, one day, the woman no longer had the strength to pet her. But when Cherish licked her hand, she still managed a smile.

Patients and families are not the only ones benefitting. Working in hospice can be emotionally difficult, so Cherish is the perfect stress reliever for staff. Cherish’s owner, employee Marlene Pearce, says that when she brings Cherish to visit employees, she immediately feels a change in the mood. “Suddenly, smiles spread across everyone’s face,” she says. “People stop what they’re doing for a chance to pat Cherish on the head or get a puppy kiss. When they get back to work, they do so with a happy heart and a wide grin.”

## Training

To become a certified therapy dog, Cherish is undergoing a rigorous year-long training program. She is learning to sit patiently, read visitors’ and staff’s body language and wait for an invitation to engage with them. She is also preparing for the unique environment of the hospice center, where she will need to be comfortable around medical equipment such as wheelchairs, walkers and scooters.

Cherish already has the characteristics of a good therapy dog—she is friendly, patient, gentle and at ease in all situations. She loves interacting and cuddling with people, even when they are unfamiliar to her.

Cherish has only been with Gilchrist a short time, but already, our staff can’t imagine doing their work without her.

**If you would like to support the Gilchrist Therapy Dog program, visit [gilchristcares.org/give](http://gilchristcares.org/give) and choose “Gilchrist Therapy Dog” from the dropdown menu.**



# 25 Years of Caring & Giving

Gilchrist began with one gift by our founding benefactor, Jeanne Gilchrist Vance, in 1994, and a vision to make a difference. That gift inspired 25 years of caring and giving, enabling Gilchrist to become all that we are today. **Gilchrist's latest Year in Review, in which we look back at the past 25 years and all that we have accomplished with the help of our supporters, is now online at [gilchristcares.org/year-in-review](http://gilchristcares.org/year-in-review).**

The report includes a special section listing the names of loved ones for whom we received memorial contributions between July 1, 2018, and June 30, 2019.



## Capital Campaign Hits Major Milestone



Gilchrist is pleased to share that we have reached 50 percent of our \$15.3 million capital campaign fundraising goal for Gilchrist Center Baltimore. The new inpatient center, which will be built at Stadium Place, a GEDCO development on East 33rd Street, will provide care and support to adults and children in Baltimore City, so they can cherish every moment together with their families.

To learn more about our capital campaign and see our video, visit [gilchristcares.org/capital-campaign](http://gilchristcares.org/capital-campaign).

## Gilchrist to Offer Grief Support Services for Howard County Schools

In August 2019, Gilchrist formed a partnership with the Howard County Public School System to provide grief and loss training for staff and support for school communities affected by a crisis. Members of Gilchrist's Grief Counseling team will offer training for school staff in conducting grief support groups within schools. Gilchrist will also participate in panel discussions during professional development days, and will serve as a resource for students and parents in need of crisis services during times when school is not in session. **To learn more about Gilchrist bereavement services, view our calendar of events and read about our individual counseling, support groups and special events, visit [gilchristcares.org/counseling-support](http://gilchristcares.org/counseling-support).**





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TTY Maryland Relay Service: 1.800.735.2258  
Gilchrist provides services without regard to race, color, creed, sex, sexual orientation, disability, religion, ability to pay or national origin.

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**Gilchrist's 3rd Annual  
Welcome Home  
Vietnam Veterans Day  
Celebration**

**March 22, 2020**  
12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Martin's West  
6817 Dogwood Road  
Baltimore, MD 21244

Register now at  
[gilchristcares.org/welcome-home](http://gilchristcares.org/welcome-home)

**gilchrist**

**WE HONOR VETERANS**

Flag Art by: Emily Villagomez, Gunpowder Elementary School

**Spring Jazz Brunch**  
to benefit Gilchrist Center Baltimore

Join the cool cats on  
**Sunday, April 19, 2020**  
from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Frederick Douglass-Isaac Myers Maritime Museum  
1417 Thames St., Baltimore, MD 21231

For more information &  
to purchase tickets  
[gilchristcares.org/  
jazz-brunch](http://gilchristcares.org/jazz-brunch)

thank you to our event chairs  
Ann Croom and Cathy McClelland