

Bannister Family House – A Community of Caring

By Eileen Silva | November 22, 2016

“**K**indness,” “blessing,” “genuine,” “humbling” are some of the words that spring to mind when residents, volunteers and staff are asked to describe Bannister Family House, which provides a “haven of hope and comfort,” a true home away from home, for out-of-town patients and their families who have extended stays at UC San Diego Health due to serious injury or illness. With 12 rooms at the original house at UC San Diego Medical Center in Hillcrest and 10 rooms in La Jolla and Del Mar, Bannister Family House is a nonprofit organization offering affordable lodging and support services close to our hospitals. Families can visit their loved ones 24/7 as needed and relax in community spaces, such as the living room, library and well-stocked kitchen, where meals are often donated by a community group, or residents can cook their own.



Fly away home. Denise Capozzi, director (left), with Becky and Dan Bloczynski and their daughter, Jenna Hunter, in front of the transformed retaining wall at Bannister Family House.

“At Bannister Family House, everybody is ‘your people,’ since all the residents are going through a similar situation, a trauma or illness,” said Dan Bloczynski, from Belfair, Washington, who stayed with his wife Becky for 11 days while their daughter received care at UC San Diego Medical Center’s Trauma Center. “It’s not like a hotel, where everyone’s a stranger and there’s no reason to interact. Here, everybody has their own story and many are

willing to share. Being here gave us the confidence that we could get through it.”

This fall, Bannister Family House got its own dose of tender loving care from the 2016 Concrete Décor Show. The courtyard patio and the walkway outside the dining area were renovated through a donated makeover. Local companies such as T.B. Penick & Sons and Westcoat Specialty Coating Systems partnered with the Associated General Contractors of San Diego, landscape architect

Amanda Conahan, mosaic artist Kim Emerson and a number of other artisans to re-surface the patio and create a heart mosaic; install a built-in barbeque and wall seating; stain the retaining wall visible from the dining area and adorn it with a bas-relief mural of flying doves, dragonflies and circles inscribed with uplifting words; re-surface the walkway outside the dining area and pattern-stamp it with a feather design to complement the doves; and more.

Residents were encouraged to glue stones in the heart mosaic on the patio. David Romero, a heart transplant patient from Las Vegas who was nearing the end of a five-month stay, says of the experience, "I got a new heart, and then I created a new heart. At first I just thought of them as stones, but then I saw the big picture of the completed heart. It meant a lot to have the opportunity to be part of that. Very cool." On day two of the project, Romero, "an open kind of guy," was on his way from the kitchen to his room in his pajamas, but he stopped to show another resident how to glue the stones. Regarding his stay Romero says, "I loved everything about it; I love the people. They are all fantastic."



Bent Mikkelsen, publisher of *Concrete Décor* magazine and organizer of the project, estimates the total donated cost of design, material and labor at \$250,000. The Concrete Décor Show, held each year in a different city, chooses a local nonprofit for a makeover.



Patio courtyard at Bannister Family House, before and after donated renovation.

"We are so thankful to Bent and to all of the volunteers. It's astounding what they did with the artwork alone," says Denise Capozzi, director of Bannister Family House. "Truly an exceptional transformation. Now we have a great gathering place

for residents to share their stories as one big family."

"Denise and Jana (Fortune) were phenomenal to work with," says Mikkelsen. "They wanted to create an environment that makes it feel a bit more like home, more engaging. A really incredible part of this whole journey is that we're able to transform utilitarian spaces using decorative architectural finishes. It's heavy work, not like painting a wall, we have to use jackhammers and other noisy, dusty equipment, and that's not always very easy on the residents or staff. For us to

be able to get in and out in two days and for people to be happy is a great thing. We appreciate the cooperation and support of the entire team at UC San Diego Health.”

“We enjoyed our time outside, following the sunny spots. Our daughter is in a wheelchair but could come out on the patio with us. We appreciate the artwork and having an outdoor space,” said Dan Bloczynski.

Dan and Becky Bloczynski and David Romero will celebrate Thanksgiving back home in Washington and Nevada with their friends and family, “just being thankful for what we have and the blessings we have been given,” says Romero. Nutrition Services will donate a gourmet Thanksgiving feast for those staying at Bannister Family House, with the menu prepared by Rodney Fry, executive chef at UC San Diego Health.

“There are no bad days working here, when you see the families and what they go through. We offer kindness, and a hug,” says Denise.

Bannister Family House is unable to accommodate everyone in need. Fortunately, as part of the new graduate housing construction for UC San Diego, additional rooms are in development in La Jolla with an estimated opening of 2019, pending project approval.

Bannister Family House accepts donations year-round. To donate online or learn about ways to help, such as hosting a meal, visit the [Family Houses](#) page.

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