

Nutcracker, Annual Appeal lead off fall/winter activities

Peninsula Ballet Theater is partnering with Mission Hospice & Home Care to provide tickets for the opening night performance Dec. 11 of the Nutcracker Ballet. The ballet is just one of the events of the busy fall/winter schedule.

A block of 100 Nutcracker tickets is available for the left, right and center of the orchestra section for between \$20 and \$40, but they must be purchased before Thanksgiving (Nov. 25). These special tickets can be reserved by calling (650) 554-1000, and will benefit Mission Hospice & Home Care programs. Peninsula Ballet Theater, a professional company, has been performing for 40 years on the Peninsula. Artistic director Bruce Steival has directed and taught internationally. Chris Christensen will conduct the symphony orchestra.

Also happening:

- The **Annual Fall Appeal**, starting just after Thanksgiving, allows Mission Hospice & Home Care to offer new programs or services to patients and families. This year's goal is to raise \$80,000 to support a new palliative (pain control) care and primary medical service managed by internationally recognized specialist Dr. Gary Pasternak.

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Chris and Linda Gulker blog about life as death nears



Chris Gulker

When Chris and Linda Hubbard Gulker learned four years ago that he had an inoperable brain tumor, they decided to spend what time they had left together enjoying life as much as they could. They took trips to France, a Blues tour of the American South, visited friends and talked, wrote, photographed and blogged about their experiences.

“Living with cancer isn't quite the same thing as living without it,” Chris wrote on his blog (www.gulker.com). “Linda and I have embraced this by talking about ‘painting a new canvas’ for our life together.

We know that a few colors just aren't on the new palette (and those can be hard disappointments).”

Chris, who was twice nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in photography and has been credited with helping to pioneer online journalism, and Linda, co-owner with Scott Loftesness of InMenlo.com, are nothing if not communicators. So they shared what was happening when they found out in July that Chris' tumor had reached terminal status.

“Our neuro-oncologist offered to continue treatment, but she was clear that it wasn't going to arrest the progression of the tumor,” Chris said during an interview in the couple's Menlo Park home. “You know you're in trouble when your neuro-oncologist hugs you.”

Linda recalled that they had discussed what to do long before being confronted with the reality.

“We said from the beginning that when this time came, we weren't going to do heroic end-of-life measures,” she said. “We knew we'd go for palliative (comfort) care rather than continue treatment.”

Indeed, at the time of the interview in August, the couple were dealing with how to manage their time and energy, given the numbers of friends and family who wanted to see them. Having a hospice volunteer make a weekly Trader Joe's run to pick-up snacks and groceries was a huge help, said Linda.

“The problem we've had is kind of managing the kindness of our friends,” said Chris. “We're having to say no to some invitations.” However, they needed and used more hospice services with Chris' advancing paralysis. Their experience with the deaths of Linda's parents taught them not to wait to engage hospice services.

“We're atypical because Chris is not only lucid, but relatively pain-free,” Linda said. “It was a lesson I learned from my mother. The hospice program came on the morning she died and it was too late.”

Her father made sure to include hospice in his instructions for his care before he died.

“We may be more prepared than some people,” Linda said. “The estate is taken care of and the advanced directives are done. Friends have said ‘You taught me we really have to get this together.’”

Postscript: Chris Gulker died peacefully on the evening of Oct. 27. He and Linda bravely and honestly recounted his last months with regular posts on www.gulker.com.

Contents:

Calendar of Events

DEADLINE FOR 'NUTCRACKER'

Wednesday, Nov. 24, call (650) 554-1000.
(See Page 1)

LIGHT UP A LIFE REMEMBRANCE

Sunday, Dec. 5, 2 to 4 p.m., San Mateo Senior Center, 2645 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo.

SPIRITUALITY AND GRIEF

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP

Tuesdays, Jan. 4 to March 15, 6 to 8 p.m., at Mission Hospice & Home Care, 1670 S. Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300, San Mateo. Advanced registration is required by calling the Rev. Linda Siddall at (650) 554-1000. The suggested donation is \$10 per week.

32ND ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Sunday, Jan. 30, 4 to 7 p.m. at the Peninsula Golf & Country Club. RSVP by Jan. 14 to (650) 554-1000. \$50.

14TH ANNUAL BRIDGE DAY

Friday, Feb. 4, Peninsula Golf & Country Club. For details, please call Sandy Dennison at (650) 341-6902.

NEW VOLUNTEER MEETINGS

Tuesday, Feb. 15 from noon to 1 p.m., or 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at 1670 South Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300, San Mateo.

DINNER AND DANCE BENEFIT

Friday, April 15, hosted by the Peninsula Italian American Social Club, includes dinner, live auction and music by Lou Roselli's Band. RSVP by April 1 to (650) 554-1000.

NEW VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., March 5, 12, 19 and 26; and two Thursdays from 6 to 8 p.m., March 17 and 24. 1670 South Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300, San Mateo.

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUPS

Mondays from 6 to 7:30 p.m., and Wednesday from 6 to 8 p.m. at 1670 South Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300, San Mateo. Open to all members of the community on a drop-in basis. For more information, please call Cindy Carlson at (650) 554-1000.



From the CEO's Desk

November is National Hospice/Palliative Care Month, and this month of awareness provides an opportunity for us to educate our community about the benefits of hospice care, and remind people that our mission is to help patients and families focus on living.

If you'd like information about how to discuss hospice and palliative care with others, please visit our Website (www.missionhospice.org) or the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization Website (www.nhpco.org).

I'd like to thank the Mission Hospice Auxiliary for hosting the extremely successful 1950s-inspired Fall Gala, "Luck, Be a Lady Tonight." Mission Hospice & Home Care friends, family and supporters joined us at the Westin Hotel Ballroom on Saturday, Oct. 30 for a fun evening of games, dinner and dancing, all to support patients who cannot afford hospice care.

This event and many other activities would not be possible without the tireless efforts of our gracious Auxiliary members. Please mark your calendars now for the next anticipated Auxiliary event: the 14th annual Bridge Tournament and Luncheon, taking place Friday, Feb. 4 at the Peninsula Golf & Country Club.

I would like to introduce two of our newer staff members: Tracie Pyers and Rhonda Rungstiyakorn. Tracie returns to Mission Hospice & Home Care as a social worker after six years of continued grief counseling and hospice work. Rhonda comes to us with more than 30 years of nursing experience and will also provide Sunday coverage for our patients and their families. Please join me in welcoming Tracie and Rhonda.

I'd like to thank each and every one of you for your support, and I wish you the very best for the upcoming holiday season. 🍂



From left: Dani Magilligan, board vice-chair; Betty Stern, board member; Barbara Regan; Ann Regan, board member



From left: Cecelia Rapaich, Clark Atkinson and Martha Melton, Auxiliary treasurer



From left: Auxiliary members Alice Flynn, fundraising chair, and Margaret Flynn, event chair



Rev. Linda Siddall

THE NUTSHELL CAREER

- Ordained as a minister in the Church of Religious Science, 2004; a licensed lay minister from 1995-2001
- Mission Hospice, 1996-present
- Owner of Simply Stated Business Communications, a technical writing and corporate training firm, 1984-1996
- Crocker Bank, Vice President of Commercial Lending, 1968-86

EDUCATION

- Currently in year two of the spiritual directors institute at Mercy Center
- Southern Illinois University and the Academy of Art in San Francisco
- Degree in religious studies from Emerson Theological Institute in Oakhurst, CA
- Metta Institute, certificate in end-of-life counseling
- Certified Reiki practitioner

Staff Profile: The Rev. Linda Siddall

The year was 1995 and Linda Siddall had experienced the deaths of three relations—including her favorite aunt and her father—over a two-year span.

“That sent me into a tailspin,” recalled Siddall, a former banker who was operating her own technical writing and corporate training company at the time. She was not present at any of the deaths.

Soon after, a guest minister at her church talked about hospice work, and Siddall was immediately touched.

“It was as if God slapped me upside the head and said ‘Wake up,’” she recalled. She wanted to become a hospice volunteer but realized she still had her own grieving to do, which is when she joined Mission Hospice’s grief support group. In June, 1996, she became a spiritual care volunteer. Current spiritual care volunteers include two Buddhist priests and several Christian lay Eucharistic ministers.

After longtime Mission Hospice chaplain Walter Johnson fell ill, Siddall was asked to assist him as chaplain and to become the bereavement coordinator. Since then, she has become both chaplain and director of spiritual care.

She is especially proud that she has been instrumental in outreach to the African-American community, resulting in a major increase in participation at Mission Hospice & Home Care, both as patients and volunteers. Much of that work has been through contacts with the African-American Community Health Advisory Committee at Mills-Peninsula Health Services and with primarily African-American churches.

Raised a Methodist in her native Midwest, Siddall said she joined the Church of Religious Science (not Christian Science) because of its inclusiveness, which is also the basis of hospice’s approach to spirituality and religion.

Siddall believes that spiritual practices go beyond religious rites and rituals. To help her maintain her own mindfulness, her computer rings with the sounds of Tibetan bells (mindfulclock.org) on the quarter and half hours to “remind me to stop and breathe.”

That mindfulness allows her to create space for patients and their families to take the opportunities for spiritual transformation at the end of life.

“I couldn’t continue to do this if that didn’t happen. I would have burned out,” she said. “Instead, each person brings us both closer to the divine.” 🙏

Coping with the holidays

by the Rev. Linda Siddall

The holiday season can be particularly difficult for people who are grieving. As the whole world seems wrapped up in joy and frivolity, the bereaved person can feel out of place.

Mission Hospice & Home Care has gathered ideas to help bereaved individuals make the holidays a bit more manageable. Many of these suggestions are based on experiences of others who have grieved during the holiday season.

- Understand and communicate to those around you that this year is different as a result of your loss. You will exhaust yourself if you try to pretend nothing has changed.
- Decide how much of your normal holiday routine you feel up to doing this year. It is all right to alter your traditions.
- Consider having a family meeting to discuss your wishes and plans, as well as theirs. Remember that if others are grieving, they will have ways in which they want to handle the holidays, too. Try to respect one another’s ideas and be gentle with each other. Let children and teens find a way to participate.
- Decide how you would like to honor your loved one’s life. Create a special place with the person’s picture, memorable objects, tree branches, candles, or other special touches. As a symbol of your love

and memories, light a candle in this place or wherever the family gathers.

- Some people find volunteer work satisfying. Others make donations or buy gifts for others in their loved one’s name. These ways of giving can be very rewarding and healing.
- Allow yourself time to think about and to acknowledge your feelings. It is important to pace yourself during the holidays—finding a balance between being alone and being with others. Decide which social engagements you want to attend. Savor the time that you choose to be alone with your thoughts and memories, as well as the time spent with family and friends. 🙏





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Continued from Page 1 “Adding Dr. Pasternak to our family of top-notch staff and healthcare providers is yet another way that Mission Hospice & Home Care strives to provide the finest-quality, personalized care to our patients,” said Sheila Young, board chair.

Pasternak, who previously served as associate medical director, recently returned after completing a clinical fellowship at the nation’s premier palliative medicine training program in San Diego. Through home visits, primary care and consultation, he will provide personalized medical service to chronic care patients.

Frances Freyberg, development director, noted that last year’s campaign focused on launching the Advanced Care Program for patients who have serious illnesses but aren’t ready or eligible for hospice care.

“Thanks to the generous support of our donors and volunteers, we continue to provide new and enhanced services to patients and families in the San Mateo County area,” said Freyberg. “This year’s donations will help us build on our programs by providing palliative care consultation and primary medical service when needed.”

- **Light Up a Life**, the annual remembrance and celebration of those who have died, will be held Sunday, Dec. 5, from 2 to 4 p.m. at the San Mateo Senior Center, 2645 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo. Everyone whose loved one has died in Mission Hospice care over the past year

should receive an invitation. If you haven’t, please call the office at (650) 554-1000. Mission Hospice & Home Care recognizes that the holidays can be an especially difficult time for those who have lost loved ones.

Light Up a Life is one of the ways people who are mourning can observe this special time. For more suggestions, please see the Holiday Checklist on Page 3.

- **Spirituality and Grief Bereavement Support Group**, a 10-week program for those who have experienced the recent or past loss of a loved one to death, will be held Tuesdays from 6 to 8 p.m., from Jan. 4 to March 15, at Mission Hospice & Home Care, 1670 S. Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300, San Mateo. Unlike the weekly drop-in support groups held Monday and Wednesday evenings (see calendar on Page 2), this group will be limited in size to allow more freedom for participants to probe the depths of their experience. Advanced registration is required by calling the Rev. Linda Siddall at (650) 554-1000. The suggested donation is \$10 per week.
- **The 32nd Anniversary Celebration**, set for Sunday, Jan. 30, will honor Karen Leonardini with the 2011 Lotus Award for outstanding support of Mission Hospice & Home Care, and Borel Bank with the 2011 Special Recognition Award. The event, scheduled for 4 to 7 p.m., will be held at the Peninsula Golf & Country Club with a hosted bar and substantial hors d’oeuvres. Reservations are \$50 and are due by Jan. 14. 🍷