

# IMPACT Stories

HOW YOUR GIVING IMPACTS PATIENTS AND YOUR COMMUNITY



Pictured above: Rick and Rebekah Martin, surrounded by their family and children, delivered a donation of stuffed animals and blankets to Borgess-Lee Hospital.

## Eva Martin Project brings comfort to young patients at rural Borgess hospitals

In June 2023, Rick and Rebekah Martin experienced the unthinkable when their 3-1/2-year-old daughter Eva accidentally drowned in the family pool.

In their rush to the hospital for emergency care, Rick and Rebekah didn't have a chance to bring along Eva's favorite stuffed animal or blanket.

"When we were able to see Eva, she laid under a butterfly blanket alongside two stuffed animals," Rick says. "Eva absolutely loved butterflies. Someone had taken the time to offer comfort items to Eva. Those items also helped comfort us and came to have great meaning. They were the last items in Eva's possession."

*Continued on next page*

*Continued from previous page*

Rick and Rebekah turned their grief into heartfelt giving when they established The Eva Martin Project. Since its inception in August 2023, the Baroda-based nonprofit has donated more than 3,300 stuffed animals and 1,200 blankets to children's hospitals, pediatric departments and emergency rooms across southwest Michigan.

"These gifts allow us to continue telling Eva's story and keep her in our memory," Rick says. "They also help comfort children and families facing similar situations. Hopefully those children will be able to return home from the hospital with their parents and their little furry companions."



Pictured: The Martin family delivering stuffed animals and blankets to Borgess-Lee Hospital.

In January, the Eva Martin Project made a generous gift of more than \$3,000-worth of blankets and stuffed animals to Ascension Borgess-Lee Hospital. The hospital has shared

the donated items with Borgess Allegan, Borgess-Pipp, Woodbridge Hills and the Borgess Hospital Emergency Department.

Jessica Albar, MSN, RN, CEN, CLSSBB, Regional Director of Nursing for Ascension Borgess-Lee, Borgess Allegan, and Borgess-Pipp Hospitals, says the donation has touched many young patients and their families.

"Borgess is deeply grateful for the generous donation from the Eva Martin Project," Albar says. "These thoughtful gifts have brought comfort and smiles to our pediatric patients during some of their most vulnerable moments."

Whether they are feeling scared, in pain, or simply unwell, the warmth of a blanket or the hug of a stuffed animal helps make their experience a little brighter. These gifts bring hope and healing in a meaningful way."

Rick says their nonprofit relies on monetary donations, gifts of new stuffed animals and family members who make many of the blankets by hand.

"We couldn't do our work without the support of family, the community, and the network of individuals who believe in this project," he says. "It's truly amazing to see everyone come together to help change the dynamic between hospital staff and young patients."

To support any of the Borgess Foundations, scan the QR code or visit [ascnmifnd.org/abfgivenow](https://ascnmifnd.org/abfgivenow).





## Borgess hospitals in southwest Michigan to become part of Beacon Health System

On April 3, 2025 Ascension announced that a definitive agreement was signed to transfer ownership of all Ascension Borgess southwest ministries to Beacon Health System, a non-profit health system headquartered in South Bend, Indiana.

This transition to Beacon Health System is expected to be finalized this summer, subject

to satisfaction of customary closing conditions, including regulatory and canonical approvals.

Until the time of the transition, there will be no immediate changes and operations will continue as usual.

**Across the Borgess Foundations, restricted funds will continue to be dedicated to the purpose intended by donors.**

*More information will be announced as additional details are available.*

## Message from the Chief Development Officer

### **A legacy of compassionate care: Your support matters**

As we prepare to embark on an exciting new chapter with Beacon Health, your unwavering support remains more crucial than ever. For over 50 years, the Borgess Foundation has been dedicated to enhancing healthcare for our patients, associates, and the community. Your generosity has been instrumental in providing the care our community needs.

### **Our mission of healing and health remains unchanged.**

Since 2000, donors have contributed more than \$32 million through the Borgess Foundation. This philanthropy has been

pivotal in every major development, building project, and new era of healthcare at Borgess.

The southwest region encompasses the main hospital in Kalamazoo and two rural hospitals: Borgess-Lee Memorial and Borgess Allegan, with each hospital having its own foundation. As of 2025, six dedicated staff members serve the three foundations, bringing a collective 106 years of experience in fundraising and foundation roles. They are supported by 39 community members who serve on one of the three foundation boards.

Together, we continue to build a healthier future for all.



**Kim Loftus, CFRE**  
Chief Development Officer  
Borgess Foundation

## Second Chance: Cardiac patient honors those who saved his life

April 10, 2010 is a special date for Chris Denick (formerly of Richland), because it was nearly his last day alive.

Chris and three of his friends went golfing that day at Yarrow Golf and Conference Resort in Augusta, Michigan. At the 13<sup>th</sup> hole, Chris began feeling dizzy.

“My friends said I bent over and placed my hands on my knees before falling backwards,” says Chris, who now lives in Sanibel, Florida. “I had a major heart attack.”

Chris, who was just 46 at the time, had never had any serious health issues. The other members of his foursome took immediate action. While John Ward called 911 and went to the clubhouse in search of a defibrillator, Keith Gregory and Mark Leineke provided CPR.

“Mark constantly did compressions, which was enough to keep a flicker of hope going,” Chris says. “He had recently taken a CPR course. I invited him to golf only the day before.”

Chris arrived at Ascension Borgess Hospital in a coma. The outlook was grim. “The cardiologist used a medical device to cool my body temperature, thereby reducing the risk of brain damage,” Chris says. “Everyone was extremely concerned.”

Remarkably, after four days, Chris emerged from his coma. Shortly thereafter, he underwent a



procedure to remove major blockages from three heart arteries. The surgeons also installed an automatic defibrillator. Afterwards, Chris began a 12-week cardiac rehabilitation program at the Borgess Health and Fitness Center.

**“It’s amazing that I came through all of that,” says Chris, who works as a consultant for manufacturing and industrial companies. “I can’t say enough about the doctors, nurses and other caregivers at Borgess. I’m still here because of them.”**

He adds that the cardiac rehabilitation staff were instrumental in helping him emotionally. “After such a traumatic experience, I had doubts about what I’d be able to do physically,” Chris says. “I’d see people working out in the fitness center and wonder if I would ever be able to do those things again. Then, I changed my diet, lost

weight, and gained strength. The support and confidence I received from the rehab caregivers made me believe in myself.”

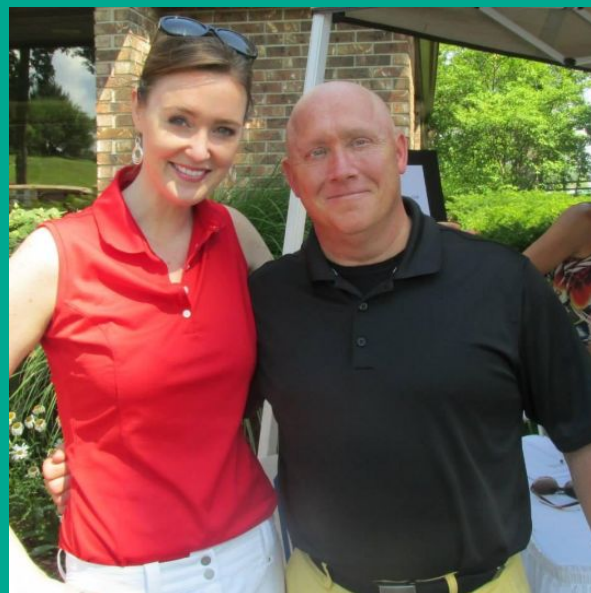
Since recovering, Chris has actively supported cardiac care at Borgess philanthropically. This past April, he paid special tribute to the members of his foursome who helped save his life 15 years ago. His donation in their names will support Borgess’ cardiac rehabilitation program.

“I want to support cardiac rehab impact on patients while recognizing the lifesaving help of my friends,” Chris says. “I know from my own experience that donations like mine have an immediate and positive impact on cardiac patients. Those gifts give people a second chance.”

Kim Loftus, CFRE, Chief Development Officer of the Ascension Borgess Foundation, says tribute gifts are a great way for donors to honor special people or a special occasion.

“A tribute gift is a meaningful way to express appreciation, celebrate a milestone, or honor a loved one,” she says. “It allows donors to show gratitude for people who have made a difference in their lives, commemorate an event or keep a loved one’s memory alive while supporting a cause they care about.”

Gifts to support cardiology at Borgess ensure that patients like Chris receive the best care using innovative technology in the most advanced facilities. Lives are saved every day thanks to donations made to cardiology programs. Make your gift today, and ensure patients like Chris can survive life threatening heart-related events.



In addition to his giving, Chris Denick has supported Borgess by participating in the annual Golf for Health tournament. He is pictured above with Kate Tillotson, former WWMT anchor and Borgess Foundation Board Member, at the Golf for Health tournament in 2013– three years after experiencing a heart attack while golfing.

---

If you’d like to make a tribute gift and leave a lasting impact on the cardiac care Borgess Hospital provides, please visit [ascnmifnd.org/abf-heart](https://ascnmifnd.org/abf-heart) or scan the QR code.





## Donor gifts provide philanthropic investment in Neurology

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our donors, the Borgess Foundation was able to invest \$2 million in the O-arm imaging system and Trios (Jackson) surgical table, to enhance neurosurgery at Borgess Hospital.

This advanced equipment will improve care for patients undergoing spine surgery and expand the hospital's capabilities in performing these critical procedures.



Pictured left to right: Jen Enyart, RN; Kim Loftus (Chief Development Officer); Joe Brogger (Foundation Board Chair); Sherry Gesmundo (Foundation Board Member); Dr. Jason Ryan (Foundation Board Member); Jessica Haycook, RN; Adam Herrera (Sterile Processing Manager/CBSPD).



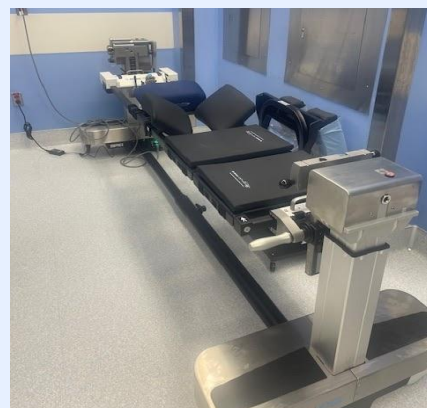
To support Neurology at Borgess Hospital, scan the QR code or visit [ascnmifnd.org/abfgivenow](https://ascnmifnd.org/abfgivenow) and select the "Brain and Spine" designation.

**The O-arm™ O2 Imaging**  
Enables precise quality control, allowing surgeons to confirm their results and help safeguard optimal results.



### Trios® (Jackson) Surgical Table

Allows Borgess Hospital to treat patients with certain traumatic cervical and spinal fractures with the ability to stabilize the spine for a safe surgery.



## Tree of Love celebrates 40 years of saving lives

In 1985, a small but passionate group of volunteers at Borgess Hospital launched what would become a life-saving tradition now entering its 40th year. The Tree of Love, a fundraising initiative born from the Borgess Service League, has evolved from a campaign to support varying hospital programs, into a cornerstone of early breast cancer detection efforts in our community for four decades.

The idea for the Tree of Love Campaign came from longtime Service League member Evelyn Zeigler, whose vision was brought to life with the support of Borgess and the volunteer coordinator Cheryl Westbrook. Fellow League members Deb Ryan and Norma Dunham were also instrumental in shaping the early success of the campaign allowing it to grow into the lifesaving program it is today.

The Borgess Tree of Love campaign has provided thousands of patients with access to mammograms and vital follow-up care when needed—ensuring that breast cancer is detected as early as possible. This life-saving work continues today, fueled by community support.

**You are invited to join us in celebrating this remarkable milestone by making a gift to the Tree of Love campaign and attending the kickoff and tree lighting ceremonies.**

Together, we honor 40 years of compassion, commitment, and countless lives saved.



**Please join us at these 2025 Tree of Love events:**

### **Borgess Tree of Love kickoff**

Wednesday, October 1, 2025

5:30 pm

Borgess Cancer Center  
2520 Robert Jones Way  
Kalamazoo, MI 49009

### **Borgess-Lee Tree of Love Tree-lighting ceremony**

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

5:30 pm

Borgess-Lee Hospital  
420 West High Street  
Dowagiac, MI 49047

### **Borgess Tree of Love Tree-lighting ceremony**

Thursday, December 4, 2025

5:30 pm

Borgess Hospital  
Lawrence Education Center  
1521 Gull Road  
Kalamazoo, MI 49048



# IMPACTStories

**Ascension Borgess Foundation**  
**Ascension Borgess-Lee Foundation**  
**Ascension Borgess Allegan Foundation**  
1521 Gull Road, MSB 300  
Kalamazoo, MI 49048

## Save the date for these upcoming fundraising events:



**Borgess-Lee Golf Outing**  
**Thursday, July 10, 2025**  
Indian Lake Hills Golf Course  
[ascnmifnd.org/leegolf](https://ascnmifnd.org/leegolf)



**Borgess Golf for Health**  
**Monday, July 21, 2025**  
Gull Lake Country Club  
[ascnmifnd.org/borgessgolf](https://ascnmifnd.org/borgessgolf)



**Don Blackmond Memorial**  
**Wine & Beer Tasting Event**  
**Saturday, August 2, 2025**  
Blackmond Sesquicentennial Farm

IMPACTStories is a Benevolent Voice publication of Ascension Borgess Foundation in southwest Michigan. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please contact:

Ascension Borgess Foundation • 1521 Gull Road, MSB 300 • Kalamazoo, MI 49048 • 269-226-8100

© Ascension 2025. All rights reserved.