



## \$2.8 Million Gift Will Fund 'Tree House' and Healing Programs at Institute of Living

As the Institute of Living marks its 200th anniversary this year, an anonymous \$2.8 million donation will help transform outdoor balconies for patients, families, and staff at the IOL's inpatient building and fund a Recovery Support Specialists program, according to Lynn Rossini, vice president of philanthropy, Hartford Hospital.

For years, the balconies in the IOL's Donnelly Building have offered patients access to the curative powers of the outdoors. Through the \$2.8 million gift, the IOL will expand the balconies to three floors and enhance the second-floor patios with perforated metal panels featuring graphic images emulating a forest of trees, furniture to accommodate seated and physical activity groups, and a designated area for exercise and fitness with safe, moveable equipment. In addition, a natural landscape aesthetic will create a healing environment for patients, including those using wheelchairs and walkers. The expansion will be known as the "Tree House" because of its views, gardenlike feel and access to the outdoors.

"We've had an interest in mental health and addiction services for quite a while and have



*The new Donnelly Building balconies will include second-floor patios with perforated metal panels featuring graphic images emulating a forest of trees, furniture to accommodate seated and physical activity groups, and a designated area for exercise and fitness with safe, moveable equipment.*



supported the Institute of Living in a few ways over the years," the anonymous donor said. "Everybody needs sun and fresh air, and to the extent that these funds will provide it in a more welcoming space, I think that's a great goal to have."

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Rossini said, "Hartford Hospital is incredibly grateful for this \$2.8 million investment in the Institute of Living's efforts to provide our behavioral health patients with the best possible experience. Our donor also played a special role in helping design and name the space."

The funds will also be used to enhance the IOL's Recovery Support Specialists program, which provides extra support to patients through peers who also have experienced behavioral health issues. Plans also call for yoga instructions, horticulture, and other wellness activities.

"We at the IOL are extremely grateful to be able to build a place of healing and connection for our patients," said Javeed Sukhera, MD, PhD, chair of psychiatry, Institute of Living, and chief of psychiatry, Hartford Hospital. "Part of what makes our site unique is that it was designed to foster healing through nature. The Tree House allows those struggling, suffering, or in pain to experience the warmth of the sun, or softness

of the wind, in a way that helps them to heal.

"I could not think of a more appropriate time than our 200th anniversary for this important announcement. Our new Tree House is a legacy towards our future," Sukhera said.

Bimal Patel, Hartford Region president and senior vice president, Hartford HealthCare, said, "The IOL has provided behavioral health services to our community for two centuries. And, the pandemic has no doubt increased the need for these critical services. Having a caring and comfortable environment is an essential part of recovery and healing. We are so grateful for this generous gift that will help us enhance the patient experience."



## 'ReImagined' Black & Red to Celebrate Institute of Living

Breaking the mold for Hartford Hospital's most anticipated fundraising event, the 2022 Black & Red will be an outdoor celebration of the Institute of Living (IOL) at the Farmington Polo Club on Sunday, June 5. The ReImagined Black & Red will also salute 25 Hartford Hospital Heroes.

The headline entertainer for the afternoon event is singer-songwriter Gavin DeGraw. Country music artist Mickey Guyton will open the show.

With Event Chairs Kathy and Brian MacLean and Committee Chairs Jessica and Eric Zachs, the 2022 gala kicks off a two-year celebration of the IOL as it marks its 200th year. Funds raised through the Black & Red will support the IOL's continuing innovative work in behavioral health.

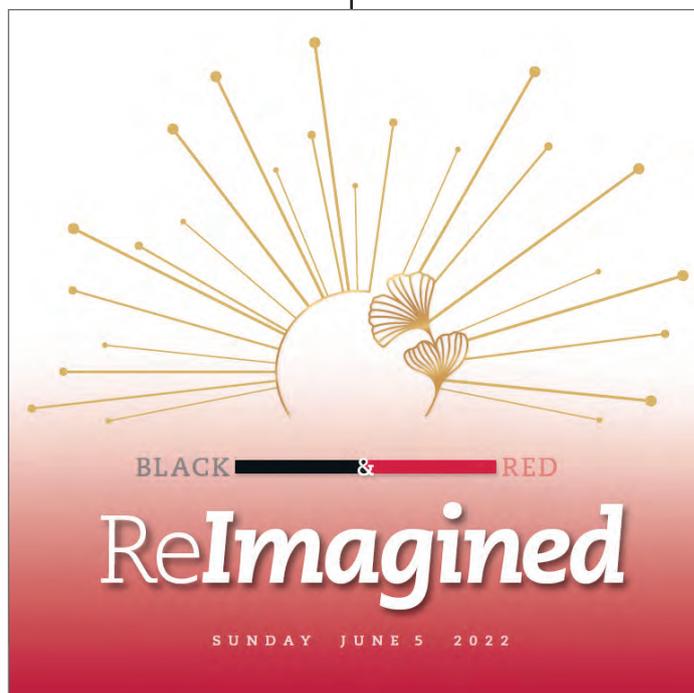
"The fallout of the pandemic has brought the importance of mental health services to the forefront," said Lynn Rossini, vice president of philanthropy, Hartford Hospital. "Recognizing the incomparable history and value the IOL brings to our community could not be timelier.

"We are tremendously grateful to the numerous sponsors supporting the IOL and the success of the 30th Black & Red gala. We are especially thankful to the gala's premier sponsors—Travelers, Constitution Surgery Alliance, and the anonymous donor honoring Dr. Hank Schwartz, psychiatrist in chief, emeritus of the Institute of Living."

Since its founding in 1822, the IOL has been a pioneer in the development of modern psychiatry, offering patients hope and recovery through comprehensive care,

research, education, and clinical expertise in behavioral, psychiatric, and addiction disorders. Recent initiatives include services for peripartum mood disorders, different tracks for treatment of psychosis, and services for the LGBTQ community.

The Black & Red, traditionally an evening event, will offer guest dancing and dining from 1 to 7 p.m. In addition, 25 Hartford Hospital and Institute of Living colleagues will be honored for stepping up in heroic ways to help patients and families through the loss and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic.



To learn more about the 2022 Black & Red, visit <https://giving.hartfordhospital.org/blackandredhome>.

# After Struggles with Rare Disorder, Donor and BJI Researcher Unite to Help Others Overcome It



People living with Ehlers-Danlos syndromes (EDS) can spend years searching for a diagnosis. Caused by abnormalities associated with collagen, EDS symptoms range from mildly loose joints to scoliosis and other joint deformities. A more severe form of the disorder, vascular Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, can cause the walls of blood vessels, intestines, or uterus to rupture. The range of symptoms and the many forms of Ehlers-Danlos make comprehensive diagnosis and treatment for the overall condition elusive.

An anonymous donor who spent most of her adult life searching for the cause of her digestive problems before Hartford Hospital physicians diagnosed EDS hopes to change that. Through a generous gift supporting research at the Hartford HealthCare Bone & Joint Institute, she intends to help those living with EDS and related disorders.

"With each new diagnosis, lives will improve," she said. "More consistent diagnosis, management, and care, as well as bringing a heightened awareness among the medical community are the goals. We want doctors to be able to help identify the signs and symptoms and provide a centralized treatment center for those suffering with this syndrome."

Hartford Hospital's Vice President of Philanthropy Lynn Rossini said, "Gifts like these are so important to the care that Hartford Hospital and Hartford HealthCare provide. When a donor shares our mission and vision to improve the health and healing of the people in our community, we are beyond grateful. The research this gift is supporting will change lives."

The Hartford HealthCare senior scientist leading the research understands the challenges of EDS firsthand. "I always had horrible joints," says Sara Strecker, a biomedical sciences PhD with extensive orthopedic experience. "I started seeing an orthopedist when I was 6 years old. So, I always knew I was really bad at sports, very hyper-flexible, very clumsy. I would always get hurt. But I didn't have a name for it."

By the time she was in college, Strecker still didn't have a name for her problems, but she was surprised to find she wasn't alone in her struggles with repeated joint dislocations.

"One day, I popped out my elbow, which happens to me more than I care to admit," Strecker said. "As I'm sitting there in the dorm room trying to put my elbow back, [my roommate] is looking at me and



*Senior Scientist Sara Strecker, who was diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome when she was in her 20s, says there's a substantial community in Connecticut dealing with the disorder. "There's about 700 people on one of the message boards I frequent that are living in Connecticut, or loved ones that were living in Connecticut who had Ehlers-Danlos," she says.*

says, 'Oh, try this technique.' That's when we realized we both had the same condition."

Strecker and her roommate were diagnosed with EDS about a year apart. Still, the connective-tissue disorder is so unusual that patients are often misdiagnosed. Strecker says there are about 500 unique EDS patients within the Hartford HealthCare system. "It's suspected to be potentially even higher, potentially up to 2% of the population is affected. So, there's a large community in Connecticut," she said.

People with the hereditary condition deal with joints slipping in and out of place, skin that can be stretched further than usual, digestive system symptoms, abnormal scarring, and other structural weakness such as hernias and organ prolapse through the pelvic floor. Patients can spend years bouncing between specialists trying to determine the cause of their symptoms.

Strecker said her research has so far focused on the perspective of physicians. She is working on CME accredited presentations for physicians to learn more about the disorder.

"With this generous donation, we can start looking at data analysis," she said. "We can start looking at bone density and muscle mass in these patients. We're going to look at incidences of GI dysfunction, incidences of anxiety and depression, incidences of the use of acupuncture or other alternative therapies. So, we can do a whole lot more projects now that we have some funding at our fingertips."

**Learn about the Hartford HealthCare Bone & Joint Institute at <https://hartfordhospital.org/services/bone-joint-institute>.**

# Headache Center and Migraine Research Foundation Announce Collaboration



Allison Verhaak, PhD, clinical health psychologist.

Brian Grosberg, MD, medical director of the Hartford HealthCare Ayer Neuroscience Institute Headache Center, speaks at news conference announcing the collaboration with the Migraine Research Foundation. Looking on are Jeffrey A. Flaks, president and CEO, Hartford HealthCare, and Grace Gold, a Headache Center patient

After years working together on various research efforts to further the understanding, diagnosis and treatment of migraine, the Hartford HealthCare (HHC) Ayer Neuroscience Institute Headache Center and the internationally recognized Migraine Research Foundation (MRF) have announced an official, permanent collaboration.

The Migraine Research Foundation closed at the end of 2021, directing more than \$1.25 million to the Headache Center to be used for headache research and administration of its ongoing grants program. MRF Founder and Executive Director Cathy Glaser was named co-chair of the Headache Center's Research Council, and will work with Co-Chair Brian Grosberg, MD, the Headache Center's medical director.

"Our work is far from done, but the Migraine Research Foundation's next chapter is just beginning," Glaser said, adding that the decision to align with Hartford HealthCare came after an extensive international search. "We find HHC to be completely aligned with MRF's goals and values. I will work closely with them to expand the reach and scope of its research program and carry on our legacy."

The connection promises to be mutually beneficial. The Headache Center, Glaser said, is an integrated, systemwide, interdisciplinary program perfectly positioned to conduct "high-impact,

patient-centered research to help patients and advance the field of headache medicine."

At the same time, Dr. Grosberg anticipated the power of harnessing the Migraine Research Foundation's "wealth of knowledge and vast network to advance our capabilities and make us a leader in headache research."

In the newly structured Headache Center Research Program, Allison Verhaak, PhD, will serve as director of research and Dale Bond, PhD, as director of research integration. The multidisciplinary Headache Research Council will continue to meet monthly and includes specialists in such fields as behavioral health, rehabilitation, women's health, pain management, integrative medicine, medical weight loss, sleep medicine and diagnostic imaging.

"It was this interdisciplinary collaboration that led Cathy to want to join with us," Dr. Grosberg said. "It is unique in the country, if not the world. This interdisciplinary infrastructure offers the opportunity to undertake synergistic studies that are truly meaningful for improving patient outcomes and advancing the field of headache medicine."

## Headache Center's Novel Residency Curriculum Awarded \$550,000 in Grants

The Hartford HealthCare Ayer Neuroscience Institute's Headache Center also has been awarded \$550,000 to support its innovative headache medicine education curriculum, HEADucation, said Lynn Rossini, vice president of philanthropy, Hartford Hospital.

Amgen, one of the world's leading independent biotechnology companies, awarded the program a \$300,000 grant, and Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd., which is based in Israel and specializes in generic drugs, is supporting the educational program with a \$250,000 grant.

The Headache Center's Allison Verhaak, PhD, clinical health psychologist, and Brian M. Grosberg, MD, FAHS, Headache Center director, said the curriculum is uniquely designed to deliver an online, case-based, live, and interactive lecture series to bridge the knowledge gaps in headache medicine education within primary care and neurology residency programs. HEADucation is designed and moderated by trained headache specialists, including HHC's Sandhya Mehla, MD, Valeriya Klats, MD, Dr. Grosberg, and former Hartford HealthCare headache medicine fellow Chantel Strachan, MD.

Verhaak said, "It is estimated that medical students have only one hour of preclinical and two hours of clinical teaching related to headache medicine. ... My colleagues and I recognized the knowledge gaps in headache treatment across different settings, including primary care and neurology. We decided to see if we could contribute to a solution that may improve headache education in residency programs and ultimately increase the number of practitioners available to treat patients in need."

The Amgen funds will primarily support curriculum development and implementation, program evaluation, data analysis, and reporting. Residency programs at the University of Connecticut, Brown University, and the University of Massachusetts participate in the program, with plans to expand to other residency programs in the near future.

Learn about the Hartford HealthCare Headache Center at <https://hartfordhealthcare.org/services/headache-center>.



Watch highlights from the February announcement at <https://healthnewshub.org/hartford-healthcare-migraine-research-foundation-announce-collaboration/>.

## A True Pro-Gamer Move: Raising Funds for Cancer Research

Justin Carmona says he's always been passionate about video games, and like many budding gamers he wanted to be the best in the world. Now, he says, "I want to be the best fundraiser in the world by using video games."

Carmona is realizing his philanthropic goal through the TwitchTV stream Game4theCure. For every game Carmona's team wins, members donate to the Helen & Harry Gray



From left, Ryan Jefferis, Justin Carmona, and Adam Wood

Cancer Center at Hartford Hospital. The stream has raised more than \$1,500 to date.

"We want to fight like the people who are fighting against cancer: brave, strong-willed, and positive!" Carmona says. "In the beginning, we thought it was just going to be a fun thing with friends, but after getting donations from around the world, my team (Adam Wood, Matt Cusano, Enzo Marino, and Ryan Jefferis) decided to turn it into a full-blown fundraiser." Johnny Mazzarella recently joined the team, which has a collective dream to raise \$5,000 for cancer research by the summer.

Carmona said he chose the Helen & Harry Gray Cancer as the beneficiary of Game4theCure because of the exceptional care Hartford Hospital provides. Cancer awareness is especially important to him because he, Wood, and Cusano lost a classmate in middle school to cancer.

"Cancer awareness has always been a huge passion of ours," Carmona says. "I personally have volunteered multiple times with Hartford Hospital. My family also resided in Hartford for a long time, so I thought it was a great way to give back to the community."

The team typically plays first-person shooters such as Overwatch and Apex Legends and has achieved the ranking of master in their respective games. The team recently also branched out into the highly anticipated 2022 Elden Ring.

"We like to hang out and spread positivity in the stream. We pick each other up since the world has been so negative lately. It's a safe fun place for everyone to hang out and talk about their passions and win games while donating to a good cause."

To watch the Game4theCure stream, go to <https://www.twitch.tv/game4thecure>.

To learn more about the Game4theCure team and how to donate, please visit <https://www.game4thecure.com/>.



## Plaque Honors Reiki Volunteer's Generous Spirit

As a volunteer and certified Reiki practitioner, Deborah "Debbie" Bator brought enthusiasm and passion to the touch therapy she provided to patients at the Helen & Harry Gray Cancer Center at Hartford Hospital. Sadly, Bator, who was from Willington, died in 2020. To honor her uplifting spirit, her family established the Debbie Bator Memorial Fund to support integrative and holistic medicine for cancer and hospice patients. Friends and family have raised nearly \$10,000 in tribute to Bator's dedication. Standing in front of a new plaque honoring Bator's giving spirit are, from left, Punyapriya "Benu" Gopal, coordinator of the Reiki volunteer program; Ryan Bator, Deborah Bator's son; Dr. Eric Secor, associate director of Integrative Medicine; and Eileen Pelletier, director of Volunteer Services.

To support the Debbie Bator Memorial Fund, visit <https://giving.hartfordhospital.org/debbie>.

To learn more about Hartford Hospital's Integrative Medicine Department, visit <https://hartfordhospital.org/services/integrative-medicine>.

## Harp & Meditation

Angela Mazur, second from left, and Marcie Swift, second from right, soothe souls with their Harp & Meditation program at Hartford Hospital. Via Zoom, Swift plays her luminous Celtic harp while Mazur guides participants through meditation for a suggested donation of \$10. All proceeds from the program benefit the Helen & Harry Gray Cancer Center at Hartford Hospital on behalf of cancer patients, their families, and healthcare providers. Accepting a check from the proceeds of Harp & Meditation events held in 2021 are, on the left, Cassandra Crowal, regional director, Hartford HealthCare Cancer Institute at Hartford Hospital, and, on the right, Dr. Andrew Salner, medical director, Hartford HealthCare Cancer Institute at Hartford Hospital.



For more information about the series, visit <https://www.harpanandmeditation.com/>.

To donate, visit <https://giving.hartfordhospital.org/harp-meditation>. The Harp & Meditation program is complimentary for Hartford HealthCare cancer patients and healthcare providers. All are welcome regardless of the ability to pay.



## Young Leaders Advisory Council

Members of Hartford Hospital's Young Leaders Advisory Council (YLAC) met with Hartford Region President Bimal Patel face-to-face for the first time in over two years on April 20. The informal open Q&A session touched upon the past two years at Hartford Hospital and the hospital's future. Pictured clockwise from the head of the table are Patel, Georgia Powell, Brian Sullivan, Sarah Quadrato, Casey Dempsey, Meghan Bianco, Janine Belsky, Doug Balko, and Sean Halloran. Attending the meeting via Zoom were Bethanie Allison, Cory Federline, Monica Guinn, Josh Koshy, and Amanda Trothier.

YLAC is a group of early- to mid-career professionals in the Hartford region who serve as ambassadors of the hospital. They strive to educate their peers about Hartford Hospital's innovative programs and services, as well as involve and cultivate emerging community leaders in activities that support the hospital.

To learn more about YLAC, email Kristen Lapenta, YLAC liaison, at [Kristen.Lapenta@hhchealth.org](mailto:Kristen.Lapenta@hhchealth.org).



## IN APPRECIATION



After retiring from the Hartford Hospital Auxiliary Board, Hazel Vail continued to volunteer every year at the board's golf tournament.

### Hartford Hospital's Longest-Serving Volunteer Announces Retirement

Hazel Vail, the longest-serving Hartford Hospital volunteer, has announced her retirement. Vail began volunteering at the hospital in 1979 and has contributed more than 16,340 hours of service—the equivalent of almost eight years of full-time work.

During her tenure, Vail supported many departments, including the main lobby Information Desk, the Auxiliary Store, the Emergency Room, Spiritual Care Eucharistic Ministry, and the Department of Volunteer Services. Her contributions also include knitting baby blankets and prayer shawls. In addition, Vail joined the Hartford Hospital Auxiliary in 1993 and served on its board for nearly 30 years.

Upon her retirement from the Auxiliary Board in 2015, the board established the Hazel Vail Scholarship. Presented each year to the top applicant of the Hartford Hospital Auxiliary Board Sons and Daughters Scholarships, this premier scholarship includes a \$10,000 award.

Vail, always a dedicated volunteer, was the first volunteer back on campus when COVID-19 restrictions were lifted and the first volunteer to be vaccinated at a hospital clinic.

We appreciate all of the time and efforts Hazel Vail has given to support Hartford Hospital. We will miss her.

*Help our volunteers support our patients. Consider a purchase through the Registry for Good. Scan qr code to learn more.*



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## Food FARMacy Funding Drive and Food Drive

The Hartford Hospital Food FARMacy is a proactive approach to our mission of improving the health and healing of the people and communities we serve. Food insecurity is associated with some of the most serious and costly health problems in Greater Hartford. With 1 in 7 adults in Hartford lacking reliable access to affordable, nutritious food, a significant number is at an increased risk for a variety of health problems, including heart disease, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes.

In partnership with the regional food bank, Foodshare, the Hartford Hospital Food FARMacy provides patients with access to specific healthy food items, free of charge, prescribed by their Hartford Hospital providers. *To help us address these critical issues, please visit <https://giving.hartfordhospital.org/FoodFARMacy>.*

