

# From the Heart

A Publication for Friends of Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services

Winter 2017

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## President Ed Knight Announces Retirement Board Names President Elect



By Rev. Peter D. Crouch, Vice President for Development

Dr. Ed Knight, President and CEO of Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services (PCHAS) since 1997, has announced his retirement, effective December 31, 2017. His past 20 years of service, combined with ten prior years from 1973-1983, will mark 30 years of service to PCHAS upon his retirement.

"I have been blessed to work with Ed during almost the entire 20 years he has held the reins at PCHAS. Throughout his time as President and CEO, Ed has been both the glue and the guiding light that has propelled PCHAS to where and what it is today," said Robert "Bob" Farris, chair of the PCHAS Board of Trustees. "Ed's dedication to the children we serve inspires everyone who comes in contact with him. What a providential blessing his presence has been to this agency!"



Dr. Knight knew all his life he wanted to be in a "helping profession," especially one that empowers people to overcome dysfunctional family origins. He studied psychology in college and earned master's degrees in both counseling and social work. Later in his career, he earned a doctorate in management and organizational development.

When he was drafted after college, he became a U.S. Army social worker. Following his service in the army, Dr. Knight began his distinguished career at PCHAS' predecessor organization,

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Presbyterian Children's Home and Service Agency. For 10 years, from 1973 to 1983, he served as one of the agency's social workers, and later as director of its Itasca campus.

In 1983, when Dr. Knight left Presbyterian Children's Home and Service Agency, an agency that later merged with another to eventually form PCHAS, he served as Hendrick Healthcare Systems' Director of Social Work Services and Case Management for 15 years. "I learned a lot about management by working in health care, but now I can't imagine being any place but Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services," he said.

He returned to another precursor organization in 1997, Presbyterian Children's Services. During this time and in years to come his leadership has remained entrepreneurial and forward thinking, pushing the 114-year-old children's agency to expand its services in order to remain viable and an industry leader. During Dr. Knight's recent 20 years of leadership, the number of clients PCHAS serves annually has increased from less than 1,000 in 1997 to more than 3,400 today. Consider the following timeline:

### 1997-1999

During these pre-merger years, Dr. Knight was president of Presbyterian Children's Services where he oversaw the Group Home Program in Waxahachie and launched the Foster Care Program that operates today in multiple cities.

### 2000-2002

In 2000, predecessor agency, Presbyterian Children's Homes (PCH), establishes the first Child and Family Program in Houston. One month later, PCH, Presbyterian Children's Services (PCS) and Westminster Presbyterian Church of Corsicana, open the second Child and Family Program in Corsicana. Throughout 2001, PCH and PCS begin serious discussions about merger. In that same year Child and Family Programs are opened in Corpus Christi and Fort Worth.

On January 1, 2002 the merger is completed and by the end of the year, the new agency, Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services,



Left to right: Ed, Adam, Chris, Virginia Knight at Itasca



operates the following programs: Group Home programs in Itasca, Waxahachie, San Antonio, Austin and Duncanville; Child and Family programs in Houston, Corsicana, Corpus Christi, Fort Worth and Austin; and a Foster Care program in Waxahachie.

### 2003-2005

A time of expansion into community-based services began as PCHAS opened Child and Family Programs in Fort Worth, Corpus Christi, Kilgore, Dallas, Shreveport and Abilene.

### 2006-2009

Tremendous expansion continued with new Child and Family programs in Wichita Falls, Longview, San Antonio, Houston,



Ed with children from PCHAS' Group Homes



Ed with former Group Home resident Jesse Addison



Temple, Lubbock, Midland, Odessa, Hurst and second locations in Dallas and Houston. The agency's Student Education Program was founded and began to serve current and former students, enabling the agency to nurture lifelong relationships with its Group Home residents. A Foster Care program opened in Longview, and the agency's first Single Parent Family Program opened in Weatherford.

**2010-2014**

During this time of rapid growth, a merger with Homes of St. Mark in Houston allowed PCHAS to create an Adoption and Foster Care Program there. In addition, PCHAS collaborated with Dallas' Juliet Fowler Communities, and opened a Dallas Foster Care and Adoption Program. A second Single Parent Family Program opened in Waxahachie and a Single Parent Family campus was opened in Houston. At the end of this four-year span, PCHAS signed an affiliated agreement with the Children's Foundation of Mid-America and shepherded its transformation into being Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services of Missouri. PCHAS of Texas and Louisiana and PCHAS of Missouri continue to work closely together, and Dr. Knight serves as President of PCHAS of Missouri's Board of Trustees and directly supervises its Executive Director.

**2015–the Present**

Responding to changing government laws, the Austin Group Home and San Antonio Group Home Programs were converted into new programs. PCHAS opened the Austin Foster Care and Adoption Program and two programs in San Antonio – its first Transitional Living Program and its fourth Single Parent Family Program. A second Transitional Living Program opened in Waxahachie and two new Child and Family Programs opened in Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Today, the agency's programs include **Group Home and Education Programs** in Itasca and Waxahachie; **Child and Family Programs** in Abilene, Austin, Baton Rouge, Corpus Christi, Corpus Christi – Next Steps, Corsicana, two locations in Dallas, Fort Worth, two locations in Houston, Hurst, Kilgore, Longview, Lubbock, Midland, New Orleans, San Antonio, Temple and Wichita Falls; **Foster Care and Adoption Programs** in Wichita Falls, Dallas, Waxahachie, Austin, and Houston; **Single Parent Family Programs** in Waxahachie, Weatherford, San Antonio and Houston; and **Transitional Living Programs** in Waxahachie and San Antonio.

At its recent October Board of Trustees meeting in Houston, the Board of Trustees accepted President Knight's plan for retirement effective December 31, 2017 and thanked him for his 30 years of extraordinary service and dedication to children and families in need. Plans are now underway to honor Dr. Knight throughout 2017.

The Board of Trustees' Succession Planning Team nominated David Thompson, who currently serves as the agency's Chief Operating Officer, to succeed Dr. Knight as its next President and CEO. The Board of Trustees voted unanimously to make this succession effective January 1, 2018. In making this appointment, Board of Trustee and Succession Planning Team Chair, Robert "Bob" Farris of Tulsa, Oklahoma, stated, "I have had the privilege of working with David almost as long as I have worked with Ed. Please know that I, personally, and the board as a group have a rock solid faith that David has been called to lead PCHAS just as Ed was. We will continue to be blessed by David's ability to successfully lead PCHAS into the ever-changing world of providing Christ-centered care and support to children and families in need."



David Thompson and Ed Knight



Ed with former Group Home resident Fred Foote



Ed with children from PCHAS' Group Homes





## Caring Congregations: Four Churches That Go Above and Beyond At Christmas Time

By Margaret Barry

PCHAS is grateful to the many caring congregations that give generously to PCHAS at Christmas time. But monetary gifts are just one of the many ways that churches honor the children and families in our care. These congregations also pray for the children and, among other things, put a lot of love, effort and time into making gifts for them. Homemade items include quilts, stockings and cards.

**A Labor of Love: First Presbyterian Church in Lewisville, Texas** made sure that all the children in our Group Homes on the Waxahachie and Itasca campuses had personalized Christmas stockings. The church's sewing group, led by Marijohn McKenzie, has been creating stockings for our children in care every Christmas for **more than 30 years!** This year, as in years past, the ladies gathered on a Saturday in early November and created an assembly line to cut the material, sew the stockings together and write each child's first name on them. An efficient assembly line is necessary, as the ladies made **100 stockings!** The stockings are then blessed during a Sunday service with a special prayer honoring children in our care.

**Preschool Kids Get Involved: Southminster Presbyterian Church in Houston** provided gifts to **100** children in our care this Christmas season. Even the church's preschool children got involved. The children go with their parents and pick out gifts for the kids. The spirit of giving is contagious.

### How an Angel Tree Can Change a Life: Northpark Presbyterian Church in Dallas

Northpark Presbyterian Church in Dallas adopts **100** PCHAS kids each year through the angel tree program at their church. One year, as a part of the program, the pastor and his wife purchased a tennis racket for one of our kids, a young girl named Linda. Two years later, they received a note from Linda, who thanked them for the racket and told them that it was the racket that gave her the confidence she needed during a very rough time in her life. Linda said that her tennis game improved to the point where she got a tennis college scholarship! This is just one example of how an angel tree gift can change a life.

### Year-Round Support and a Christmas Gift of \$31,000: Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church

In addition to a \$31,000 Christmas donation and an angel tree initiative, MDPC (and its Fuente Ministry) has been a blessing to our Houston Child and Family Program. For many years, MDPC has provided office space and computer support for our Child and Family Program Specialist Nimia Tillmann. The staff help Nimia coordinate parenting classes and the entire congregation gives financial and moral support to clients in the Child and Family Program. Nimia is especially thankful for the food pantry, where many of her clients get their food.

PCHAS thanks these and all of the caring congregations for their love and support at Christmas time and all year round!

## Photos from our 2016 Dallas and San Antonio Luncheons





# A Tribute to Randy Spencer

## Child Placing Staff of the Year

By Margaret Barry and Leah Gilliam



Randy Spencer, PCHAS' Vice President for Organizational Impact, recently won a prestigious award from the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services. The award, Child Placing Agency Staff of the Year, was presented at the Alliance's annual conference, attended by more than 750 child placing agency leaders.

Leah Gilliam, Program Director, PCHAS Dallas Foster Care and Adoption, nominated Randy for this award. At the award ceremony, she was asked to say a few words about him:

*A passionate man of God, dedicated to PCHAS' mission and passionate about his work serving kids and families, Randy is a man of great compassion and insight. He has the unique ability to make each person with whom he speaks feel truly heard, acknowledging that their voice matters. He zeros in on that person's strengths. In the words of Ginny Lynch, PCHAS Senior Development Officer, "he is the best strength-finder in Texas!" Randy is a visionary leader who knows how to make the vision a reality. He is also known for being family-centered and solution-focused. Below are just a few of the comments I gleaned from Randy's friends and colleagues.*

*"A few days before Randy finished his degree in social work, he received an invitation to manage an emergency shelter in Amarillo. The day after graduation he packed everything he owned in his Honda Accord and moved to Amarillo. Randy*

*wanted to know what his clients lives were like so for a time he moved into the emergency shelter."*

*"After a few years working at the shelter, Randy pursued a Masters in Social work degree and eventually became Executive Director for The Bridge, an agency which offers services for children, youth and families, such as counseling, support groups and parenting education. After that, he served as Executive Director at Cumberland Presbyterian Children's Home. He led Cumberland in a restructuring that resulted in the team serving state-placed children; and once again, he applied a solution-focused and family-centered approach."*

*Randy has been the manager of a shelter, a case manager, therapist, CEO and currently serves as Vice President for Organizational Impact at PCHAS.*

*When I was called for an interview with PCHAS, I excitedly shared this with my father, who knows Randy, and he said, "You'll get to work with one of the greatest child advocates I know -- Randy Spencer. You will learn a great deal from him....listen carefully."*

*I have indeed learned a lot from Randy, and we at PCHAS are thankful that we have him to help guide us.*

## Acknowledgement of donors

We are very appreciative of the following people and congregations that provided leadership gifts prior to our 2016 Dallas and San Antonio luncheons:

### Dallas Luncheon:

- Anonymous
- Dan and Carol Klein





## Meet Baby Oliver

By Margaret Barry



Loving adoptive parents like Andy and Donna can literally make the difference between life and death. They feel as though they are called by God to care for the most fragile children in need.

Some of the most fragile children are newborn babies with health problems.

Andy and Donna met baby Oliver in the neo-natal intensive care unit at a nearby hospital. Oliver had been exposed to drugs in utero and was suffering from withdrawal. He cried a lot and was irritable and jittery. Andy's and Donna's hearts went out to

this tiny, innocent baby who was suffering so much. Oliver was hospitalized for a month before they could take him home. Oliver was being weaned off of the drug he became addicted to in utero, so it was necessary for the doctors to give him small doses of the drug. The amount was slowly adjusted as Oliver was weaned off of the substance for the first two weeks of his stay.

The doctors also recommended a lot of tender, loving care for Oliver, which Andy and Donna were more than happy to provide. Day after day, they wrapped Oliver tight in his blanket, which made him feel more secure, and rocked him gently for hours. Oliver's cry was louder and more insistent than most babies' cries, and it broke Andy's and Donna's hearts to hear these cries. They could only imagine what Oliver was going through.

After a month of visits from Andy and Donna, Oliver was released from the hospital and they could finally take him home. Oliver's heartbreaking cries continued, but they continued to rock him and hold him tight until he calmed down. Andy and Donna are a Godsend to Oliver, and Oliver has responded well to their loving touch.

Fast forward one year: Oliver is thriving! He has not reached all the developmental milestones that normal babies achieve at one year of age, but the doctors think that he will soon catch up to other children. He has bonded with his adoptive parents and smiles and laughs easily. Andy and Donna couldn't be happier. They feel that Oliver is a gift from God.

Thank you for praying for baby Oliver and for his adoptive parents.



## Meet Kevin

By Margaret Barry



A pastor at Kevin's church noticed that Kevin was unusually tired and stressed and called one of our Child and Family Specialists, Miranda. The pastor did not know the depth of Kevin's misery--he could barely keep his eyes open in class and his grades were slipping from A's and B's to C's and D's.

When Miranda met with 18-year-old Kevin, this is what she learned: his mother recently returned to Barbados and left her three children behind. This 18-year-old young man became a caretaker of his siblings, age 8 and 13, overnight. He was doing his best to hold down a job at a fast food restaurant, stay in school and was doing everything he could to keep the family together. But the family was on the verge of becoming homeless. Miranda guided Kevin in finding and moving into an apartment and PCHAS helped out with rent and provided every day support.

Miranda reached out to churches in the area and other PCHAS supporters provided clothing, food, beds, a full set of dishes, towels and everything the family needed to live together and survive. Today Kevin and his siblings are well cared for and finally feel a sense of security. They are happy that they are together as a family. The eight-year-old still struggles in school, but both siblings are now making A's and B's. Thank you for supporting Kevin and praying for his family.

# Staff Members Run the Houston Half-Marathon

## To Raise Money for PCHAS!

By Margaret Barry



Staff members Randy Spencer and Jennifer Quintero-Pitts ran the Houston half-marathon as a way to raise money for children and families in our care.

*Here's what Jennifer Quintero-Pitts, Coordinator of Volunteers, says about what it's like to train for the marathon and why she ran the half-marathon on January 15th:*

"Training for the half-marathon is an incredible journey of endurance, perseverance and determination – especially for someone like me who's never considered herself a runner. But as I run each mile during training I carry with me the children's hearts and spirits as motivation. Having grown up in a single parent family completely abandoned by our father, I can understand some of the emotional struggles and doubts our children face every day. I had to find ways to prove to myself and to others that I mattered. And, now I'm running to help our kids know that they matter too!" – Jennifer Quintero-Pitts

As of this writing, Jennifer had raised \$1,050 for PCHAS!

*Here's a story about Randy Spencer and why he ran for PCHAS:*

Like Jennifer, Randy Spencer, Vice President for Organizational Impact, says that during training, he was also motivated by

thoughts of children and families in need. Randy, who previously ran the half-marathon for PCHAS two years ago, says that running for a cause he believes in helps a great deal when things get rough on the trail. Randy has never been a distance runner; he's more of a cyclist, so it's a challenge for him to run the half-marathon. When his muscles start to hurt while he's running, he thinks about PCHAS' mission – to provide Christ-centered care and support to children and families in need. He also thinks about fellow PCHAS staff members. "I work with talented people. They work very hard, so I'm running for them, too."

In addition to staff who run the half-marathon, a number of PCHAS employees show up at 5:30 a.m. on the day of the marathon and hand out Gatorade and water to the runners at the five-mile mark, something that Randy appreciates. "It's fun to run past the PCHAS employees at the water station," said Randy. "It's very exciting and energizing, and it encourages me to keep going. When you are hurting and you see people cheering for you, it's wonderful!"

Randy has so far raised \$920. Raising the money was easier than he thought it would be. "When I'm fundraising, I tell people that the money will be well spent. As Vice President for Organizational Impact, I'm one of the people responsible for making sure that the money **is** well spent, so I can say that with all sincerity.



## PCHAS Celebrates Itasca Group Home Renovations

By Alyssa Rueter



PCHAS hosted a celebration on its Itasca campus this past September to debut campus improvements. Renovations were made to the tennis court, swimming pool and gym. The tennis court renovations include a resurfaced court, additional lights and a freshly-painted fence. The Shope Gymnasium renovations included a renovated ceiling, remodeled bathrooms

and a state-of-the-art weight room. A beautiful wooden pergola and outdoor furniture were added to the deck surrounding the swimming pool. The campus is also now graced by a nine-hole Frisbee golf course, a favorite of the kids.

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Austin, TX 78749

*Be sure to include your complete name and address.*

## Connect with PCHAS



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After a reception, visitors were given a tour. Some of the visitors were former residents who enjoyed being back on campus.

Kyle Mitchell, director of the Group Home programs on the Itasca and Waxahachie campuses, is thrilled with the renovations. "There is something for every kid at every fitness level," said Kyle. "I'm so grateful to the supporters who made this possible!"

"The renovations were made possible by a generous donation from a very loving and caring family," said Rev. Peter D. Crouch, Vice President for Development. "A plaque inside the gym recognizes their long-term friendship with PCHAS. We thank them for their prayers and support."



## You're Invited!

Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services cordially invites you to attend one of these upcoming events:

**April 18th: Central Office Open House**

Contact Allison Harris,  
[Allison.Harris@pchas.org](mailto:Allison.Harris@pchas.org); 512.922.1683

**May 3rd: Fort Worth Luncheon**

Contact Ginny Lynch,  
[Ginny.Lynch@pchas.org](mailto:Ginny.Lynch@pchas.org); 972.896.5318

**May 11th: Houston Luncheon**

Contact Sarah Cleary,  
[Sarah.Cleary@pchas.org](mailto:Sarah.Cleary@pchas.org); 512.731.2571

**October 11th: Austin Luncheon**

Contact Allison Harris,  
[Allison.Harris@pchas.org](mailto:Allison.Harris@pchas.org); 512.922.1683

**November 1st: Dallas Luncheon**

Contact Sara Newell,  
[Sara.Newell@pchas.org](mailto:Sara.Newell@pchas.org); 417.576.0124