

LETTERS FROM HOME

FOR THE FRIENDS OF GIANNA HOMES

Serving our community since 1999

Tackling the Risks of the Game:

What Football, Concussions, and Memory Care Have in Common

Many of us spend our fall weekends watching the players on our favorite football team crash into their opponents. While tuning in this year, you may notice more attention being paid to the dangers of concussions. Earlier this year, the NFL revised its concussion protocol for players. Teams incur fines when they do not adhere to these new rules (Belson, 2016).

Despite these rule changes, the NFL and other sports leagues have been under scrutiny for their generally lax attitudes toward brain health, even as films such as *Concussion* raise public awareness on the issue. Whatever the NFL knew or denied in previous years, the organization did acknowledge a link between playing football and the brain disease Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) earlier this year. According to reporting from PBS *Frontline* (Breslow, 2016), Dr. Ann McKee, a neuropathologist at Boston University, has diagnosed CTE in 90 out of the former 94 NFL players she has examined.

Discovered by Dr. Bennet Omalu, a Nigerian-American physician, CTE is a condition caused by repeated blows to the head or concussions. Those most at risk include professional athletes, combat veterans, and even children who participate in youth sports. According to the Alzheimer's Association (2016), symptoms of CTE are similar to other types of dementia and can include:

- Confusion
- Difficulty with balance and motor skills
- Erratic behavior (including aggression)
- Memory loss
- Personality changes (including depression and suicidal thoughts)
- Problems paying attention and organizing thoughts

For anyone who has been a caregiver for someone with dementia, it is clear that CTE can bring many challenges to a family, especially when there is still no clear diagnosis or treatment available for this disease.

This is where Gianna Homes hopes to help. As more information about CTE is discovered, the need for expert help and a peaceful care environment continue to rise. Our highly trained staff and welcoming homes can help people with all types of dementia and their families navigate these difficult changes.

Until that time comes, remember to wear your helmet!



Alzheimer's Association. (2016). Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE). Retrieved from www.alz.org/dementia/chronic-traumatic-encephalopathy-cte-symptoms.asp

Belson, K. (2016, July 26). NFL Introduces New Rules to Back Its Concussion Protocol. *New York Times*, Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2016/07/26/sports/football/nfl-concussion-protocol-new-rules.html?_r=0

Breslow, J. (2016, March 15). NFL Acknowledges a Link Between Football, CTE. *Frontline*. Retrieved from www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/nfl-acknowledges-a-link-between-football-cte/

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Dear Friends,

With Letters from Home, we hope to share with you, our friends and family, a little bit of what life is like here at Gianna Homes.

Each stage of life brings its own changes. At Gianna Homes, we create a place where our residents can feel at home and where they will find care, companionship, and dignity.

—Anne Marie Hansen,
Founder & President

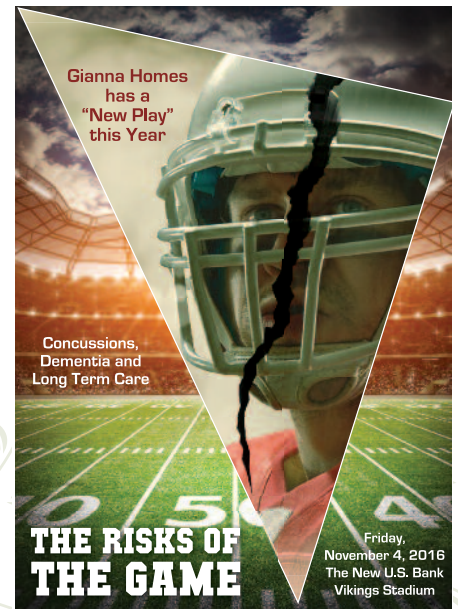
Letter from the Board

Dear Friends of Gianna,

Whow! What a night! We are still amazed at the thought that the Gianna family came together at the new U.S. Bank stadium for our Gala this November. Thank you to so many of you who were table sponsors, underwriters, volunteers and donors. An endeavor like this takes so many people to participate and we, as the Board, are so grateful for you coming alongside us to raise money for the Steve and Mary Mattson Fund. Your contributions enable us to serve residents this coming year who are in need.

Know of our gratitude and best wishes for a wonderful Holiday season for you and your families.

Gratefully,
The Board of Directors of Gianna Homes



Touchdown! Risks of the Game Gala at U.S. Bank Vikings Stadium a Success

This year's Risks of the Game gala on Friday, November 4, was a roaring success. Looking out over the field in the Hyundai Club, 240 guests enjoyed the sights and sounds of the newly constructed U.S. Bank Vikings stadium. The night brought laughs and giggles as well as moments of reflection, led by our Emcee Cory Hepola of Kare11 News.

The evening started out with a pre-event tailgate tour of the stadium for a group of VIP guests. They got to explore the atrium, press box, and even the locker room, all with a locally brewed beer in hand.

Games and cocktails were shared to kick off the evening, accompanied by the vocal stylings of Arne Fogel and his band. Guests savored a plated meal by the Minnesota Hospitality staff while listening to words of our keynote speaker, former Minnesota Wild player, Jordan Leopold. He shared about his experience sustaining a number of brain injuries and concussions and his mission to advocate for brain health. He relayed his time spent with the residents at Gianna Homes where they painted masks together to tell their story around brain health.

Frank Sullivan and his team led guests in an exciting cake auction – with a pumpkin cheesecake selling for over \$4,000! The whoops and hollers that filled the room were almost as if Adrian Peterson had just ran in for a touchdown! Guests also participated in a raffle for beautiful jewelry and a game to win signed Minnesota Wild merchandise and a Vikings helmet signed by legendary coach Bud Grant. The night concluded with dancing and good cheer.

Gianna Homes – our board, staff, families, and residents – are so grateful to all the generosity shown to us that evening! Thank you!

Calling All Cheeseheads: Sandy's Story

If you ever had the chance to meet my mother, you would remember her smile, bright blue eyes and frequent laughter. My mom Sandra Jean came into this world on February 9, 1943. The youngest of 4 children born in Pittsville, Wisconsin, town of 600. Pittsville's claim to fame is that it is the exact center of Wisconsin. My mom loved telling people that; she thought it was so funny. She was a self-proclaimed small-town Wisconsin cheesehead girl who loved the Green Bay Packers. She even had the big cheese hat!



Sandra Jean attended nursing school at Saint Joseph's School of Nursing in Marshfield, Wisconsin, in the early 1960s. Becoming a nurse was my mom's dream job. She cared for her patients with all her heart. She ended her career working as a case manager for workers compensation, specializing in brain injury and spinal cord injuries. She loved the

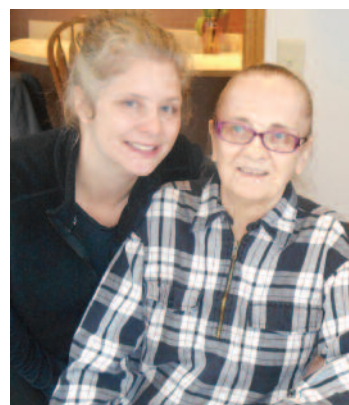
long-term relationships she was able to develop with her patients. Then, my mom's journey took us on a road we did not want to be on.

My journey into my mother's illness started in March of 2006 when I was five months pregnant with my first child. I went to all of my mom's appointments with her, but that first one was the most difficult. We walked back to the car after and she looked at me and said, "I was hoping it was a brain tumor because that just sounds better than dementia." She was embarrassed that she had dementia and always worried about what she might say or do.



In keeping with my mom's personality, she didn't do anything the easy way. She spent five years at the first facility that she named "The Prison." As the dementia progressed, my husband and I decided we needed her closer.

I am an only child and by this time I now had two small children and I was my mother's "everything!" She spent two years at the second facility. During this time, I saw the most mental decline. She became more confused, had a more difficult time communicating and started exhibiting more combative behavior. She spent three weeks in a geriatric acute psychiatric unit only to find out that her current place of residence would not take her back. It was there that the hospital social worker suggested I look at Gianna Homes.



When I called Gianna Homes to see if they could go meet my mom, I felt like someone had wrapped their arms around me. I was reassured that they had a place for my mom no matter how difficult her dementia was. When she and I walked into Gianna Homes, it felt like she was home. Gianna Homes gave my mom a home when she needed it the most. I knew my mom was loved and cared for when I could not be there. Every time I went there, I was greeted with warm hugs and love. Here my mom was able to rediscover all the things she loved before becoming ill. She could be outside gardening, help in the kitchen, work on art, listen to music and dance, but best of all take naps with Claire's dog (my personal favorite). My two children enjoyed visiting grandma Sandy in the "bird room" and having Santa Clause stop by Gianna Homes. This was a place where Sandy's grandchildren could explore and overcome their fear of dementia.

My journey came to an end on February 12, 2016, when my beautiful mother passed away. It took 12 days for her to leave this earth. I felt those days were a gift from God. For some strange reason, my busy crazy life slowed down in those 12 days. I had time to sit by her side as we said goodbye. As my mom slipped away to heaven, the staff at Gianna Homes took care of us both. Many hugs, tears, laughter, warm meals for me and chocolate were provided. My mom and I could not have completed this journey without Anne Marie and all the staff at Gianna Homes. I am extremely grateful for Anne Marie's vision to start a program like this. It gave my mom quality and dignity when no one else could.

Thank you with all my heart to all the staff and volunteers at Gianna Homes!

Unmasking Brain Injury

On Wednesday, July 27, the residents of Gianna Homes and Gladys' Place came together with retired NHL player and brain injury advocate, Jordan Leopold and Cory Hepola of KARE11 News to create masks with the help of the Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance.

The Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance promotes healing through the arts with a project called "Unmasking Brain Injury in Minnesota." Survivors of brain injury are invited to create masks to portray their journeys with brain injury. Some participants have suffered concussions, others deal with seizures, some members of the police and military have incurred head trauma and some survivors have battled diseases. In this journey, all are welcome to come together through the Unmasking project.

At the event at Gianna Homes, each resident, staff, volunteer, and family started by telling a bit about their life story — where they are from and what they did for a living. Then, they were invited to paint their journeys on the mask. Some included stickers and flowers, others simply splashes of color. Each mask was unique.

After our artists completed their pieces, they shared the story of their mask with the group. "You just gotta be who you are!" said one resident.

Indeed, despite physical changes that may happen in the brain, we as caregivers at Gianna Homes strive to see them for they are. As one family member shared, "They remained beautiful through all the changes."

You can view video footage of our event on our YouTube channel!
<https://youtu.be/gHA1l60xTaQ>



Tricia poses with her mom Betty.

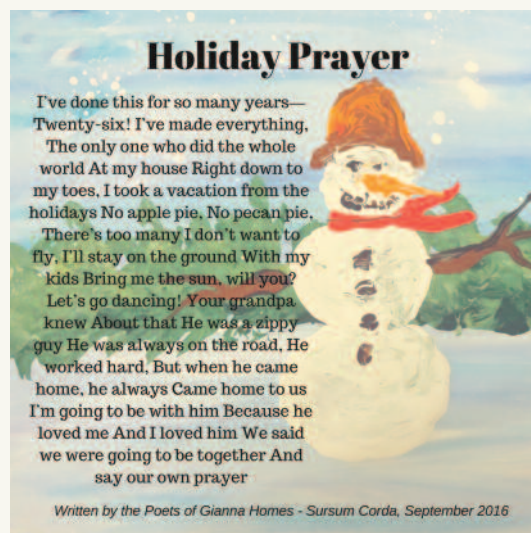


The Phillips family, long-time volunteers at Gianna Homes, display the masks they created.



Poetry with Rachel

Poet Rachel Mortiz, an artist with COMPAS community arts, recently assisted our residents at Gianna Homes and Gladys' Place to collaboratively write their own poems about the holidays.



Volunteer Recruitment Up — Thanks to VolunteerMatch

Program Director Claire Klein is singing the praises of volunteermatch.org. The website matches non-profit organizations with talented, qualified people in the community willing to help. This approach to recruitment has brought in more than 10 volunteers and volunteer families since our initial postings in July — that's a 33% increase in our program in only three months!

If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities at Gianna Homes, check it out! www.volunteermatch.org/search/org951684.jsp



Lefty: The Story of Carol Koniar

My wife Carol Johnston Koniar was born with one arm in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Sweet, caring, and protective of others, Carol loves and cherishes her family. She also loves any kind of animal, and some of her fondest memories are of her family and pets. Her parents encouraged her to not let her one arm be a handicap. Carol grew up enjoying both ice skating and gymnastics.

After gaining some notoriety for her skills in gymnastics, Carol honed her skills and received a scholarship to Cal State Fullerton in California. Twice an All-American gymnast, Carol was a member of one of the most decorated collegiate women's gymnastics teams of all time.

In 1979, Disney produced a documentary short on Carol entitled *The Truly Exceptional: Carol Johnston*. This was one in the series of *The Truly Exceptional* shorts by Walt Disney Educational films, showcasing people living with disabilities. The documentary was turned into a feature film *Lefty*, which premiered across the nation as part of Disney's Wonderful World series.

After a career in gymnastics was cut short in 1980 by a knee injury, Carol used her master's degree towards helping people in Human Resources, where she became a well-respected benefits manager. Carol's desire was to always give back. She joined the board of directors of the Dayle McIntosh Center in Orange County, California, where she shared her experience and worked on fundraising projects.

At a ceremony of her peers, officials and friends, Carol was inducted into the Titan Athletics Hall of Fame in October of 2013. Carol was born with an insatiable drive because of her disability and never felt sorry for herself (she was more concerned about being only 4' 10"). Many people are inspired by her story and positive attitude.



After a few years into our relationship, I started noticing Carol's memory seemed out of the ordinary. "We were getting older" I thought. Carol's physician confirmed "things like this happen when you get older." I thought it was a bit peculiar because at the time, she was only 50.

We started doing more research, changing doctors and taking tests.

Finally, on March 21, 2012, at the age of 54, we received a diagnosis of Alzheimer's. We took it all in stride at first. Now we finally had an answer for friends and family. To help Carol, I started to leave work earlier to work from home in the afternoons.



In 2013, I arranged to work from home full time to provide the care Carol required. We also decided to move closer to my family in Minnesota. Family and neighbors were extremely supportive. As time went on, Carol's decline was steady, but gradual.

In one day, it just seems as if the wheels fell off and something had snapped. My caring, loving, supportive, respectful wife was now angry, fearful and paranoid. We went to the emergency room. Eventually, we all agreed, that she had progressed beyond the limits of the care I could provide. I was lost.

Carol was admitted to the mental health unit for evaluation. I had just one week to find a place that could care for Carol. I toured a number of facilities. The best facilities had no openings; others seemed like 24-hour hospitals.

My Aunt Jan was involved with the Alzheimer's Association and was a tremendous asset. She helped me sort through what was really important. This is when I was introduced to Gianna Homes.

Starting with my first visit to Gianna Homes, a weight was lifted from my shoulders. I felt the warmth and kindness from everyone and knew this was going to be a great home for Carol. Gianna's care and devotion can be seen in the way they care for their residents and facilities.

Our lives have been transformed by Gianna Homes. Carol is able to see pretty flowers and listen to the birds chirping. I have the peace of mind that comes when your loved ones are treated with love and respect.

Carol has traveled on a number of field trips, including one to the Botanical Gardens and another to a children's gymnastics facility. That is the kind of nurturing, warm and open relationship they have with Carol. Gianna keeps Carol smiling with her usual sunny disposition.

I hold Gianna in the highest of regard. Gianna's care for my wife Carol has helped relieve many of the worries and stress that comes with Alzheimer's. Carol and I could not be more grateful for your care, love and guidance.



Namaste: Yoga at Gianna Homes

Every other Friday brings a special visitor to Gianna Homes. Deb Whitcomb visits the home to lead our residents in an adaptive yoga program. No need to turn yourself into a pretzel here — Deb is trained to meet the specific needs of people with special physical and cognitive needs. With guidance, even people who may only typically passively observe activities can be involved with simple stretches and weighted sandbags to help them feel grounded and connected to their own bodies.

Here is what Deb has to say about her practice:

Tell us about your philosophy of care and approach to teaching adaptive yoga. My philosophy of care is first and foremost meeting people where they are at physically, mentally and emotionally to cultivate a connection. It helps to know a bit of history of the resident: How did they live their lives? What were their values, habits and lifestyles? Utilizing movement and deeply ingrained patterns and ways of being can provide a connection based in the present moment. Human connection is hardwired, but unfortunately becomes fragmented by dementia. Short-term memory is difficult to access, but by activating deep, ingrained patterns or neuromuscular pathways unaltered by physical brain changes, for a brief moment in time, the participant is in the here and now.

How do you see yoga practice affecting older adults, especially those with dementia? Yoga works not only on the physical level, but also on mental, emotional and spiritual levels. It may not appear that much is happening physically, when observing adaptive yoga. However, using different postures in a particular sequence, even with minimal effort, activates the life force or Prana within the body,

providing physical benefits including grounding and increasing circulation, muscle tone and strength.

Are there exercises caregivers can try with their loved ones?

Loss of connection through conversation, storytelling and remembering cherished memories are often inaccessible with dementia. Establishing a different method of connecting requires creativity and patience. There are a few simple techniques you can use to enhance connection with your loved one. These include singing songs or nursery rhymes, reading short poetry and/or daily inspirational messages. Incorporating touch and movement while singing, talking or quoting inspirational messages are also ways to foster connection. Another modality that works is to gently place the hands on the tops of the feet (preferably bare) to provide a physical reference for grounding. A tall spine is also important, so referencing the feet and cueing to gently lift the chest or crown of head can accomplish this.

What else would you like us to know? One of the most difficult changes associated with dementia is grief and loss: loss of how things used to be, loss of the keeper of the family history and the matriarch and/or patriarch of the family. Self-compassion and resiliency can help you navigate this difficult and challenging time. Be kind to your self and practice self care. I recommend reading *Finding Hope When Dreams Have Shattered* by Ted Bowman.

Yoga is more than just a way to get in exercise or movement. It helps us connect with our bodies and the world around us. We are so grateful for Deb's work with our residents.

Christmas Time Is Here!

As you do your holiday shopping, please keep Gianna Homes and Gladys' Place in mind! Search for "Gianna Homes" under the wish lists on Amazon or follow the links here!

[amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



Gianna Homes



Gladys' Home



Caregiver Corner: Surviving the Holidays

Tips from Brighton Hospice Chaplain, Carolyn O'Bryan Cochran

Holidays are among the hardest times for those who have experienced the death of a loved one. Thanksgiving and holiday decorations are out. Christmas music is playing everywhere you go. Society is encouraging everyone to join in the holiday spirit and be "of good cheer." The sounds, sights and smells of the holidays can trigger memories of our loved one who has died, becoming constant reminders of his or her absence.

Nothing will take away the hurt and pain you may be feeling. We can't change what has happened. We can, however, choose how to deal with our grief. Here are some suggestions to help you survive those first holidays. I encourage you to be tolerant and compassionate with yourself as you continue to heal.

- 1. Acknowledge and validate your feelings.** Grief is normal! Feelings are not good or bad, they just provide us with information.
- 2. Remember people grieve differently.** Family dynamics change when a loved one dies. There may be differing views on how to act during the holidays — don't expect everyone to be where you are. Try to communicate honestly and respectfully.
- 3. Family Gatherings.** These can be reminders of our love for one another and they can emphasize the absence of the one we love. Plan ahead but leave room to change if you feel it is appropriate. Talk to other family members about how to honor your loved one when together. Ritual can be helpful.

4. Remember the holidays weren't always perfect before your loved one's death.

5. Spend your energy wisely. It is easy to feel fatigued during the holidays. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. It's okay to cut out things that stress you.

6. Practice good self-care. It is important to ground yourself in body/mind/spirit during this difficult time. Do things to take care of yourself.

7. Prepare for after the holiday. Be aware there may be a low time after the hype of the holidays. You may want to plan something to look forward to once they're over.

8. Remember: Love does not end with death. Grief is both a necessity and a privilege. It comes as a result of loving and being loved. Accept yourself as you grieve in your own time. Love yourself. Be patient with yourself. Allow yourself to be surrounded by loving, caring people. Song of Songs tells us that love is stronger than death. Love always remains. Remember the gift of that love!



Mark Your Calendar!

Family and Resident Events

- **Thursday, Nov 24, 2:30 pm** – Thanksgiving pie social
- **Friday, Dec 16, 2:00pm** – Christmas party with visit from Santa and Minnetonka High School Carolers (GH-SC only)
- **Saturday, Dec 17, 10:00am** – Christmas party with visit from Santa and Armstrong High School Carolers (GH-SC only)
- **Thursday, Dec 22** – Mneme therapy painting with Suzy Volden
- **Sunday, Dec 25, 2:30pm** – Cocoa and gift opening under the tree

- **Saturday, Dec 31, 2:30pm** – Countdown to New Year's Party
- **Tuesday, Feb 14, 2:30pm** – Valentine's Day card making
- **Every Other Friday** – Yoga with Deb (GH-SC only)
- **Tuesdays (GH-SC) and Wednesdays (GP)** – Massages with Wendy
- **Thursdays** – Communion services with Pastor Margie, Deacon Francis, and Eucharistic ministers of Immaculate Heart of Mary parish (GH-SC only)
- **Second Thursdays and Last Saturdays** – Communion services with Pastor Margie and with Stephen's ministers of St. Joseph's parish of New Hope (GP only)

Volunteers

Volunteer trainings and staff orientations offered regularly. Contact the office (952-988-0953) for more details.

- **Monday, Jan 9, 7:00pm** – Holiday party

Lewy Body Dementia Support Group

- **Support group meetings** every second Monday of the month. Light lunch served.

Gladys' Place



Our Mission: Providing memory care with a loving kindness that respects the dignity of each resident. Welcome Home!



Christmas letter from Gianna Homes:

Though usually the busiest time of year, the holiday season one of my favorite times of the year. I bet many of you would agree. This year, Gianna Homes put together a list of our favorite things we are grateful for:

1. **Sunshiny days** spent outdoors and exploring Twin Cities culture
2. **Music** that helps us connect with our residents and each other
3. **Laughter** that helps put everything in perspective
4. **Hugs** that make us feel loved and connected to others
5. **Food** that nourishes us and provides sensory delight
6. **Family** who love us no matter what

If you don't have your own gratitude list that reminds you why life's worth living, I encourage you to make one during this holiday season and ring in the New Year with more gratitude and love in your life.

This past year, we have said good-bye to a number of residents here at our homes and they and their families are very much missed. Though we're professional caregivers, losing a resident is always difficult. We build relationships and connections with each other, which leave a void and deep sense of loss when a resident is no longer with us. We extend our heartfelt condolences to all families who will celebrate the holidays without their loved ones this year. However, we have opened our hearts and home to many new residents and their families.

From our home to yours may your holiday season be richly blessed.

Anne Marie and all the staff at Gianna Homes



The words from the traditional New Year's carol written by Scotsman, Robert Burns comes to mind this time of year:

*Should old acquaintance be forgot,
and never brought to mind?
Should old acquaintance be forgot,
and old lang syne?*

*For auld lang syne, my dear,
for auld lang syne,
we'll take a cup of kindness yet,
for auld lang syne.
And surely you'll buy your pint cup!
and surely I'll buy mine!
And we'll take a cup
O, kindness yet, for auld lang syne.*