

## Brevard's longest-serving hospice introduces new name, branding

By Ken Datzman

Brevard's longest-serving, independent hospice is rebranding with a new name and much more as it continues to evolve and grow the scope of services and programs it provides countywide.

Founded 43 years ago by registered nurse Emilie Sasko, Hospice of St. Francis, based in Titusville with an office in Melbourne, is now known as St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care (ReflectionsLSC.org).

The senior leadership said the name change better reflects the depth of care and services it now offers, including pediatric palliative care. The organization in general provides a wide range of end-of-life and advanced chronic disease care and services.

St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care is also a "Level 5 Partner" with "We Honor Veterans," a program of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Level 5 is the top tier and requires annual recertification by its members. Level 5 Partners focus on increasing access and improving the quality of care for veterans in their community, demonstrating a commitment to go above and beyond with special programs for veterans.

St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care was the first on Florida's East Coast to achieve Level 5 Partner status.

Sasko started Hospice of St. Francis in 1977. Her vision at the time was having neighbors help when a community member became ill with a terminal disease and needed comfort, compassion, and loving care. Her dream became Florida's second hospice.

"Hospice of St. Francis started out as an all-volunteer organization 43 years ago with an RN who had a passion for caring for people, love of life, and used a neighbor-helping-neighbor hospice concept in Titusville," said Joe Killian, who for the last six years has served as president and chief executive officer of not-for-profit Hospice of St. Francis.

"Today, we cover the entire county and provide some of the best services of any such organization in Brevard. We're proud of that, and it was the motivation behind the name change. St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care reflects the various stages of care we provide and it more effectively identifies who we are today as an organization versus who we were four decades ago."

Care is provided by an interdisciplinary team of physicians, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, allied therapists, psychological and spiritual counselors, and trained community volunteers.

He said the rebranding undertaking was a big effort led by his senior leaders.

"The concept, the ideas, and the action engine behind the rebranding motivation was Cami Leech Florio, our chief strategy officer. She was the visionary in regard to changing our brand and had the energy to do it. Both Cami and Julie Grantham (director of communications) did the work in changing our name and our brand. I admire Cami and Julie for their outstanding effort and the work they put into making this change."



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Hospice of St. Francis, a 43-year-old organization based in Titusville with an office in Melbourne, has changed its name and logo to reflect the depth of care and services it now provides countywide. The new name is St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care. Joe Killian is president and CEO of the nonprofit entity. Cami Leech Florio is chief strategy officer. St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care is a Level 5 Partner in We Honor Veterans, a program of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. This is the highest level to achieve, and Partners must be recertified annually. Level 5 Partners place a great emphasis on staff training and education, and caring for Vietnam-era and other combat veterans.

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## St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care

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"A part of the mission for rebranding the organization was recognizing that our name — Hospice of St. Francis — is a reflection of our core," said Leech Florio. "Over time, we've grown and have been able to provide a broader scope of services. But regardless of the services we provide, whether it's hospice, whether it's palliative care, or whether it's grief support, for instance, it's really about the patient living their life with dignity, with comfort, and with peace in their heart."

Last year, her father received care for several months from Hospice of St. Francis.

"When I walked through that journey myself, what I saw was that hospice and end-of-life care is not about giving up, it's about prioritizing what's most important. For my father, personally, he put three things front and center: He wanted to spend time with his family, he wanted to go to church, and he wanted to go out to eat at his favorite restaurant. We were able to do all those things with him and everything else just became peripheral. We focused on the things that were most important to him and Hospice of St. Francis helped him do that. It gave us the resources that we needed and allowed us to spend time together as a family. He died in my home."

"As the president and CEO of this organization, I am proud of the fact that we are there in the way Cami described with her own family experience. We have been doing that with thousands of people in Brevard County, and we've been doing it for 43 years," said Killian.

Marsha Abeln, the chief financial officer for St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care, said the organization's "protocols and platforms are continuously being enhanced and upgraded to provide the best possible care for our patients. Complemented by our robust community-engagement program and our energetic volunteer services' teams, Emilie Sasko's founding principle of neighbor-helping-neighbor is always at the forefront of our minds and in our hearts."

When the organization originally started, it provided only hospice care. Killian has expanded the services in recent years. "For example, we have one of the most robust bereavement programs in the county. The program is not only for our patients, but also for anyone who lives in the community, including school children. We have a children's bereavement program," he said.

Bereavement is referred to as the time of grief following the death of a loved one. Grief is the normal and natural response to the loss of a loved one.

"Our scope of services now includes palliative care, hospice care, pediatric palliative care, and the Space Coast's most extensive array of grief-support programs," said Killian.

"Our staff is deeply committed to providing high-quality care as they bring help and hope at some of life's most challenging stages."

Palliative care aims to control pain and manage symptoms. In the context of hospice, palliative care focuses on quality of life rather than curing disease. All hospice care is palliative, but not all palliative care includes hospice.

"There is a need for pediatric services in our county," said Killian. "What we're looking at doing is addressing it from both a palliative care type of program to actually providing pediatric hospice. We are undergoing training right now with our staff. We've been in discussions with various hospitals in Orlando and Jacksonville. We are working closely with them establishing protocols and pathways that are needed in order to provide this type of care in our community."

Many of the roughly 20,000 U.S. children (age 1 to 19

years) who die annually from serious illness do not receive high-quality end-of-life care, according to the American Society of Clinical Oncology. These are children with chronic, complex, or life-limiting conditions.

A study of children with advanced cancer revealed that 48 percent had pain and 46 percent fatigue. In addition, many bereaved — and nonbereaved — parents experience psychological distress, poor health behaviors, work impairment, and financial hardship.

Children have different experiences than those of adults and face unique challenges near the end of life. Children require age-specific symptom assessment and management.

Considered the model for quality compassionate care for people facing a life-threatening illness, hospice provides expert medical care, pain management, and emotional and spiritual support expressly tailored to the patient's needs and wishes. Support is also provided to the patient's loved ones.

"I am proud to be part of a mission-driven organization committed to serving the needs of Brevard County," said Dr. Lauren Loftis, the chief medical officer for St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care. "I am in awe of the way our staff demonstrates a true passion for our work, so beautifully reflected in how we lovingly care for our patients and their loved ones at a most sacred time."

Dr. Loftis, who joined the organization in March, added, "I am especially grateful and humbled to serve alongside a team of professionals who despite the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic remain deeply committed to our mission of uplifting lives, uplifting each other and uplifting our community with love."

The rebranding includes a new logo design and a new tagline. The organization's new tagline is "reflecting life, love, and compassion."

Leech Florio said the tagline came about as work on the new brand evolved, providing a short, simple way to express the organization's continued commitment to providing those facing life-limiting medical conditions with the things that matter most.

"Every day, our staff uses their hearts, intellect, and hands to reflect life, love, and compassion for our patients and their loved ones. We have earned a wonderful reputation over the years, and we are grateful to our patients for their trust in our care and services. It is truly an honor to provide that care," she said.

Leech Florio said St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care "also has a new color palette that reflects some of the natural elements that we are blessed to enjoy in our beautiful coastal environment."

St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care is heavily involved in the We Honor Veterans program. "As a Level 5 Partner, we are committed to serving the veteran population in Brevard County. There are many veterans on the Space Coast," she said.

There are more than 67,000 veterans in Brevard, according to a 2017 U.S. Bureau study. More than 48,000 are over 55 years old.

"We have special programs for military veterans," said Killian. "In fact, we have developed a 'virtual reality' type of service for our veterans who want to take part in Honor Flight and are unable to travel because of their health. They can be involved with Honor Flight virtually."

Since its inception in 2010, the nonprofit Space Coast Honor Flight has flown more than 1,300 World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam War veterans on an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C. to visit their memorials.

Space Coast Honor Flight is a regional hub within the national Honor Flight network, which was established 15 years ago.

A dedicated corps of "Guardians" physically assist the veterans to and from the event. The Guardians, who pay their own expenses on the trip, are the individuals who make this trip happen for the veterans.

Now, area veterans have the opportunity to enjoy this enriching experience virtually, thanks to St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care.

"Our organization has a huge veteran component and we are involved in many activities," said Leech Florio. "Over the July 4th holiday, we did a flag-raising ceremony in collaboration with the City of Rockledge and Rolling Thunder, an active veterans advocacy group in our area. We are committed to welcoming home Vietnam veterans working with other veterans' organizations in the community. Vietnam veterans were not properly welcomed home after their heroic service to our country. We are engaged in doing that."

Level 5 Partners place a great emphasis on staff education, and caring for Vietnam-era and other combat veterans. "We're seeing more veterans of that era who now need hospice services and palliative care services," she said.

Many veterans are not enrolled in VA and may not be aware of palliative care or end-of-life services and benefits available to them, including the Medicare hospice benefit and VA-paid hospice care. Of the 2.4 million deaths in the United States every year, roughly 680,000 are veterans, according to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

Organizations such as St. Francis Reflections Lifestage Care that achieve Level 5 of the We Honor Veterans program concentrate on supporting veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. "Everybody in our organization has PTSD training and education," said Killian.

PTSD is a disorder that can sometimes develop after exposure to a traumatic event. People with PTSD may experience "intrusive and frightening" thoughts and memories of an event, experience sleep problems, feel detached or numb, or may be startled, according to the National Institutes of Health.

"As a Level 5 Partner, we reach out and provide more services in this field. And we have to continually improve on the services we provide to veterans, which is important not only to us, but also to veterans," he said.

Hospice care around the nation continues to grow, according to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization's new "Facts and Figures" report that provides an overview of hospice-care delivery in the U.S., with specific information on hospice patient characteristics, location, and level of care, and Medicare hospice spending.

The report was released Aug. 17 and shows that 1.5 million Medicare beneficiaries received hospice care in 2018, an increase of 4 percent from the previous year. Nearly 51 percent of Medicare decedents were enrolled in hospice at the time of death. The average lifelong length of stay for Medicare patients enrolled in hospice in 2018 was 89.6 days. The average median length of stay was 18 days, which has changed little in the last 15 years.

"There is a growing need for hospice and the services that we provide in Brevard County. And as an organization, we are well-positioned to meet those expanding needs of patients and their families. We want to help people in the community because we consider ourselves neighbors," said Killian.