

Sally Werst McKeen

Community volunteer and donor, Community Hospice of Texas



Healthcare organizations received nearly \$41 billion in charitable gifts in 2018. The impact of those dollars is even greater than the numbers suggest.

Given pressure on reimbursements, not-for-profit healthcare organizations increasingly rely on philanthropy to fund capital projects and innovation in patient services.

That makes every healthcare donor a hero, but Sally Werst McKeen is truly extraordinary, said Diane Wolfe, who nominated her for Health Care Heroes.

"Her dedication to Community Hospice of Texas is just one example of Sally's lifetime contributions to health care. Her partnership with Community Hospice of Texas began almost 30 years ago when Harry K. Werst, her father and mentor, was diagnosed with leukemia. His referral to hospice changed her life," Wolfe said.

"It was the most compassionate, caring relationship that I had ever experienced," McKeen remembers.

In the decades since, McKeen has helped build Community Hospice of Texas into the state's largest not-for-profit provider. She is more than the organization's most generous individual donor, Wolfe said.

McKeen was the visionary behind development of Community Hospice of Texas inpatient care. While most hospice care is provided in the home, inpatient units represent a high standard and provide a place for 24-hour care when a patient's symptoms cannot be managed at home or family caregivers need respite, Wolfe said.

"Without inpatient hospice facilities, known as hospice houses, symptom crises would require emergency hospital care

at higher cost to health care payers and families themselves. Sally's vision, fundraising acumen and leadership gift made the first hospice house in Fort Worth/Dallas a reality. Now known as Community Hospice of Texas House at Huguley, it opened in 1997 and today is one of three providing inpatient care to Community Hospice of Texas patients and families."

She is a past board chair and five-term leader on the Community Hospice board of directors, and a well-connected civic leader whose network had been tapped to strengthen the organization.

"Now she lends her name to the Sally Werst McKeen Legacy Society and will help provide Community Hospice of Texas care for generations to come through her estate gift commitment," Wolfe said.

Wolfe said McKeen is a force in nonprofit governance and has contributed decades of experience to strategic initiatives as a long-serving member of the Community Hospice of Texas Board of Directors and veteran of board service at more than 30 organizations, including Cancer Care Services.

She also contributes public affairs expertise earned over a 30-year career in civil service to the U.S. Army and Army Corps of Engineers and adds fundraising skills that provided essential resources, Wolfe said.

A partial list of her service includes:

Chairing the board of directors for Leadership Fort Worth, Cancer Care Services, Community Hospice of Texas, Fort Worth/Tarrant Area Salvation Army and Huguley Memorial Medical Center Hospice.

Service on the board of directors for Circle T, Girl Scouts of the USA and co-founder of Adult Girl Scout Network, Court

Appointed Special Advocates for Children, Crime Stoppers/Citizens Organized Against Crime, Executive Service Corps, Learning Center North Texas, Longhorn Council, Boy Scouts of America, North Texas Community Foundation, Meals on Wheels Endowment, Tarrant Area Food Bank, Union Gospel Mission, Women's Center Tarrant County, Women's Policy Forum of Tarrant County and Young Men's Christian Association Camp Carter.

She also was a member of the capital campaign steering committee for Goodwill Industries.

– Paul K. Harral

Why do you do what you do?

To try to help our community with human needs organizations.

Is there someone who inspired you to enter health care as a volunteer?

My father, Harry K. Werst, who was my mentor in giving back.

If you could make one change that would improve health care for everyone, what would it be?

Better communication between medical staffs and patients.

Is there something else you would like us to know?

I am a cancer and polio survivor, worldwide traveler, a 30-year Department of Defense civilian, married the late Maj. Gen. Chester McKeen, a United Nations Intern, worked for a branch of Radio Free Europe and the U.S. Army in the former Panama Canal Zone.