

Giving Back to our Communities

Yellow Door Foundation

It was a chance conversation with a friend over dinner that led JoAnne and Jeff McTague, of Barboursville, Va., to begin exploring the idea of how to help the families of children being treated at the UVA Children's Hospital who were travelling from out of the area for the services the hospital provides and who were also saddled with hotel bill costs to stay near the hospitalized child.

After a little more investigation, JoAnne, who is retired from American Express and who now works with her husband flipping houses, decided that starting the Yellow Door Foundation was the way to meet those needs. One of her first encounters as she researched and worked to develop the foundation was with a friend she had met at a dinner party -- Virginia Oil and Gas Association (VOGA) Board of Directors Secretary, Ann Marie Gathright, who also works with VOGA member Environmental Standards Inc.

The relationship forged along the way ultimately saw VOGA and its membership agree to donate the proceeds from a 50/50 raffle at its summer meeting and the VOGA member winner of that raffle -- Debbie Orrison -- donate her winnings back to Yellow Door Foundation. Combined with some additional contributions made by VOGA members, the Yellow Door Foundation received a donation in excess of

\$6,100 from the industry and its members following that meeting.

It was as she was developing the Yellow Door Foundation concept that McTague met Brooke Chastain; Brooke's daughter, Maggie; and Brooke's mother, Traci Warner, who works with VOGA and in the gas industry. The McTagues opened their home to Brooke and her family as they brought Maggie to UVA for her medical needs and they have done so more than once as Maggie has undergone additional therapy.

For Brooke and Traci and Maggie, their affiliation with Yellow Door Foundation all started over cheesecake.

"Two summers ago, Traci Warner called me asking where she could find the best cheesecake in Charlottesville," Gathright recalled. "Brooke was in the hospital with Maggie, and she wanted to try and have some of Maggie's favorite dessert delivered. I knew just the place and brought the cheesecake to them at UVA hospital. Later, at the VOGA summer meeting, I told Traci that she and Brooke and their family were always welcome at my house when they were in Charlottesville for Maggie's treatment. I didn't want them to endure the ridiculous hotel expenses there.

"Of course, the first time Traci asked me for help, I was out of town and unable to host Brooke and Maggie," Gathright said, noting that was how they connected with the McTagues. "I sent out a request to my friends asking if anyone could help. JoAnne came to the rescue. She was just getting Yellow Door Foundation started at that time. Not only did JoAnne host Brooke and Maggie then, she has hosted them many times since. Now, JoAnne and her husband, Jeff, are like family to them."

"JoAnne and Jeff have been amazing people to get to know," Chastain said. "There are roughly 2,500 kids from Southwest Virginia who travel yearly to UVA Medical Center for services, so the need is great. The Yellow Door Foundation takes care of the whole family and they have just gone above and beyond."

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She continued, "I have volunteered for years with VOGA and it means a lot to me to see them step up and help this way. A lot of times the oil and gas industry gets a terrible rap, but in my experience, VOGA is really like family and its members care about the community and the people in the community."

"Brooke and Maggie were an impetus for the creation of the Yellow Door Foundation," McTague said, noting the foundation gets its name from a drive she made through Charlottesville. She saw a blue house with a red door, but there was already a red door name out there. She thought of other colors and chose yellow for the color's meaning of hope, positivity and sunshine.

Yellow Door now has three furnished apartments at Stone Creek Village -- just three miles from the hospital -- that provide family lodging for as long as the child is being treated at UVA. Since the foundation was formed, 11 families have been assisted.

Later this spring, due to a donation made by Gathright and her husband, Gerry, a fourth unit will be added. That unit will be named in honor of Gathright's mother, Rosie.

"My own experience with UVA hospital and the experience of being my mom's advocate provided me a deep understanding of a caregiver's struggles with exhaustion, confusion and fear -- all while trying to remain a strong and steady constant for the person for whom they are advocating," Gathright said. "Trying to imagine that struggle as a parent is beyond my capabilities of thought. And, so it has been my privilege to be associated with Yellow Door. This December, my husband Gerry and I put forth a donation such that the next two-bedroom unit Yellow Door offers will be named in honor of my Mom. It will be called, "Rosie's" house.

"It is my hope that VOGA will continue to support Yellow Door and JoAnne's good works," Gathright added.

McTague said by the end of 2019, Yellow Door Foundation hopes to have six units available.

"Every family deserves a home away from home while their child fights cancer or undergoes a transplant, but over 40 percent cannot afford it," she said. The apartments offered through Yellow Door are specifically for immunocompromised patients.

VOGA President Ian Landon said VOGA's membership is appreciative of the good work done by the McTague's through the Yellow Door Foundation.

"We appreciate all they have done for the families they have served thus far," Landon said. "We hope to be able to continue to support Yellow Door Foundation and the good work that it does in the years ahead."

"What the folks there at VOGA have done is a lot of the reason this has grown," McTague said. "We are grateful for their continued support."

McTague is slated to be a guest speaker at the VOGA 2019 annual meeting in June where she will update VOGA members and other attendees on the Yellow Door Foundation.

For more information on Yellow Door Foundation, visit www.yellowdoorfdn.org.

