

GRANITE HOUSE

DONOR NEWSLETTER

Fall 2023



For our donors, volunteers, and partners on our journey



NOTES FROM THE BOARD

This has been our most challenging year since COVID, with the unprecedented loss of our precious residents. Besides an emotional loss, it means a loss of revenue through an individual's state support. One empty bed out of four reduces our revenue by 25% but has little impact on reduction of staffing and expenses. Thank goodness that as a nonprofit we have flexibility and a built-in reserve in our business plan and have been mindful as we continue to cover one-time expenses for a new home. Our board members are confident that we can weather these recent ups and downs. Plans include postponing a paved driveway and any development of the lower field for now; also continuing for at least one more year using our current volunteers in property management and administration roles.

Donor funds are more important than ever, which allow us to provide programs not covered by state revenue: music therapy, our annual picnic for staff and families, outings, birthday and holiday celebrations, our lovely flowers outside, and our sensory program. Donations this year, since the founders' son passed away late winter, have shown tremendous support for the family and for Granite House with many tribute gifts, which will be recognized in the Spring 2024 newsletter. The board extends sincere thanks to those who are first-time donors, and we invite everyone to consider a tax-deductible gift during the upcoming fall and holiday season. Please help us replenish our reserve funds, finish our goals, and let our volunteers retire!

Granite House is a Minnesota nonprofit corporation with a mission:

To provide support and hope to individuals and families living with severe and permanent brain injury.

CELEBRATING FIVE YEARS OF CARING



The Granite House 2023 Walk for Thought team had a great day at this event held at Long Lake Regional Park. The weather was beautiful, and we had 34 people, plus two dogs, join us. We were staff, residents & family, plus board members and friends. The big surprise was seeing our nurse, Grace, come out with her five-day-old son Kashton! Our team members and friends of Granite House made donations to the MN Brain Injury Alliance, who hosts this annual event. Through this year, we have raised over \$4000 for them.

GRANITE HOUSE has built a 24-hour community residence in Stillwater, Minnesota, for the long-term care of younger adults with severe and permanent brain injury who might otherwise be in a nursing home. Purpose-built with community support, it opened in November 2018.

PROFESSIONAL BRAIN INJURY CONFERENCE, APR 26-27



Granite House hosted a table at the 37th Annual Brain Injury Professional Conference in April. We met case managers and many others who work in the brain injury community and handed out information packets and our brochures. On the first day, the annual **Care Beyond Expectations Award** was bestowed upon our founders, Tom and Carol Insley, for "...exemplifying passionate, personal direct service, dedication to excellence, and care beyond expectations to persons with brain injury." What a great tribute to everyone at Granite House!

FEATURED: OUR FOUNDING FAMILY

GRANITE HOUSE

Granite House was founded in 2014 by Tom and Carol Insley, to care for their son, Aaron, and others. Anna Bohnen, a caregiver who would become the first Granite House nurse, was the co-founder. Tom and Carol raised two boys in Lake Elmo, who were in an auto accident in 2007 that changed their family forever. Their son Richard, age 23, did not survive, and Aaron, age 21, a senior at Gustavus Adolphus College, suffered a severe brain injury. Tom and Carol spent that first year learning about Aaron's injury and care while he was hospitalized, then brought him home with part-time caregivers until he moved to Granite House in Nov 2018.

Tom and Carol had no background in medical fields or brain injury prior to 2007. Tom grew up near Baltimore, MD and graduated from the University of MD-College Park with a degree in chemical engineering. He was working at Corning Glass Works in Martinsburg, WV when he met Carol, who was in retail management in her hometown of Washington, DC. Carol's undergraduate degree had been completed in Munich, Germany as an exchange student. Tom and Carol moved to Bozeman, MT after a summer wedding in 1980, just as Tom started graduate school at Montana State. They spent two years hiking in the mountains before Tom started work with 3M in St. Paul, with a master's in chemical engineering.

Tom had been a high-altitude mountain climber even before living in Montana. Before he met Carol, he had climbed all the highpoints in New England, as well as the Mexican volcanoes, including Orizaba at 18,491 ft in elevation. With Bozeman as a base, Tom and Carol vacationed as he climbed Mt. Hood in Oregon, and Mt. Rainier in Washington several times.

The family returned to Bozeman every summer, and the boys started backpacking at ages 4 and 6, when they could carry their own packs. A goal was set to reach Granite Peak, the 12,807' highpoint of Montana. Richard reached it with Tom in 1999 at the age of 15. It wasn't until Aaron was 21 that he was interested, and he trained all summer in 2007 to reach the summit with Tom, just 3 months before the accident. Tom went out to Montana this summer, and Aaron's ashes are now on the summit of Tempest Mt, across from his brother's, on Granite Peak. The profile of Granite Peak became the logo for the nonprofit in 2014.

While living in Bozeman, Carol worked in retail management, but was a stay-at-home mom in MN. As Aaron started 7th grade, Carol began graduate school at UW-River Falls part-time, earning a master's degree in elementary education the year Richard graduated from high school. She was teaching in River Falls when the accident occurred and quit immediately to become Aaron's primary caregiver.

Creating Granite House became a full-time volunteer passion for Tom and Carol. Tom retired and repurposed his time to clear the property with his own equipment and serve as the general contractor. He convinced every one of the subcontractors and suppliers to discount their products and services to build Granite House. Tom put in long hours during construction, framing the lower level and spray-painting the entire house from the ceiling down.

Carol took on the role of primary administrator, overseeing initial licensing, contractor payments, and leading the board meetings for the nonprofit. Working with our local Thrivent group, she planned and ran four successful events to raise startup funds. Carol worked with Anna and our future house manager, Amber, on the choices for flooring, paint, and furnishings, and set up staff policies. Carol served on the DHS Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Committee from 2015-17, spreading the word about Granite House and making vital connections within the brain injury community. She has been appointed for another two-year term this fall.

For the past five years since Aaron moved into Granite House in 2018, Carol and Tom have continued to be full-time volunteers as well as serving on the board of directors. Tom built the massive stone retaining walls and landscaped the areas near the house. He has been the primary property maintenance person, managing snow and ice on the driveway and other emergencies. Carol has continued to do payroll, donor correspondence, and the newsletters. As the board chair and license holder, she works with Amber and Grace on compliance and operations, and with the board on policies and governance.

With this level of daily involvement, Tom and Carol saw Aaron every day for 15 years and were highly engaged in his care. Even though Aaron is no longer at Granite House, they are committed to finishing the work they started and will eventually pass their volunteer jobs on to other paid staff.



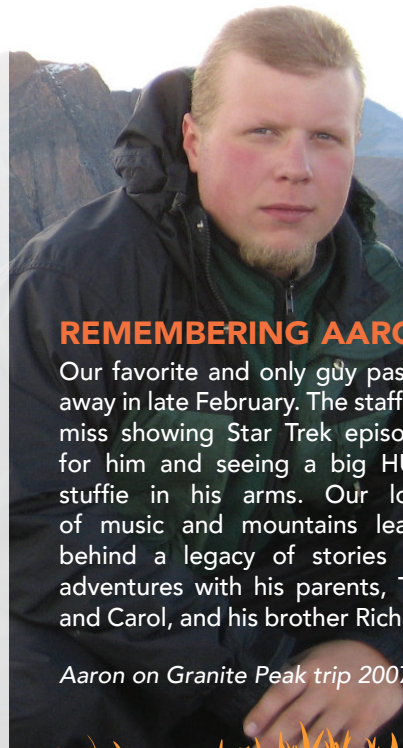
Tom & Carol Insley, with Aaron



Aaron with brother Richard 2006



Aaron at Granite House 2019



REMEMBERING AARON

Our favorite and only gully passed away in late February. The staff will miss showing Star Trek episodes for him and seeing a big HULK stuffie in his arms. Our lover of music and mountains leaves behind a legacy of stories and adventures with his parents, Tom and Carol, and his brother Richard.

Aaron on Granite Peak trip 2007

PROGRAMS FOR OUR RESIDENTS AND STAFF



STAFF AND FAMILY PICNIC!

Our picnics are such fun for everyone, and this year we had 70 people attending! The weather was just perfect, and the food was amazing. Staff members brought their families to show where they work and who they care for. Resident families came to see their loved ones at their home and enjoyed seeing the staff.



CANOE OUTINGS

It was another great summer of canoeing on the St. Croix River, hosted and guided by Tom. On two separate outings there were staff members who brought family (and Jax, our house dog) plus some board members. We saw the petroglyphs on the cliffs and had a shore lunch on the sandbar. It was great fun for the seasoned paddlers and a learning experience for others. This is a great activity that we will continue to do, since Granite House is located so close to the river.



WELCOME, KATIE

Our newest resident moved in just in time for late summer activities. With family in nearby Stillwater, Katie has lots of visitors and is enjoying music therapy and time outdoors. The staff is learning about her favorite foods and activities, and the other residents are glad she has joined us. Katie had a great time at the State Fair with the staff. Her family came to the picnic and Walk for Thought.



MUSIC THERAPY

Steve from Twin Cities Music Therapy is coming every other week to engage and delight the residents and staff. He brings drums, cymbals, and other music makers that the residents can use to enjoy the beat and enjoy the music. Check out the videos on our Facebook page!



RESIDENT OUTINGS

The residents went to the State Fair, local beaches and parks, and pool therapy at Courage-Kenny in Stillwater. We also brought them to the Walk for Thought for a great time with the staff, families and many good friends. The weather was beautiful and we all enjoyed the day.

WEEKEND WAFFLES

About every three weeks over last winter and into spring, the staff, and residents—including their families—enjoyed homemade waffles for breakfast. Tom's special recipe from scratch, which includes local honey, whole-wheat flour, and homemade yogurt, was hearty and delicious. The waffles were served with fresh berries, whipped cream, and locally made maple link sausages. Adding mini chocolate chips in the batter became a favorite request, and the leftovers in the freezer were enjoyed later, warm from the toaster. With winter coming, we'll start again soon.





VEGGIES, 2023

The summer crop of tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, peppers and zucchini was even better than last year, now with three of the raised bed planters in use. The deer left the plants alone because the planters were surrounded by river rock, unstable for them to walk on. The residents were brought down close to help Tanya and Amber work on the planters and had fresh-smelling vegetables put into their hands right from the garden.



SPECIAL GIFTS

It was so thoughtful of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Afton to select Granite House as a recipient for the proceeds from their annual rummage sale. A group from the church came for a tour and presented us with a check for over \$2400! They were very impressed with the house and had such great praise for our mission. We also received a generous gift from Girl Scout Troop 56493 in Lake Elmo, who donated funds from their spring cookie sale to Granite House. Thank you to these caring and generous members of our community!



SUMMER VOLUNTEERS

Excel Energy employees volunteered paid time off to do yard cleanup this summer. Nick, his son Austin, and co-worker Garrett helped to dig out weeds and spread mulch around the oaks. Nick came to cook at the picnic again, this time with three smokers and friends Dan and Josh, who made some very tender chicken, beef, and ribs, as well as everyone's favorite, smoked mac & cheese! For the volunteer hours spent on the picnic, Excel's "Dollars for Doing" program made a donation to Granite House.



DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE SPECIAL?

Granite House is a great place to work, and we know that for some, it's been the perfect place to learn valuable skills and build up a resume. Some of our student staff members have moved on to become nurses, social workers, and physical therapists. With flexible hours, great pay and benefits, and a calm, family setting, it's a very special place. We have a new opening for full-time hours. See our website for more information and contact Amber.

NOTE FROM THE STAFF

Next month we are celebrating our fifth anniversary at Granite House! Out of our current staff of thirteen, six have been here since we started, and five more have now been with us for three years. That's amazing, considering the current job market and being a healthcare provider. The fact that among our staff and residents we had 70 people come to our picnic shows pride in our programs and our beautiful home. Visitors see a real home, and people who care for others like family. If you have not seen Granite House, please contact us for a tour. Our staff has been loyal, resilient in tough times, and able to find a new normal with the recent turnover in residents. They are our greatest asset, and we commend them for making Granite House a success.

Amber and Grace

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