

HART keeps loved ones home for the holidays

Guest Submission by
the Home Assistance Referral Team

This special time of year naturally evokes memories of family gatherings and celebrations bringing generations together in the warmth of home. It is especially meaningful when senior family and friends and those needing care can be together and participate in the festivities.

HART (Home Assistance Referral Team) helps to make these wishes come true. For 40 years, this essential community asset has been providing caregivers to those needing assistance, allowing them to remain safe, independent and well in their own homes. The referral service matches prescreened caregivers

with those needing help, ranging from medical and personal care to light housekeeping, limited yard maintenance, companionship and errands. HART also provides respite care, offering relief for primary family caregivers.

HART is proud of its mission of care to the Greater Niagara community, and 2022 has been a hallmark year for the organization. The COVID pandemic put a greater emphasis on keeping those in need, safe and well in their own homes, as opposed to group settings. Cases increased to nearly 12,000 calls for help annually, resulting in caregivers providing over 20,000 hours of care.

Currently located in Lewiston, our service area has primarily been communities in Niagara County, but HART is now providing care to those in northern Erie County. We have added an education component to our services and, this year, conducted several key presentations on topics aimed at informing our caregivers and the general public.

Considerably more caregivers have joined our roster, which now includes nearly 300 and is continually growing.

This significant service increase prompted our diverse board of directors to make the decision to move the organization from a part-time operation

to full-time mid-year. The office is now open five days a week, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and calls are answered on a timely basis.

As a not-for-profit organization, HART operates solely on funds provided through grants, individual major donors, community fundraising and special event revenue. This generosity is greatly appreciated and is even more important now that we are operating on a full-time basis. We are also proud to be included as a United Way of Greater Niagara agency.

When community organizers developed our unique care model some 40 years ago, they may not have envisioned then how vitally important HART would

become to those needing care in our Niagara and northern Erie area. Our board members, staff and caregivers pledge to remain loyal to that legacy and insure that HART remains vital well into the next 40 years. When you need us, we'll be there.

For information about our services, to become a caregiver or to make a donation to HART, please call the office at 716-754-8313, or go to our website at www.hartprogram.org. You can also check us out on Facebook.

Patricia Berggren
Board of Directors Chairperson
Home Assistance Referral
Team – HART Inc.

Don Luce helped people (cont.)

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It was a revelation that caused a national sensation. Photos of prisoners being held in those brutal conditions were published in Life magazine. Luce's persistent anti-war activities subsequently led to his being expelled from the country in 1971 for being a threat to the South Vietnamese military.

Although press coverage of his activities in and about Southeast Asia was extensive, very little was written about his later life in the United States, a life that cemented his legacy as an advocate for human dignity and respect. His commitment was most evident during his career at Community Missions of Niagara Frontier Inc., where he worked until he was 85 years old.

"People like Don don't set out to leave a legacy. It's just who they are," said Community Missions President and CEO Robyn L. Krueger.

"He was happiest and most alive being with people and helping them," added Christian Hoffman, the agency's vice president for public relations and development.



Don Luce with his husband, Dr. Mark Bonaccini; and with friends he made along the way. (Photos by Ted Lieverman)

Community Missions hired Luce as its public relations director 20 years ago after he answered an ad for the job. They already shared a connection: Luce was an adjunct professor at Niagara County Community College. The school was offering offsite programs in reading, money management and job search skills – many of them at Community Missions.

When Luce interviewed for the job, Krueger remembers him saying he was a good storyteller.

"He kind of glossed over his Vietnam experiences," she said.

Luce was soon telling the story of Community Missions to anyone who would listen. The agency offers emergency housing, mental health services and youth

programs along with a busy community kitchen that serves more than 175,000 meals a year.

His most effective storytelling proved to be showing others rather than telling them about those services.

Luce would invite people, including potential funders, to meet him for lunch. But instead of taking them to a local restaurant, he would bring them to the community kitchen so he could show them what it was like to eat there. It also gave them a chance to talk to Community Missions clients – to see them as human beings. Then he would ask his guests what they thought about the experience.

His approach worked, as com-

munity members began to better understand and appreciate the important role Community Missions played in the community. It also resulted in countless donations.

Luce also played another key role in raising money to support the agency's efforts. For years, the agency had sent letters soliciting gifts from some 5,000 previous donors. He believed they should also send appeal letters to people who hadn't given before.

"He introduced us to prospecting, reaching out to others," Hoffman said.

The change kickstarted community support. That mailing now goes out to some 25,000 households and raises thousands

of dollars more than it had before.

"It was and continues to be very successful," Krueger said. "It gives us an opportunity to introduce others to us and the types of services we have."

Along with the late Mamie Simonson of Lewiston, Luce also initiated the popular "Cash & Cans Drive," at which people attending Artpark performances donate money and food items to support local food pantries. The drive is now in its 11th year.

"That was vintage Don," Krueger said.

But the way Luce touched the lives of others – especially people who were underserved, misunderstood and marginalized – is what those who knew Don will remember the most.

Renowned photographer Ted Lieverman, who visited Luce several times while documenting his life and work, saw it over and over.

"I spent a lot of time talking to (Community Missions) clients and staff," Lieverman said. "Don was a person who deeply cared about people. He wasn't a charity worker. He was a community builder."

Luce is survived by his husband of 43 years, Dr. Mark Bonaccini; his mother-in-law, Nancy (late Edward) Bonaccini; and many loving nieces, nephews and cousins. He was predeceased by his siblings: Roy, Carlyle and Patricia Luce.

The community is invited to a celebration of his life beginning at 1 p.m. Monday, Dec. 26, at Community Missions of Niagara Frontier, 1570 Buffalo Ave., Niagara Falls. Memorial donations may be made to Community Missions.

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