It’s Christmas at Clara’s House!

It will soon look a lot like Christmas here at Clara’s House. Preparations are underway to set up the snow village and decorate the tree. Christmas music will drift throughout the House, and smells of cinnamon and cider will fill the air. Our volunteers play a very important role in getting the House ready for the holidays. Not only is it a joy for us, but also for our guests. Many do not have the opportunity to decorate or observe the holidays in their own home and have commented on how comforting it is to enjoy familiar holiday sights and smells while at Clara’s House. See page 2

Brothers, Owen and Liam Caristo, didn’t ask for toys for their birthdays. Instead they asked guests to donate items from the Clara’s House wish list and grocery gift cards to keep the pantry stocked. Many thanks to the entire family for inspiring us all with their generosity.

Inside This Issue

It’s Christmas at Clara’s… 1 & 2
Sustaining Gifts……………….. 1 & 2
The Night Shift………………… 2
Grateful Guests…………………. 3
Making a Difference…………… 4
Director’s Note………………… 5
First Connections……………… 5
A Peace of the Spirit…………… 6

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Clara’s House is supported solely by philanthropic donations through the Foundation of FirstHealth.
Christmas (continued)

For all of our volunteers we will have a Holiday Open House on December 15th from 1:00 – 3:00 pm when we will have warm apple cider, tea, coffee, and baked goodies for anyone who would like to stop in and enjoy the festive environment and holiday spirit. We look forward to seeing you and your guests during this special time.

Sustaining Gift Program

Due to the generosity of Clara McLean and our community, through the Foundation of FirstHealth, Clara’s House has been a wonderful gift to all who have passed through our doors since April 30, 2012. Although the physical building has been paid for, we must raise our operating costs each year in order to sustain our services and provide for continued growth and outreach.

As you know, we request a $35/night donation when guests stay at Clara’s House. This is far less than the actual cost for all services such as food, utilities, and maintenance, which is actually closer to $85. In addition, some are not able to afford the full $35 so they give what they can toward their stay.

Based on the many notes and letters we receive from guests, it is clear that Clara’s House is indeed a safe harbor in the midst of life’s storms. Therefore, we are excited to announce the new Clara’s House Sustaining Gift Program which allows our supporters and benefactors the flexibility to give on a regular basis in a way that is most convenient for them. In addition to cash and checks, gifts may be made by credit card with automatic payments occurring monthly, quarterly, or annually. Gifts made in kind are accepted, as well as planned giving opportunities through the Foundation of FirstHealth. Please consider joining us in supporting operations at Clara’s House. For more information on giving options, contact Rebecca Ainslie, House Director, at 715-4224 or rainslie@firsthealth.org.

The Night Shift

By: Catherine Delavergne, Relief Manager

The first few times I worked overnight at Clara’s House, I was admittedly wary of ‘things that go bump in the night’. Listening to all the ‘noises’ each night (doors closing, people walking and talking, etc.) gives me the sense of being a ‘watcher’ or ‘gate master’.

When we have a full house, it is alive with guests coming and going. Families greatly rely on our night staff, and they recognize our interest in their personal lives, daily challenges at the hospital, and patient progress.

I think of Clara’s House as “my” house and treat it with care, making sure everything is in its place. Typically guests are greeted, coffee is ready, desserts are offered, and a sense of calm and relief await them when their day is done. “I hope you sleep well” and “Good night” are regularly voiced. It is a very good feeling knowing everyone is tucked in for the night and responsibilities are complete.

Although working nights is not a traditional setting, it is rewarding. Families often need to talk to staff and to each other, sharing their stories, supporting each other, praying for special needs and knowing they are not alone in their circumstances.

So, you can see I have become quite comfortable in my Clara’s House surroundings -- confident that families’ needs are being met both day and night in this very special place.
Grateful Guests

As Clara’s House and Healing Garden volunteers you work hard to make the environment beautiful, welcoming, and relaxing for our families and guests. However, often when you are here, the guests are at the hospital visiting loved ones and you don’t get to see how much they enjoy and appreciate the special atmosphere you have created. Below you will see photos and notes from recent guests. These are only samples of the feedback we get every day from those who stay with us during some of the most difficult times in their lives.

September 27, 2014

Words can’t describe how thankful I am for being able to stay here. The house and grounds are absolutely beautiful. The staff and volunteers are very welcoming and nice.

This house is as close to feeling like we were at home, while our baby girl was getting better, as could be.

Love, the Fullers

Volunteer, Betteann Mamel, assists the Fullers who recently stayed at Clara’s House while their newborn baby girl gained strength in the MRH Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. It was happy day for all of us when they got the green light to take her home. The family offered their gratitude in the above note.

September 9, 2014

This is to express my sincere appreciation to the “team” at the Clara McLean House for the hospitality shown me during the worst time of my life.

You went out of your way to show me the ultimate in caring and friendly hospitality, and for that I will be eternally grateful. . . I was almost a permanent fixture there for so many weeks, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for allowing me the privilege.

Staying there surely did lighten my burden during those difficult days.

My best to all of you,
John Johnson
The Foundation is Making a Difference

The Foundation of FirstHealth and the Clara McLean House Advisory Council are pleased to announce the new Health, Healing, and the Humanities Series.

This series of informative lectures guides us in recognizing and reconnecting to the healing power of nature and art.

In October, we welcomed Bella Meyer, the granddaughter of artist Marc Chagall, who gave a wonderful presentation on the Healing Power of Flowers.

We are looking forward to our next two speakers and hope you will be able to join us.

- **November 19, 2014 @ 3pm** – Vivian Jacobson will present “The Literary Chagall: The Healing Powers of Prose and Poetry.” Location: Clara McLean House
- **February 4, 2015** – John Coffey, Curator of American and Modern Art, NC Museum of Art
- **May 20, 2015** – Richard Louv, Author of Last Child in the Woods.

For more information about the Health, Healing, and the Humanities Series, please call Lynn Holland at (910) 695-7510.

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Light Up a Life Illuminates Garden, Honors Lives

Throughout the month of December, the lights on the three holly trees in the garden at the FirstHealth Hospice and Palliative Care campus will shine in memory or honor of someone with a hospice connection – a physician who has provided care, a nurse who has offered comfort, a special volunteer, or perhaps a hospice patient who has passed away.

This year’s Light up a Life program will take place on **Thursday, December 11th at 5pm** on the Hospice and Palliative Care Campus just off Highway 15-501 North.

“The Light up a Life Program is a really special time that our staff and volunteers look forward to each year. Having the program at our new campus and alongside the beautiful gardens brings a sense of closeness and natural connection with those we are remembering,” says Hospice and Palliative Care Director Tina Gibbs.

For more information on the Light up a Life program or on how to dedicate a light, call the FirstHealth Hospice Foundation at 910-695-7500.
A Note from the Director
by Rebecca Ainslie

Dear Volunteers and Friends,

As another fiscal year has come to a close at Clara’s House, I would like to share some numbers with you from the past year:

- Total Overnight Guests: 1,608
- Room Nights (number of nights/rooms occupied): 2,293
- Average Length of Stay: 2.84 days
- Average Revenue per Room Night: $29.49
- Actual Operating Cost per Room: $85.00
- Average Occupancy (up from 44% from the previous year): 52%

Our busiest months were January at 69% and March at 70% occupancy. Our largest specialties served were Medical at 189, Neuro at 147, and Heart at 139. The top counties served were Cumberland at 24% and Richmond and Robeson counties at 11% each.

Numbers help tell our story, but they certainly don’t reflect the many late night chats and cups of tea shared between a worried family member and our staff, or the many heartfelt hugs exchanged here, both happy and sad. As staff and volunteers, it is indeed a privilege to assist our families at Clara McLean House as they walk their journey.

In Gratitude and Best Wishes for a Happy Thanksgiving,
Rebecca

First Connections Holiday P-A-R-T-Y!

It is time, once again, for one of our favorite First Connections events – the holiday gift swap and luncheon.

This year’s event will take place on Wednesday, December 17th at 11am at the Clara McLean House.

Although we will still have the gift swap and luncheon, we will be adding a new and exciting twist as we do every year so stay tuned for more information.

An invitation will be sent out in early December, but you can mark your calendars now!
A Peace of the Spirit by Pam Hudson

I recently attended a conference at Lake Junaluska, and we had daily devotions lead by some of the Chaplains in attendance. One young woman spoke about the importance and prevalence of ‘small things’ in our lives that have a big impact on us and help sustain our faith. She shared of her time in Uganda with orphan children and how she was touched by the affection and smiles of those children. As I listened I could not help but think about Clara’s House, the staff and volunteers, and the families we serve. I have seen kindness shared over and over as time was spent together listening, as tears were shed, and as touches of love and support were both so generously given and received. And I would have to agree that these things deeply matter and empower us all. In fact, I would press the point that these seemingly ‘small things’ are what makes us great as we connect and sustain one another. As we approach our thanksgiving time of year, we can look closely at all that connects us to one another, the things that touch us where we live, and how we may lift each other up in times of need and day by day. Thank you all for your time, talents and treasures!