



random acts  
OF FLOWERS®  
CHICAGO



AS FEATURED IN:





# random acts OF FLOWERS® CHICAGO

## mission statement

Random Acts of Flowers recycles and repurposes flowers by engaging dedicated volunteer teams to deliver beautiful bouquets and moments of kindness to individuals in healthcare facilities across the country.

## overview

Random Acts of Flowers has a very simple mission with a huge impact. Our goal with each delivery is to improve the emotional wellness of our recipients through the delivery of repurposed flowers and vases.

*Our mission focuses on recipients who:*

- Have been in a facility for an extended period of time
- Have not had visitors
- Don't have a support structure
- In need of a little cheer

*Medical research has shown that patients with flowers or plants in their room have:*

- Shorter hospital stays
- Lower ratings of pain, anxiety, and fatigue
- Lower systolic blood pressure
- More positive feelings

## history

In July 2007, RAF's founder, Larsen Jay, was in a near-fatal accident. While confined to his hospital room, the support that Larsen received in the form of visitors and floral arrangements immediately aided in his long recovery.

Larsen noticed how many of his fellow patients did not have visitors or flowers; within moments the first "random act of flowers" delivery was made, repurposing his flowers and delivering them to other patients. The memories of how a simple gesture made a difference compelled Larsen to form Random Acts of Flowers.



*"The yellow daisies are beautiful. I enjoy them every day. Thanks so very much"*

- Floral Recipient



*"I went to visit my father in his nursing home and there was a cheery flower arrangement on his nightstand. I thought it was so delightful that someone he didn't know would send him sunshine in a vase. My family appreciates what you do. Thank you."*

- Floral Recipient Family



founder, Larsen Jay

Delivering the beauty of flowers and a moment of kindness to those who need it most

*Dear wonderful people at Random Acts of Flowers, I can't tell how much joy these flowers brought me! What a wonderful organization- what a wonderful thing to bring a bit of sunshine and happiness to someone in the hospital. I just wanted you all to know how much I appreciated the flowers and the companies that made it all possible. Thanks so much for brightening my stay.*

-Mary



*I just wanted to thank you for the flower delivery earlier this week. Several residents popped by my office throughout the week to let me know how thoughtful that was, and how much it cheered up their day. Some residents are very isolated, and knowing that someone cares for them means a lot! We are so grateful for your hard work!*

-Kendra

*I was surprised and delighted when I opened the door and saw your volunteers who gave me a lovely bouquet! I am so very happy this week because of your great thoughtfulness and kindness. I am a disabled senior who lives full-time in a power wheel-chair and I really have few visitors...Your wonderful gift is right in front of me now! Thanks you all so very much for your Random Acts of Flowers and kindness.*

--James



*Dearest Random Acts of Flowers: Thank you so much for the large vase of various colored roses! A pleasant surprise indeed. Thank you for the kind thought, it made my year. Most of all, thank you for specially thinking of me.*

-Elizabeth

*I am a consultant for a facility that serves people with chronic mental illnesses. Today they got a large donation of over 100 flower bouquets. I was touched by your generosity and the residents are thrilled. Many of them have no families at all, and this is one of the few treats that they will get. It is beautiful that you think of those who are usually unrecognized and forgotten. Thank you.*

-Megan

**Major Flower Sourcing Partners:**

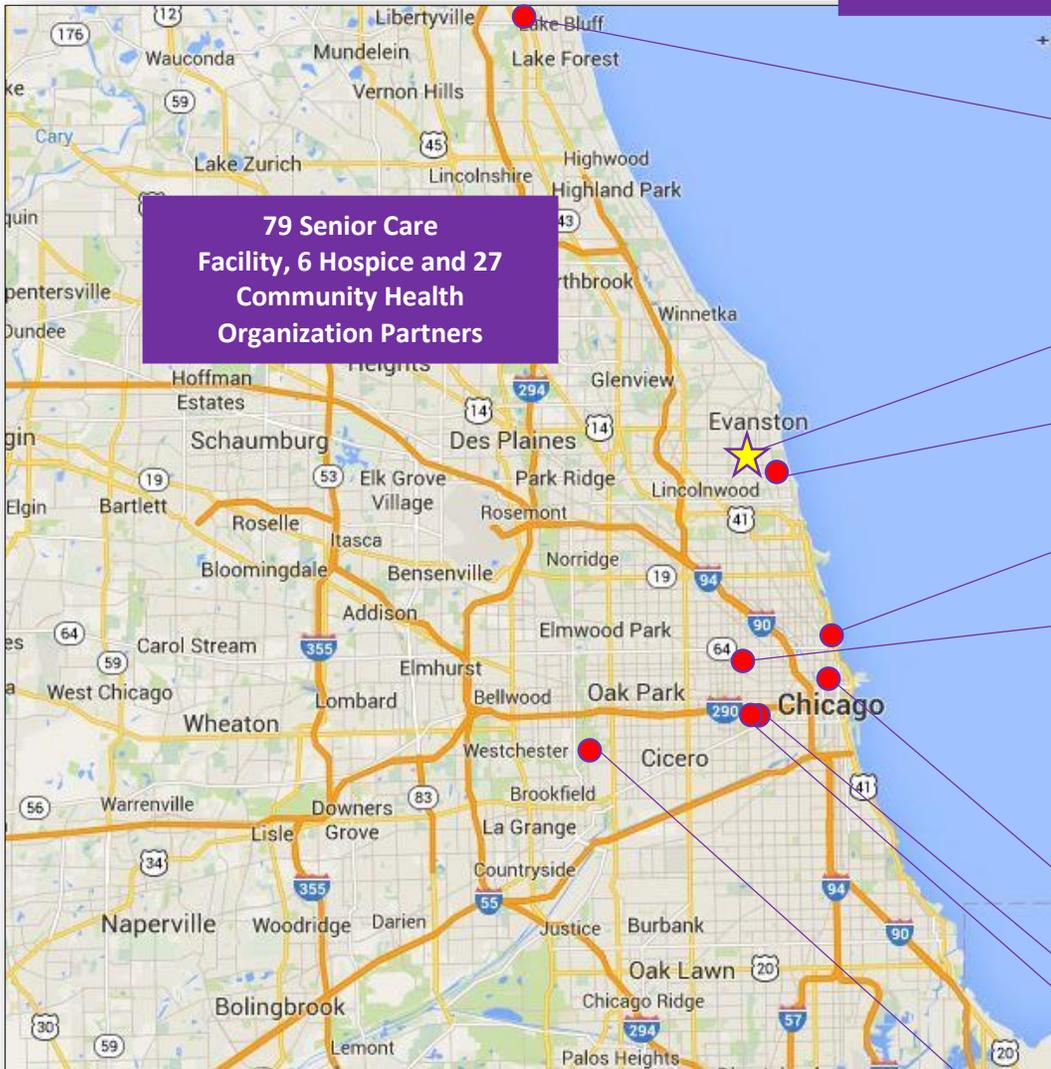


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Saints Mary and Elizabeth  
Medical Center

Northwestern  
Medicine®

RUSH UNIVERSITY  
MEDICAL CENTER

**450+ Dedicated Volunteers**



**RAF Chicago Staff**

- Joanie Bayhack, Executive Director
- Andrea Lutz, Director of Mission Fulfillment
- Sydney Werd, Program Assistant
- David Oquendo, Program Driver/Delivery Leader

**RAF Chicago Board of Directors**

- Stephanie Biederman • Anitha George • Avery Keller • Becky Kimbell
- Brooke MacLean • Lori Muller • Debra Pelech • Anna Sieglar

## Presence Health Patients Get Surprise Pick-Me-Up from Random Acts of Flowers

A Healing Gift

Bucktown-Wicker Park, IL

By JOHN DEWEY (Open Post) - February 19, 2016 2:42 pm ET



Patients throughout Chicagoland were treated to a big Valentine’s surprise as Random Acts of Flowers Chicago distributed bouquets to hospitals, nursing homes, and rehab and hospice centers. Hundreds of flower bouquets were donated by FTD/ProFlowers, local flower wholesalers and grocery stores.

“It was beautiful to see the faces of these patients light up when we arrived at their room,” said Anitha George, director of Patient and Family Centered Care at Presence Saints Mary and Elizabeth Medical Center, 2233 W. Division St. “A hospital is not where most people want to be on Valentine’s Day. So we were so glad for the opportunity to partner up with Random Acts of Flowers to give these patients a wonderful gift.”

Joanie Bayhack, executive director, Random Acts of Flowers Chicago, was among the volunteers distributing flowers to patients. “There is no greater feeling than to surprise someone with a beautiful bouquet. It symbolizes a moment of kindness and connection between two people. Our volunteers have special empathetic and compassionate hearts. We truly believe -- and it has been proven through Harvard studies -- that flowers heal the body, heart and soul. Whether we are delivering flowers to a new mother and her new baby or to an 80-year old patient learning to walk again on the rehab floor, the joy of flowers is universal.”

Random Acts of Flowers (RAF) recycles and repurposes flowers. As a recycling “green” nonprofit organization run almost entirely by volunteers, RAF is committed to nourishing the health of the environment, individuals, and the community. To date, RAF has kept more than 100,000 vases out of landfills.

## Random Acts of Flowers celebrates first year



**Lee A. Litas**

Pioneer Press

February 3, 2016 5:02pm

**The Event:** Sometimes when bad things happen to good people, compassion inspires great things. On Jan. 27, 102 supporters, sponsors and those enchanted by the mission came to celebrate the first anniversary of Random Acts of Flowers in Chicago. Held at the Maclean Collection library in Lake Forest, the event served as a donor cultivation event and to introduce RAF to Chicago.

**Cause Célèbre:** "Many organizations start from families with an affinity for sharing moments of kindness and compassion. (Founder) Larsen Jay was passionate about giving flowers to people who don't otherwise have them," explained Joanie Bayhack of Wilmette, executive director.

After a devastating fall from a ladder in 2007, Jay's hospital room was flooded with flowers. Wanting to share his bounty, Jay wheeled his bouquets to other patients, and worked out the idea for what, in 2008, would become RAF. Today, RAF has locations in Knoxville, Tenn., Pinellas County, Fla., Silicon Valley, Calif., and Chicago.

"There are people in nursing homes or veterans hospitals, sometimes for 20 years. They don't have flowers; they've lost family; they don't have a visitor even so it's very emotional to go on these deliveries," said Bayhack.

RAF gets unwanted flowers from a variety of venues and facilities. Their volunteers then deconstruct the bouquets and create new arrangements, using donated vases from church drives, schools, etc. To date, RAF has kept more than 100,000 vases out of landfills nationally.

"I personally have seen what (RAF) can do," said Robert Apatoff of Winnetka, RAF partner and CEO of FTD Companies Worldwide. "There are a lot of people who need a pick-me-up... who don't have...family and they shouldn't be without the simple pleasures of life and the love that flowers bring."

**Bottom Line:** The event raised \$5,000 for RAF.

# DAILY NORTH SHORE

## Random Acts of Flowers

by Stacy Flannery • February 2, 2016

In celebration of their first year in the Chicagoland area and to welcome newly appointed Executive Director Joanie Bayhack, Random Acts of Flowers Chicago hosted friends and supporters at a special event at the MacLean Collection in Lake Forest.

Random Acts of Flowers, located in Evanston, recycles and repurposes flowers by engaging dedicated volunteers to deliver bouquets to individuals in local healthcare facilities.

Guests enjoyed a fascinating evening perusing the collection, which consists of more than 35,000 maps, books, and globes dating from 15th century to the present, including rare land surveys produced by George Washington.



**Sarah Alter, Joanie Bayhack, Brooke MacLean**  
Photography by Larry Miller



**Stacey Moe**



**Julie & Leif Rolfsen**



**Barry MacLean, Mark Siegler, Richard Siegler**



**Barry MacLean**



**Richard Siegler, Walter Jacobson, Anna Siegler, Mark Siegler**

# Dave Hoekstra's Website

## The Beauty in Random Acts of Flowers

By [Dave Hoekstra](#) On February 19, 2016 · [Add Comment](#)

Life isn't so daunting if you break it down into a series of small gestures.

The non-profit [Random Act of Flowers](#) recycles flowers from weddings, parties, funerals and grocery stores. Volunteers then deliver floral bouquets to Chicago area hospitals and long term health care facilities.

Knoxville, Tn.-based Random Acts of Flowers (RAF) has only been in the Chicago area for a little more than a year. From January to December of 2015, RAF delivered bouquets to 16,142 people in the Chicago area.

Sweet.

Located in a 3,000-square foot space in the Nature's Perspective Landscaping building at 2000 Greenleaf St. in Evanston, the Chicago branch is the fastest growing operation of the four Random Acts of Flowers (Knoxville, Pinellas County, Fla. and Silicon Valley).

After White Sox legend Minnie Minoso died on March 1, 2015, the organization recycled flowers from his funeral. The flowers were made into bouquets with black and white ribbons (the White Sox colors) and delivered to 62 people at Senior Suites of Bridgeport.



My parents passed away in the spring of 2015 and the passage of time showed me to pay it forward. They loved flowers. Dad raised roses in the backyard when we lived in Columbus, Ohio and I always saw my Mom's face light up even through the darkness of dementia when I brought flowers to visit them in Naperville.

She loved her tulip magnolia in the front yard of her home. The buds turn into blooms, blossoms float off the tree and it happens so very fast.

"We create new bouquets and bring them to people in health care facilities who might be struggling in a very vulnerable point of their life," said Andrea Lutz, Director of Mission Fulfillment at Chicago's RAF. "We use flowers as a way to bring joy, life, beauty and nature to them. But they are hand delivered by a community member that cares about them. It's that simple."

Volunteers rescue flowers from grocery stores—9 Whole Foods, 2 Mariano's and the Grand Food Center in Winnetka—wholesale businesses and wedding, funeral and special events. RAF also partners with FTD (Florists' Transworld Delivery).

Flowers are brought to the Evanston location to be stored and deconstructed. Other volunteers meet at recipient facilities that range from Hines VA Hospital in Maywood to Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

Facility carts are pre-loaded with flowers. Hines, for example, serves 120 people in four carts. Volunteers visit recipients of all ages with staff members. Recipients are identified before the visit. Lutz said, "We don't need to know or are not legally allowed to know who we will be serving."

Periods of volunteer engagement can be longer in nursing homes. RAF serves nearly 100 assisted living facilities within a 45 minute radius of Evanston. Lutz explained, "In hospitals, many people have been up all night, 'Who are you, what?' But in one nursing home a gentleman told me in his older age he has learned to love flowers but he can't afford them. Once a year he treats himself. And I walked in with calla lilies, part of this amazing bouquet. We deliver to new moms. Some hospitals are like,



*RAF Chicago Executive Director Joanie Bayhack delivering smiles. (Courtesy of RAF)*



‘These are new moms, they’re celebrating.’ We’ve gone into rooms and there’s nothing in there. The rooms are dark, they’re tired. We all have stories where people break down and start crying.”

More than 550 people from the Chicago area have volunteered for RAF in the past year. Joanie Bayhack,, Executive Director RAF Chicago said, “The nice thing about our volunteer experience is that there is something for everyone. We have volunteers who like deconstructing, composting and others who like arranging. Then others like delivering and are comfortable in hospitals and hospice centers.”

That would be me.

Bayhack continued, “We have three volunteer cleaning queens who come in every Thursday. There’s no long orientations and workshops. There’s music cranking, coffee brewing and snacks everywhere.”  
“You hear laughter.”

Roses and chrysanthemums are the most common flowers that come through the Chicago RAF. “But we never know what to expect,” Lutz said with a smile. “We put together a volunteer guide that describes each flower we’ve ever received with helpful tips. There are 86 flowers in the guide, which we regularly update.”

Random Acts of Flowers was founded in 2008 by Adrian and Larsen Jay in Knoxville. Larsen Jay was an independent film and television producer who fell off his roof during a 2007 home repair. “Ironically in 2007, I climbed to the foot of Mount Everest and went helicopter skiing on another project,” Jay said in a mid-February interview. “I came back completely fine. But on a DIY project, I stepped on the top of the ladder for the 15th or 16th time, the bottom kicked out and I fell face down on the concrete about a story and a half up.”

Jay, 41, broke his left arm, both wrists, right elbow, his nose and suffered 10 skull fractures. “My head hit the ladder, which is the only reason I’m talking to you,” he said. “It was a second lease on life. To be put back together orthopedically, physically and emotionally is pretty astounding.” Jay spent two days in ICU, ten days in a trauma floor recovery room and ten more days in a rehab facility. He has had more than 12 surgeries and is still being rearranged.

“One thing that changed my perspective was the generosity and support of the people around me,” Jay said.

“And that often came in the way of flowers. I had never been given a bouquet of flowers. Each day multiple deliveries started showing up. Our room was filled with 30 plus bouquets. It turned into this jungle of joy and happiness. It helped me focus on recovery, it changed the atmosphere of the room.

“When I got stir crazy and convinced my family and nurses to get me out in the hall I noticed how many rooms were barren. No flowers, no plants, no visitors. It was a jarring visual. We went back to my room, took the cards off my flowers and loaded them in my wheel chair. We didn’t ask for permission. We didn’t follow protocol. We just started giving them out down the hall and that was the genesis.”

A native of Syracuse, N.Y., Jay later sold his documentary production company and now runs RAF full time. His wife Adrian is a former Knoxville ABC television reporter and Northwestern University grad who interviewed Jay on a story. They were engaged six months after they met. Larsen’s father-in-law is Barry MacLean of the MacLean-Fogg manufacturing company. He serves on RAF’s National Board of Directors. Jay’s vision is to make RAF a national operation.

Empowered by flowers.

We’re blown away at what has happened,” he said. “We can barely keep up. We’re almost up to 115,000 deliveries to people nationwide. All of last year we did almost 50,000. Our success is half by design and half by dumb luck in figuring it out. You can explain Random Acts of Flowers in a few seconds: everybody has been to a wedding, funeral, a special event and they’ve looked at all the flowers and thought ‘What a waste.’ Thirty years ago food banks didn’t exist, but if I told you Panera threw away all their bread tonight you would be appalled.



Larsen Jay on the way

“We’re trying to build a whole new industry to think about flowers the same way. Everybody understands what we do really fast. What’s cool is the number of volunteers who work tirelessly on behalf of people they’ll never meet is fascinating to me. They understand it makes a difference and its part of the American spirit.”

Hospitals have found that a patient’s mood improves after receiving flowers, which in turn, helps with dialogue and rapport. Lutz said, “We have a volunteer nurse who talked about how it has made a huge difference in the way they can engage their patients who are scared or real sick. We’re escorted by nurse floor managers who are walking around with charts and not (hospital) volunteers.”

The RAF work week is designed around recipient partners. Visits are at 1 p.m. Tuesdays. “On Monday everyone is getting back from the weekend and figuring out scheduling,” Lutz explained. “Wednesday is when they do their procedures. And they’re wrapping things up on Thursday and Friday. Tuesday afternoon was the perfect day for when people are most relaxed. We arrange the flowers Tuesday morning and have them prepped the previous afternoon.”

The initiative is growing so fast in Chicago, RAF is hitting the road in March to teach the 70 person claim staff from Zurich Insurance how to make arrangements and Lutz and program assistant Sydney Werd will lead a bouquet demonstration at the Macy’s Spring Flower Show.

Lutz previously worked at the Northern Illinois Food Bank and the Food Bank for New York City. She sees similarities between the two venues. Lutz explained, “Taking something that ordinarily gets thrown out, repurposing it and bring it to people who need it. Logistical puzzles and maximizing limited resources. But I love the ownership here, starting from scratch and seeing that ‘a-ha’ moment with flowers and plants. And, we’re all big flower nerds.”

Werd knows of the days of wine and roses. She was a bartender before joining RAF. “I graduated from college, bartended (at Union Pizzeria in Evanston) and was a florist (at Bloom 3 in Evanston),” she said. “I fell into the florist job 100 per cent. Random Acts of Flowers would come to the shop to get extra flowers, they would go away and we knew they were going somewhere cool.”

Bayhack’s previous skill sets include a stint as publicity manager at Playboy magazine in Chicago and VP & Senior Vice-President of Communications and Corporate Sponsorship for WTTW-Channel 11 and WFMT-FM. “The fun starts with how good everybody feels from the beginning,” said Bayhack, who also was an extra in the fun film “Animal House.” “Donating flowers that would have gone into the dumpster, so that feels good. The group comes in and they have fun sorting through it. The next shift comes and they love doing the arranging. I sit and watch. I hear the joy. And the end result is the presentation of flowers to some unsuspecting, physically confused person and they light up. They might say, ‘Was it my birthday?’ Or, ‘I’ve never had flowers before.’”

Flowers are a bonding mechanism for sure.

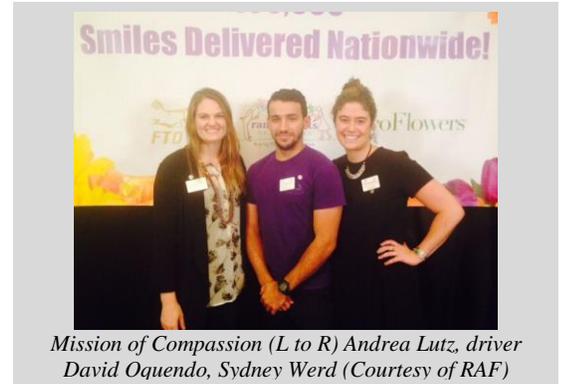
Jay said, “Giving flowers is a gesture that cuts across races, religions, disabilities, income levels. The result is the same response across the board. There’s few things where that happens. In essence, we’re focused on basic kindness. We’re not trying to cure cancer, build a building or change homelessness. That’s sometimes hard in non-profits to quantify. We sell air, we sell smiles. But at the end of the day, I know our world is a better place because of Random Acts of Flowers and our volunteers.

“Kindness and compassion have to have value in our society.”

That bears repeating during these times of rage and rants.

Kindness and compassion have to have value in our society.

To volunteer, visit [www.RAFChicago.org](http://www.RAFChicago.org), or call (847) 430-4751.



*Mission of Compassion (L to R) Andrea Lutz, driver David Oquendo, Sydney Werd (Courtesy of RAF)*