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*Our Hospice Center welcomes patients from CT, NY and elsewhere.*

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## So Much More Than Love

### Kitchen staff honors former hospice patient



*Regional Hospice's Culinary Team: (L to R) Jon LeFebvre, Aaron Swart, Jessica Hufnagel*

It is often said that, "Food is love." Yet, at Regional Hospice's *Center for Comfort Care and Healing*, food is so much more. When the Center first opened in 2015, a conscious decision was made to invest in gourmet chefs who are passionate about serving fresh, made-to-order meals. Different from traditional food service, the professionals hired had to have a deep appreciation for quality food, along with a dedication to caring for people at the end of their lives. The meals they would prepare could be the last gift a dying patient received.

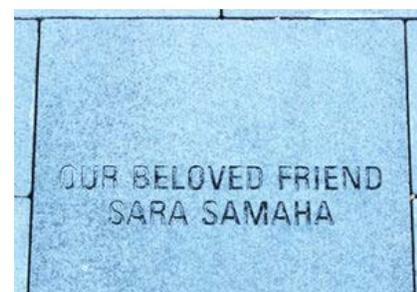
#### **Nourishing Bodies, Nourishing Spirits**

The team of Aaron Swart, Head Chef; Jon LeFebvre, Sous Chef; and Jessica Hufnagel, Sous Cook knew that the challenges they would face would be great, but they could never have predicted the personal rewards they would receive. In the past year and a half, they have provided nourishment for ailing bodies, while receiving nourishment for their spirits.

#### **Honoring Sara**

This was especially true in regards to former patient, [Sara Samaha](#), a foodie who enjoyed their creative dishes for the 8 months she was at the Center. When the caring kitchen team collected over \$500 in tips, they decided to honor Sara by donating the money toward a [Memorial Paver](#). "We didn't even want to take tips," explained Jon LeFebvre, "but many of the family members were insistent." This isn't surprising considering we regularly receive "Thank You" letters mentioning the superior level of service that our kitchen staff provides.

#### **He, A Personal Chef – She, An Honest Friend**



Jon and Sara developed a special bond. As the Chef for the evening shift, LeFebvre would visit Samaha every night to ask her what she would like to eat. “There wasn’t much she didn’t like,” he admits. Yet, at the same time she was always very honest. He would stop by her room before heading out for the evening and ask, “Did I pass or fail?” She would give him candid feedback, sometimes indicating with a chuckle, “Try again tomorrow.”



**An Evolving Menu**

Sara was one of the first patients to fully embrace the Center’s evolving menu, often giving the kitchen freedom to explore their creativity by indicating “Chef’s Choice” on her menu sheet. Her willingness to explore helped Chef Aaron and the team expand the menu from its initial 12 items, to well over 100 options with the many combinations and special requests available. The entire kitchen team honored Sara’s heritage (as someone who had lived in New Orleans) by preparing red beans and rice, gumbo and jambalaya. They also mastered Sara’s favorite soy salmon recipe, which is now one of the most popular dishes on the menu.

**A Lasting Impression**

Prior to her passing, Sara valiantly battled ALS. In spite of her physical limitations, including being bound to a wheelchair, she did whatever she set her mind to, even making a final trip to New York City just days before she died. That determination has left a lasting impression on Jon, who now feels driven to live life more fully. Having known her reminds him to relax and appreciate his gifts. He knows that even on his most stressful night – when there are many meals to prepare, dishes to wash and counters to clean – he gets to go home. “The patients we cook for do not have that luxury,” LeFebvre somberly concludes.

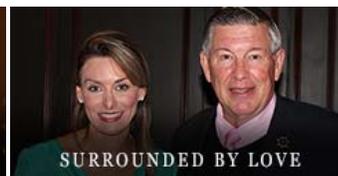
**Their Last Joy**

Jon fully understands that food is often a hospice patient’s “last joy.” Knowing that each meal he serves could be the last for a patient sometimes weighs heavy on his mind, which is why he and his fellow kitchen colleagues try to be as accommodating as possible. “You can tell when someone makes something that they really care about,” he explains, “I never want to sacrifice quality for convenience.” The work is hard, but worth it for LeFebvre who says, “This is easily the best job I’ve ever had. I love this place. This is a second family to me now.”

**Final Gifts**

Just before she died Sara told Jon that she was sending him something special. Shortly after, he received *The Commander’s Palace: New Orleans Cookbook*. He has prepared recipes from the book in Samaha’s memory. Now, due to the combined generosity of LeFebvre, Swart and Hufnagel, Sara’s memory will live on in our Memorial Garden among the herbs that will be used to make the foods she loved.

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