

# twigs

Newsletter of  
Children's Hospital Branches, Inc.  
Fall 2024

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5700 Martin Luther King, Jr.  
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Phone: (510) 428-3355



**As I pen my last letter** as President of the Children's Hospital Branches board, I am reflecting on the reasons I chose to lead these fine ladies. I was humbled to receive the offer from our Parliamentarian Cece Werson. I have been delighted and truly honored to serve these past three years and cannot thank you all enough for your support. In my very first letter, I spoke of the desire to uphold the writ-

ten mission statement of one of my predecessors, Kristina Smith. I hope that I have been successful in raising funds for and awareness of UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital while educating, providing service, promoting teamwork but most of all having fun.

During my tenure, we have continued to evolve our relationship with the foundation, honing our process for identifying critical needs from many departments of our beloved hospital, allowing every branch to choose a cause to support.

was inspired by the concerted teamwork from members across many branches. In addition to having a ton of fun, we were successful in our fundraising efforts and raised over \$140,000.

This fall, we learned so much from the speakers at our events, including doctors, grateful parents and the new hospital president Dr. Nicholas Holmes at our most recent General Meeting. I believe he truly recognized the powerful commitment of this group of extraordinary women, especially when he realized the decades-long service of many of our members.

Sara DeVries has been more than an office manager. She has been my guide and guardian, working behind the scenes to keep all things running smoothly. If I or the board thinks of something that needs doing, Sara has likely already done it. She is worth more than her weight in gold! Our continued gratitude always. Thank you Sara!

As the world changes, the Branches continue to evolve and, after 110 years, we are still ever present. Though our current numbers are small relative to our

## "Dr. Holmes realized the decades-long service of many of our members."

We bid farewell to Hill Branch's long-standing Winter Ball event that had been held annually in San Francisco for 62 years. Its retirement has allowed for a wonderful new Hill Branch event to emerge - Have a Heart for the Hospital, a fun dance party held at the University Club at Cal Memorial Stadium. It is going on its third year and we look forward to many years to come.

Lombardy has continued to host fun and productive shopping events in a variety of venues in the East Bay. Cacao has had great success with their online popcorn sales and this holiday season, they are running a raffle for a quilt created by one of their former members. Two of our long-standing branches, Teak and Chinquapin, combined to become the Oak Branch. The members of this branch are the volunteers that make the Bambino shop run. They continue to raise money while rehoming so many wonderful treasures. Rowan Branch continues to add more events to augment their long-standing and successful 23-year spring Shopping Spree. I look forward to continuing to support the wonderful ladies I enjoy "fun"draising with in my own branch.

We recently concluded our all branches event Sips in the City at a new and exciting venue on Treasure Island. I

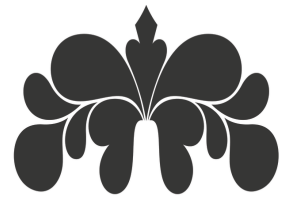
previous high of over 60 branches, we are so very mighty in our commitment to the children who need our care and compassion. Again, I thank you all for your support. I will remain on the Board and continue to serve the Branches. I stand fully committed to carry on our mission and look forward to seeing everyone in the new year. I humbly pass the gavel to your new Branches Board President, Gretchen Gibson. I know she will be a magnificent leader.

### 2024 Board of Directors

Eileen Caponio.....	Rowan, President
Gretchen Gibson.....	Hill, V.P.
Deirdre Henry.....	Rowan, Treasurer /Sunshine Fund
Kristina Smith.....	Rowan, Secretary
Sandra Carpenter.....	Cacao
Fredora Darmstedt.....	Oak, Family House
Julie Davidson.....	Lombardy
Wendy Dunn.....	Lombardy
Marianne Malenk.....	Oak, Bud Branch
Clare McDonald.....	Lombardy
Carol Miller.....	Oak, Bambino
Julie Parodi.....	Lilac
Lucy Talbot.....	Hill
Linda Webber.....	Lilac

Cece Werson..... Hawthorne Emeritus, Advisory  
Kerry Plain..... Garden Emeritus, Non-voting

# Sips in the City on Treasure Island



The 1920's roared into Treasure Island on September 19 as flappers and Dapper Dans tasted delicious premier wines and spirits, bid on an array of coveted auction items, hoped to win a beautiful jewelry raffle necklace and raised their paddles in support of lifesaving NICU equipment. The 200 Sips in the City guests, almost all of whom were dressed in period costumes, also enjoyed the art deco ambiance, swayed to a live jazz trio and nibbled delicious catered offerings while enjoying the spectacular waterfront views of the Bay Bridge, San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge from Skyline Events. The event netted \$146,000!

Many dedicated Branch volunteers from all active Branches worked diligently to transform Skyline Events into an art deco dream. "This year we continued our All Branches Sips in the City event which raised much needed funds, educated our guests and promoted fun intra-branch member teamwork," says Branches President Eileen Caponio.

"The decor transported guests to a glamorous Gatsby-era soiree, with dramatic ostrich feather centerpieces, bold Art Deco prints and sophisticated lighting," says Facilities Co-Chair Bettina Pletkin.

A sumptuous and visually stunning buffet was catered by Culinary Excellence owned by chef Christian Hardy who incidentally is the former head of pediatric cardiology at Children's Hospital Oakland. Guests also enjoyed commemorating the evening by having their photos taken at the fun virtual photo booth service and by roving professional photographer and Rowan member Sofia Titvinidze.

The evening's program featured a passionate talk from NICU director Dr. Art D'Harlingue and grateful mom Nathalie Toribio which preceded a paddle raise to support purchase of a phototherapy device for babies with jaundice and a near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) to monitor brain oxygenation. It was a moving, fun and successful evening in support of our favorite cause.



Attendees chatting with a winery representative



Branch members decked out in their art deco outfits



Moe and Aztia Ansari selecting the winner of the jewelry raffle from the box held by event co-chair Kristina Smith.



addressed the group. He conveyed his appreciation and admiration for the work of the Branches over the years. He gave an update on the ongoing hospital construction with renderings of what the final indoor and outdoor spaces will look like. After Dr. Holmes' remarks, the group adjourned for a delicious lunch. A wonderful time was had by all!

**2024 FUNDS RAISED**

• Community Foundation Grant	\$5,000
• Community Fund Match	\$10,000
• General Donations	\$12,000
• Other Funds Raised	\$10,000
• Sponsorships and Fundraising	\$45,000
• Other Donations	\$28,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>

The Bambino shop manager Lou Gates provided an engaging update on the store and Carol Maes gave the details on the plans for the holiday season at the shop, including the raffle of a holiday quilt. Nia Blakeney from Cacao announced the raffle of another quilt created by one of their former members, Joyce Williams. Kris Miller Fisher from Hill Branch briefed the members on the third annual Have a Heart for the Hospital planned for February 8th at the University Club at Cal Memorial Stadium. Then, the new hospital president Dr. Nicholas Holmes



Jasmine Payne and Beverly Ingram from the hospital foundation.



# Elena's Story



During its over-100-year history, the Children's Hospital Branches has contributed funds to UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland to support services and equipment for almost every department. The inspiring story of Elena Sweet exemplifies a patient who has benefited from expertise from across the hospital - the emergency department to oncology to child life to the Braddock

Emotional Support Team (BEST). Please consider a donation to help the hospital continue to help patients like Elena via [childrenshospital.org/donate](https://childrenshospital.org/donate) or the remittance envelope provided.

When asked about herself, 13-year-old Elena Sweet doesn't hesitate. "I'm the biggest drama queen you'll ever meet," she says. As a young child, Elena's penchant for drama manifested as elaborate imaginary games. As she grew, she explored new worlds as an avid reader and passionate stage performer. Elena was participating in a theater class in San Francisco when her Dad, Josh, first noticed the limp.

It was the summer before her 11th birthday when Elena began to feel an ache in her right leg, which a pediatrician attributed to growing pains. But over Thanksgiving break, the pain got worse, and one night, Elena collapsed on the way to the dinner table. Josh and Liz rushed their daughter to UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland where she was diagnosed with Ewing Sarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer. As a doctor relayed the news to Liz in a crowded hospital hall, she thought to herself, "This is the moment that everything changes."

Elena's prognosis was good, but the journey would be arduous. Over 10 months, she received 14 cycles of chemotherapy, spent 115 nights in the hospital, and underwent multiple surgeries, including a 15-hour procedure to salvage her leg. As Elena's parents agonized over how to comfort their child and doctors ran the gamut of pain management options, relief came in surprising places. One day, Hania, a child life specialist, brought Ahbi, Oakland's beloved facility dog, for a visit. Ahbi put his paws on Elena's bed, then climbed up next to her, and she put her arms around him and held on. "I think it was the first time she actually felt some real comfort," says Josh.

UCSF Benioff Oakland's Braddock Emotional Support Team (BEST), which offers psychological services for hospitalized children, worked closely with Elena to address her fear of needles. Together, they came up with a "poke plan," empowering Elena to dictate the timing of the poke, vocalize her concerns, and advocate for herself. "They helped me realize that I could get through this by expressing my feelings."

"Everyone, the doctors, nurses, child life specialists, psychologists, music therapists, massage therapists, educators, they were all focused on treating our whole child and keeping her spirits lifted," says Liz. "UCSF Benioff Oakland became our family, our home. We felt so held."

Elena is now in remission. After missing most of her 5th grade year, she rose from her wheelchair to walk, assisted only by a crutch, across the stage to accept her diploma to deafening applause.



Elena Sweet during one of her hospital stays.



Elena was awarded the 2024 Colin Powell Medal of Courage at the Dreamfest Concert for UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals.



# Cacao Quilt Raffle

Cacao Branch is conducting a raffle for a beautiful quilt made by former Cacao member Joyce Williams. Raffle tickets will be available for purchase until January 18th. Please contact Sandra Carpenter (510-450-0283) to purchase.



## Rowan Phoenix Boutique

The Phoenix Boutique, a fundraiser for the Child Life program on the Oakland campus of the hospital, took place on November 14th. The word Phoenix is symbolic as it references 'rising out of the flames'. Our goal in raising money is to support the Art Therapy programs in particular. We want to help elevate the experience children have at the hospital and we believe in the power of these programs to do just that!

Art Therapy gives children going through illness a new 'voice' to express their predicament, an escape from it and a way to lessen stress and bring colorful joy!

Many of the vendors are artists or at the least creative entrepreneurs, so this is close to all of our hearts. We raise money through vendor sales, raffles and donations.

Boundary Oak in Walnut Creek generously donated the beautiful venue along with delicious appetizers for all the shoppers. Among the artists are Anne Morrisson Rabe, Le Dao, June Sablan, Lily Dong, Pam Drake and Julia Minasian.





# Bambino

Bambino was closed to shoppers Tuesday November 19 and Wednesday November 20 to transform the shop for the Holidays, skillfully managed by Colleen Lund and Susan Sperry. Though Carol Maes retired from managing the Holidays, she organized the incoming donations throughout the year and ensured everything was priced.

There was a private party for about 30 volunteers and Branch members Thursday November 21 to kick off the holiday season. We opened to the public later that afternoon.

During the holiday season, the shop's "Winter Wonderland" is open Tuesday through Thursday from 11-3 and Friday through Sunday from 11-4. The last open day for 2024 is Sunday December 22.



Colleen Lund, Dee McDonough, Susan Sperry (left to right) at the shop decorated for the holidays



Carol Maes and Liz Wheeler (left to right)



Fredora Darmstadt, Lee Herndon and Dee McDonough (left to right)





Hill Branch Presents  
A Western Soirée to Benefit  
UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland



BOOTS, BUCKLES &  
**BIG HEARTS**



HAVE A HEART FOR THE HOSPITAL 2025

SATURDAY  
**02.08.2025**

\$225 per person | University Club Level | UC Memorial Stadium



**HELP THE BABIES & CHILDREN!**

**DONATE TO BAMBINO**



We accept donations  
Tuesdays through Saturdays  
11am- 2pm

Please **call the shop** ahead of time  
if you want to **donate furniture**  
510-658-7473

**Five-bag maximum** for  
each donation drop-off

Large or small, donations are always  
welcome, provided the items are  
**clean, undamaged and ready to be  
priced** for the sales floor.



**HOLIDAY HOURS**

**11/22/2024 - 12/22/2024**

**TUESDAY - THURSDAY  
11AM - 3 PM**

**FRIDAY - SUNDAY  
11AM - 4PM**



**Children's Hospital Branches, Inc.**

5700 Martin Luther King, Jr. Way  
Oakland, CA 94609-1673

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## SUPPORT OUR UPCOMING EVENTS!

### **Hill Branch Valentine's Dance**

Saturday, February 8  
The University Club, Cal Memorial Stadium

### **General Meeting February/March**

Saturday, March 1  
Outpatient Center

### **Volunteer Recognition Luncheon**

Wednesday, April 16  
Sequoia Country Club

### **Rowan Branch Shopping Spree**

Monday, April 28  
Round Hill Country Club

### **Lilac Branch "Run for the Roses" Casino Gala**

Saturday, May 3  
Green Valley Country Club in Fairfield

Please consider donating on our website: [childrenshospitalbranches.org/donate](http://childrenshospitalbranches.org/donate)  
You may also mail your donation to the office; look for the donation envelope inside.