VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2 | FALL 2026

# More childhood, please.®

A MAGAZINE FROM AKRON CHILDREN'S

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*Jordyn, age 18 of Wayne County*

Akron Children's



# A letter from Chris Gessner

Dear friends,

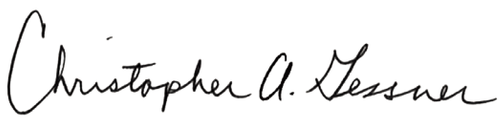
It's inspiring to walk through an Akron Children's facility. You'll see kids of all ages and backgrounds coming in for everything from checkups or sick visits to tests and surgeries. Regardless of their age, health or place of residence, our world revolves around our patients. We're committed to ensuring our patients have access to the care they need to help them grow and thrive.

You'll meet a variety of patients in this issue of our "More childhood, please." magazine. Jordyn's quality of life has improved greatly, thanks to getting the behavioral healthcare she needed to overcome anxiety and depression. Anna Cate's family shares her story of being born without half of the left part of her brain. They reflect on how Akron Children's neurological experts have helped her maintain her ability to walk and participate on the swim team. Claire was injured in a scooter accident, and an army of medical and surgical specialists put her on the road to recovery.

The magazine also features two patients of Akron Children's Adult and Pediatric Burn Institute: 12-year-old Gianna and 69-year-old Jeff. Gianna's advanced burn treatment included spray-on skin to aid her recovery, so she could rejoin her competitive cheerleading team. Jeff battled a complex leg wound for more than a year, losing hope and facing amputation, until he learned that Akron Children's treats wounds as well as burns for kids and adults.

Thanks to all the patients and families who shared their incredible stories. I hope you enjoy this issue.

Warm regards,



**Chris Gessner**
*President and CEO*

Akron Children's

*Akron Children's mission is to improve the health of children, teenagers and young adults through excellence in patient care, education, research, advocacy and community partnerships.*

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"More childhood, please." magazine is published by:

*Akron Children's*
*One Perkins Square*
*Akron, OH 44308*

*An Equal Opportunity Employer*

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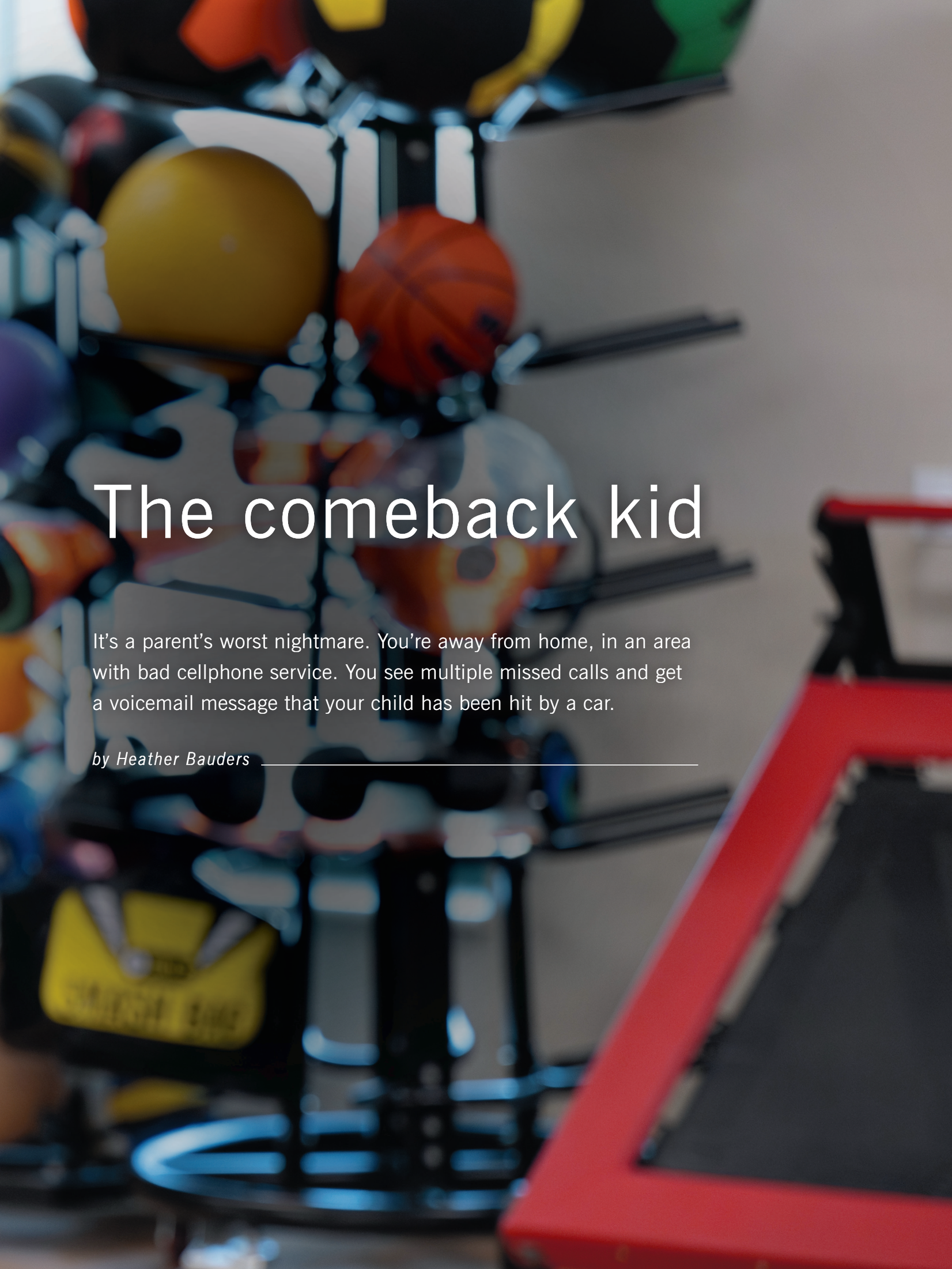
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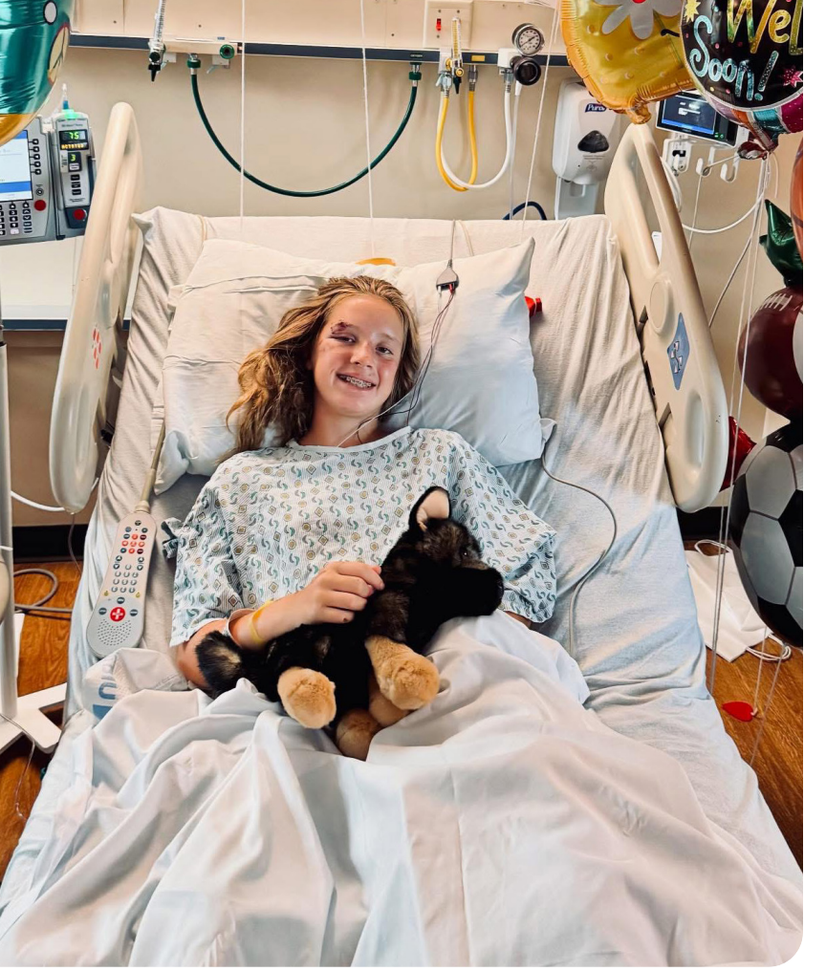




# The comeback kid

It's a parent's worst nightmare. You're away from home, in an area with bad cellphone service. You see multiple missed calls and get a voicemail message that your child has been hit by a car.

*by Heather Bauders*




*Claire recovered well from her significant head injury and went home faster than anyone anticipated.*

That is what happened Aug. 5, 2025, when 12-year-old Claire Millington and a friend were riding their motorized scooters. “We talked about whether to take the longer or shorter way back to her house. We chose the longer one, so we could be together for a few more minutes,” Claire said. “I’d never been that way before, and I didn’t see a car coming as I turned. My friend made it past the car, but I didn’t.”

## From the emergency room to intensive care

Claire doesn’t remember getting hit by the car. An ambulance took her to Aultman Hospital Emergency Room in Canton, and then a medical helicopter transported her to Akron Children’s. “God protected her brain from those traumatic memories and from having more serious neurological issues than a small brain bleed,” her mom, Ashley, said. “She wasn’t wearing a helmet when the accident happened, so the damage to her brain could’ve been so much worse.”

Claire was intubated to help with her breathing and taken to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. “She needed surgery to repair the broken bones in her left lower leg, but they couldn’t do that until they were sure she was neurologically stable,” Ashley recalled. “I kept telling her she was in the hospital, but she was OK. I’ve never prayed so hard in my life. I begged her to wake up, and she finally did after about six hours. They assessed her and then wasted no time getting her into the operating room.”

## Claire’s first surgery and recovery

Orthopedic surgeon Patrick Riley Sr. performed the operation. “Claire’s orthopedic injury was a ‘comminuted fracture of her tibia and fibula,’ which means a fracture that has more than two pieces,” he explained. “We fixed the tibial fracture with a 10-hole plate and eight screws.”

As Claire recovered from the brain bleed, she couldn’t have too much stimulation. “That was a rough time, and I was worried for her,” Ashley shared. “She plays softball and basketball, and she’s so active. It was like my bubbly kid was just not in there.”

But Claire turned the corner, recovering faster than her family or care team expected. She went home from the hospital on Aug. 9, her mom’s birthday. Claire moved into the downstairs family room, which included a bed, stocked mini refrigerator and the collection of cards, balloons and stuffed animals from her hospital stay.

“We have a lot of technology and skill in the orthopedic world to fix fractures, but sometimes head injuries are not so fortunate,” Dr. Riley said. “In this case, Claire recovered well from a significant head injury. That is the best part of this story.”

Claire went through months of physical therapy (PT). “We had to start slowly to encourage Claire to bear weight on her injured leg, eventually teaching her to walk again,” said Dan Norman, physical therapist with Akron Children’s Sports Rehabilitation. “One of the biggest hurdles, and rightfully so, was her fear that she would reinjure her leg. This is a battle we often face — and it’s best defeated through constant education and encouragement.”

It was Claire's first year in middle school, sixth grade. She joined her classmates in September 2025, starting in a wheelchair and then progressing to crutches and a walking boot. She went to school for half-days the first week, easing into her new routine.

"North Canton City Schools were so amazing," Ashley said. "The superintendent called me to see what we needed. Claire's math and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers, Mrs. Bourlas and Mrs. Ventosa, provided so much love and support. Claire focused on core classes like ELA and math, catching up on other subjects later.

"She said it was her favorite school year, which is funny because it was the hardest year of her life," Ashley continued. "But she had really good girls around her — teammates and friends who carried her books and helped her get around."

## A second surgery and the next phase of rehabilitation

Nine months after the first surgery, Claire had a second operation. "Claire healed wonderfully from the first operation, so we removed the plate and screws to let the bone get back to normal," Dr. Riley shared. "I think it helped a lot that Claire is athletic and has a feisty personality. She knew she wanted to get back to her sports, and this was a big driver for her."

She was in a boot for four weeks after surgery and then had more PT. Dan continued to focus on helping Claire build leg strength as well as improve motion in her ankle and knee. "An injury can take kids away from their friend groups and steal part of their identity," he said. "I really enjoy helping patients like Claire through these difficult periods in their lives. It's priceless to see her resume the sports and activities she loves."

Claire rejoined her travel softball team in June. "It was fun, cool and weird to be back on the softball field," she said. "I've always loved being a catcher, but I mostly play third base now. We travel an hour or two away from home to play against strong competition."

When she has downtime from sports, Claire enjoys hanging out with family and friends. She hasn't been back on a motorized bike or scooter, but if she does resume riding, she will wear a helmet. She hopes other kids will learn from her accident and always wear their safety gear.

## An army of support

Ashley is grateful to God, her family, friends, the Akron Children's care team, the North Canton community and many others who showed support after Claire's accident. "I can't say enough positive things about the care she has received from Akron Children's; I'll never forget it," Ashley said. "It's been a long road, but Claire has handled it with so much strength and optimism. We're very blessed and thankful she's alive."



*Physical therapist Dan Norman works with Claire to stand on one leg while tapping randomly blinking lights. This exercise simulates real-life activities of standing on an uneven surface while focusing attention elsewhere.*

# Daphne's brave heart lives on

*by Heather Bauders*

For Connor and Kassi Filkins of Akron, parenthood didn't turn out like they expected. They lost their 3-month-old daughter, Daphne, due to complications from open-heart surgery. But early in their grief, they knew they wanted to do something special to remember their precious little girl.

## Daphne's story

Kassi's pregnancy went fine until the 18-week anatomy scan showed an area of concern with the baby's heart. After the anatomy scan, Kassi and Connor were referred to the Akron Children's Heart Center for an in-utero echocardiogram.

"From then on, my pregnancy was kind of a roller coaster," she said. "Things the doctors were watching got resolved, and then new heart-related concerns would pop up. We knew heart surgery would be a possibility for our baby, but we were initially told it wouldn't be until she was a toddler."



*Joy radiated from Daphne, and her family is working to keep her light shining.*

Kassi had a positive, natural childbirth at Summa Health in Akron. Daphne arrived early the morning of Oct. 24, 2024. The next day, after being discharged from Summa, Daphne had an echocardiogram at the Akron Children's Heart Center.

Daphne had complex heart disease, including abnormal drainage of the upper veins of her body to her heart and an anatomic separation in one of the main collecting chambers of her heart into two chambers that obstructed blood flow from her lungs. "All of these defects played a part in how her heart functioned," Kassi said. "Daphne needed surgery way sooner than we originally thought, or her heart problems could be fatal."

On Jan. 23, 2025, Akron Children's heart surgeons Drs. Tara Karamlou and Robert Stewart performed open-heart surgery on Daphne, who was just 13 weeks old. "Once the surgeons got in there, the anatomy was even more complex than they expected," Connor explained. "They had to call a few audibles, and a bleed happened that couldn't be resolved. They did everything they could to save Daphne, but she passed away."

> "We knew Daphne was meant to have a great purpose."
>
> *- Connor, Daphne's father*

## Finding hope through helping others

Connor and Kassi came home to an empty house, blanketed in grief. "She was such a good baby. She had regular tests and appointments; everything went fine until it didn't," Kassi said. "It's a whole new world you can't prepare yourself for, and it was hard to find our footing sometimes."

A youth pastor in Hudson, Connor worried how his church kids would handle their grief. "Kids texted me before and during Daphne's surgery to wish us well. It was so hard to text their parents, so they could tell the kids that Daphne died," he recalled. "As a pastor, you're in the business of hope. But when you're living in a place of that much trauma and grief, it was hard to make the choice for hope."

It didn't take long for Connor and Kassi to know they wanted to do something to help other families in the Akron Children's Heart Center. "Our ideas evolved over time, but our desire was really strong," he said. "We knew Daphne was meant to have a great purpose."

## Daphne's Brave Heart launches

Connor and Kassi started a nonprofit organization called Daphne's Brave Heart. It aims to further efforts around research, advocacy and family support for kids with congenital heart defects (CHD).

They worked with Matthew Long, major gifts officer of the Akron Children's Foundation, to begin fundraising for a private waiting area for families whose kids are having heart surgery. "Ducky is a nickname we had for Daphne, so the new space will be called Ducky's Room," Kassi said. "We got input from Drs. Karamlou and Stewart on what the room should include. We're appreciative of their continued partnership, as losing Daphne had to be hard on them as well."

The goal of Ducky's Room is to help families feel comfortable and have a sense of privacy while their children have heart surgery. "Losing Daphne was a very difficult day for our operating room team, and of course, for me personally," Dr. Karamlou said. "But the unrelenting courage and resilience of Daphne's family and the ability to partner with them in creating Ducky's Room was incredibly healing. We are grateful that families dealing with challenging situations will be able to spend time in this incredibly comforting space. This is an enduring legacy that will provide so much for the families we serve."

Plans for Ducky's Room are still underway, and the special space is set to open in early 2027. "Daphne gave us the biggest smiles, and she had the bravest heart," Connor said. "Our mission is to keep spreading big smiles for all the brave hearts of the patients at Akron Children's."



*Baby Clarke has a huge smile like his big sister.*

Daphne's Brave Heart, in conjunction with the local nonprofit organization First Serve, also provides care bags for Heart Center surgery families. "The bags include a blanket, lip balm and hand lotion, a small journal, a heart-shaped stress reliever, a deck of cards and a note of encouragement," Connor said. "We want to provide practical items to let families know they are not alone."

## Daphne's light continues to shine

Connor and Kassi welcomed their son, Clarke, in January 2026. They spell his name with an "e" at the end, just like Daphne's name, and he has a huge smile like his big sister. He is in good health, including his heart.

As Clarke grows up, they will tell him all about Daphne and the impact she had. "Daphne's attentiveness came through, and joy radiated from her," Kassi said. "She was larger than life, even when she was here, and that's still true now. We'll do our small part to support local families on their CHD journeys, and we'll work to keep Daphne's light shining."


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# Advanced burn and wound care help patients recover

The Akron Children's Adult and Pediatric Burn Institute, supported by The Paul and Carol David Foundation, is a hidden healthcare gem. Many people do not know that the burn team cares for adults as well as kids — and treats complex wounds in addition to burns. Let's meet two patients, Gianna and Jeff, who received world-class care at the Burn Institute.

*by Heather Bauders and Kathy Johnson*



*Gianna kept her eye on the prize — returning to competitive cheerleading — as she recovered from her burn injuries.*

# Gianna's story

A burn accident in December 2025 put 12-year-old Gianna Ivery, a competitive cheerleader, in Akron Children's. She had a candle burning in her bedroom, got too close after spraying perfume on her hoodie — and the sweatshirt went up in flames.

"When something like that happens, you lose all fear as a parent," her mom, Shanequa, said. "I couldn't get her to understand that she needed to lie down and roll, so I grabbed a nearby towel to smother the fire. I then made sure my 10-year-old son, Roman, was OK because he witnessed the whole ordeal."

## Rushing to Akron Children's

Shanequa called her husband, William, as she and the kids rushed from Stow to the Akron Children's Emergency Room. After arriving there, Gianna was immediately taken to the Burn Institute. She mostly had deep, second-degree burns on areas including her upper chest, chin and right arm. "These are the types of burns in a gray zone," said Dr. Anjay Khandelwal, Burn Institute director. "The treatment decision can truly change a child's long-term outcome and is often misjudged."

Any caregiver who entered Gianna's room got the same questions. "When Dr. Khandelwal came into the room for the first time, he knew what to expect," Shanequa chuckled. "Gianna wanted to know if she'd be home for Christmas and when she could cheer again."

## Advanced burn treatment

Gianna was an ideal candidate for a combination approach. "The first step is to use a special tool to excise or debride the burn. Then we used the RECELL® spray-on skin system, followed by a protective artificial skin," Dr. Khandelwal said. "Our team has helped to pioneer this approach. We're the only facility in a multistate area that offers this treatment combination routinely."

Without this advanced care, Gianna would've needed skin grafting to harvest a large section of healthy skin and essentially transplant it. "With spray-on skin technology, we take a very small skin sample — about the size of two postage stamps — and expand it to treat a much larger burn area," Dr. Khandelwal explained. "This technique allows for faster wound closure, less pain, shorter hospital stays and improved cosmetic outcomes."

Physical and occupational therapists worked with Gianna to keep her moving, saying it would be easier if she moved a little each day. "She was more upset about missing a cheer competition than her burn injury," Shanequa said. "Gianna didn't lie in her hospital bed and cry all the time. She put in the work, so she could get back to cheering."

## An amazing recovery

Gianna met her first goal of being home for Christmas. She rejoined her cheerleading team — taking things slowly and following her care team's recommendations — and returned to competition in March 2026.

Dr. Khandelwal says Gianna is a great example of how modern burn care is evolving. "Her recovery timeline simply wouldn't have been possible with a more traditional approach," he offered. "We are truly world pioneers. Our goal isn't just healing the burn: It's getting kids back to being kids as quickly and completely as possible."

The Ivery family is grateful that Gianna's scary story has a happy ending. "It could've been a lot worse. We could've lost our home or our kids; we could've lost everything," Shanequa said. "We're truly blessed Gianna's burn ended up being just a little hiccup in the road."

*Gianna is focused and fearless when she's on stage.*





*Jeff couldn't have made it through without his wife, Cathy.*

# Jeff's story

*After a small cut developed into a debilitating wound over the course of a year, Jeff Dzuro doubted he would ever return to his favorite pastime—fishing. Even more unlikely was the place where he would finally heal: a children's hospital.*

In summer 2024, Jeff, a 69-year-old West Akron resident, nicked his leg on a branch while trimming trees. That seemingly simple cut turned into a 15-month ordeal that nearly cost him his leg.

When the cut didn't improve, Jeff sought care at a local wound clinic. Weeks of treatment didn't help, and he ended up in the emergency room. That started a cycle of wound infections, sepsis, unsuccessful treatments and hospitalizations. "Doctors would give him antibiotics and infusions to get the infection under control," Jeff's wife, Cathy, recalled. "But the underlying problem was the wounds weren't healing."

Over time, the wound on the front of Jeff's leg worsened and eventually reached the bone. Jeff's doctor delivered the devastating news that amputation might be the best option. He had surgery on the open wound, but it became infected. Then Jeff had another bout of sepsis, fell at home and suffered a new wound on his ankle.

## A surprising referral to Akron Children's

Running out of options, the couple sought one final opinion from a local dermatologist. That decision changed everything.

The dermatologist referred Jeff and Cathy to the Akron Children's Adult and Pediatric Burn Institute. "After more than a year of doctors' visits and hospitalizations, no one ever mentioned Akron Children's as an option," Cathy said. "We thought they only treated kids and people with burns."

Dr. Anjay Khandelwal, Burn Institute director, instantly gave Jeff and Cathy hope. “He took one look at pictures of my leg and said, ‘I can fix that,’” Jeff shared. “He said I needed a wound vac to gently suction the wound. I’d been in and out of hospitals and had sepsis six times — and nobody had ever recommended a wound vac.”

After speaking with Dr. Khandelwal, Jeff was admitted to Akron Children’s two days later. “His complex wound threatened his function, independence and potentially even his limb due to exposed tendon, muscle and bone,” Dr. Khandelwal explained. “Our priority was to stabilize the wound and create the right environment for healing. I recognized how hard his journey had been and was committed to restoring his quality of life and his leg.”

The burn team thoroughly cleaned and debrided Jeff’s wound to remove the dead tissue and preserve as much tendon and bone as possible. A few days later, Dr. Khandelwal placed a state-of-the-art artificial skin substitute over the wound to help rebuild the damaged tissue. The advanced treatment created durable coverage over the exposed tendon and bone surrounding Jeff’s foot, ankle and lower leg.

As the wound improved, Jeff continued treatment as an outpatient. When the area healed enough, Dr. Khandelwal performed a final skin graft using skin from Jeff’s thigh to close the wound permanently.

“After surgery, his ankle wound turned red and started to heal,” Cathy said. “He only had to stay in the hospital for a few days.”

## Turning the corner

Jeff, an avid fisherman, started walking again in January 2026. He’s building his leg strength and stability, so he can return to fishing in his favorite spots along the Cuyahoga River.

As Jeff looks back on all he’s been through, he’s filled with gratitude. “The last two years bolstered my faith, and I leaned on God to get me through this rough battle,” he said, his voice cracking with emotion. “I couldn’t have made it through without Cathy, who’s been by my side to love and take care of me. And I owe Dr. Khandelwal the world; there’s no end to my praise for him.”

*With four words — “I can fix that” — Dr. Anjay Khandelwal gave Jeff the precious gift of hope.*



## About the Burn Institute

The Adult and Pediatric Burn Institute, supported by The Paul and Carol David Foundation, is one of only two pediatric hospitals in the United States that treats patients of all ages. With innovative technologies such as spray-on skin and specialized laser therapy, the Burn Institute fulfills a regional need for patients throughout northeast Ohio, western Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

# Innovative hybrid spine surgery improves quality of life

*by Holly Pupino*




*Gwen attends Curvy Girls, a scoliosis support group where monthly activities help build confidence and self-esteem.*

Gwen Stine became aware at an early age that her S-shaped spine was going to make life difficult.

Diagnosed with scoliosis at age 5, she had to wear a back brace for up to 18 hours a day. Kids at school would question her about it and ask if her back was broken. But that wasn't the worst thing. "Gwen experienced back pain on a daily basis," said her mother, Joelle.

Despite wearing that brace for seven years, Gwen's condition became progressively worse as she approached puberty. Her curve increased dramatically to surgical range.

## Vertebral body tethering offers a hybrid surgical approach

Employing rods and screws, spinal fusion surgery has long been the gold standard for treating severe scoliosis. "But fusing the lumbar (lower) spine can have a marked impact on the patient's range of motion," said Dr. Todd Ritzman, Akron Children's surgeon in chief and Gwen's pediatric orthopedic surgeon. "And, long term, we fear the few remaining discs patients have in their low back might degenerate, get arthritic or have pain, requiring treatment in the future."

Dr. Ritzman thought Gwen was a good candidate for a new hybrid option in scoliosis treatment called vertebral body tethering (VBT). It's an option for a subset of pediatric patients with scoliosis — those who still have significant growing to do — and it can be offered to some patients in conjunction with spinal fusion.

VBT is a "growth modulation" treatment that uses anchors attached to vertebrae on the side of the spine that curves outward and a flexible tether to guide the spine into upright alignment as the child grows. It takes advantage of the spine's natural growth to correct the curves. It is minimally invasive compared to spinal fusion.

In some cases, the pediatric orthopedic surgeons at Akron Children's believe the best of both worlds may be to combine these two surgeries, fusion of the thoracic (upper) spine and VBT of the lumbar spine, to preserve the child's spinal range of motion. This could make a difference for future participation in dance, gymnastics, diving, cheerleading and other activities that require considerable flexibility.

Joelle and her husband, Greg, felt comfortable with Dr. Ritzman's recommendation.

## Finding help and support through Curvy Girls

Before surgery, Joelle and Gwen were thrilled to discover the scoliosis support group, Curvy Girls, had a local chapter. They began attending monthly meetings. While moms share news of the latest scoliosis research in one room, the girls hang out in another doing activities that




*Gwen embraces school life again, including cheerleading, after vertebral body tethering.*

promote friendship and build self-esteem. Joelle and Gwen even attended a Curvy Girls international convention in New York.

"One of the reasons I love Dr. Ritzman is I would ask him about a study I learned of through Curvy Girls, and he would always be aware of it," said Joelle.

"It was cool to see other girls, older girls, who wore braces and had scoliosis," said Gwen, currently the leader of the Cleveland chapter. "I would think, 'They're cool, so I'm going to be cool.'"

As a busy seventh grader hoping to get back to school, the hybrid approach proved to be a great option. In October 2025, Gwen underwent two procedures — fusion of the thoracic (upper) spine and VBT of the lumbar spine — on the same day. Within six weeks, she was back to school, practicing for her school musical and had even returned to cheerleading — mounts, jumps and cartwheels.

Dr. Ritzman and his Akron Children's colleagues, Drs. Lorena Floccari and Walter Samora, are all full-time pediatric spine surgeons and active members of the Scoliosis Research Society and the Pediatric Spine Study Group. Dr. Ritzman is also a member of the Harms Study Group.

"We are very excited about the hybrid approach," Dr. Ritzman said. "It combines the best advantages of each approach. Fusion is a very reliable, reproducible procedure with really good outcomes in the thoracic spine — while VBT preserves motion and the ability to perform preoperative activities in the lumbar spine."

The key, says Dr. Ritzman, is selecting patients who are the best candidates — those with lots of growth and those who know a second surgery could still be necessary after VBT. Tethers can break, fail to correct the curve or overcorrect the curve requiring a second procedure in 12% to 15% of patients.

Doing the procedures at the same time — about eight hours in Akron Children's dedicated spine operating room — saved Gwen and her family the anxiety and recovery associated with two separate surgeries.

## Gwen's recovery

"I spent a few nights in the hospital but was home in my own bed by the fourth day," said Gwen. "At one of the follow-up appointments, we asked Dr. Ritzman about restrictions on activities like sports and roller coasters. He said, 'Go live your life.'"

"We are thrilled with the outcome," said Joelle.

Gwen is doing exactly what Dr. Ritzman said to do — living her life fully at school, with friends and family, and being more active than ever. She plans to stay involved with Curvy Girls, helping and supporting other girls on their journey with scoliosis.

This past Easter, Gwen opted to wear an open-back dress to show off her spinal fusion scar.

"It's a badge of courage," she said.



# From surviving to thriving

How one family found hope, healing and joy after a devastating mental health crisis.

*by Kathy Johnson*



When Jordyn handed her mother a perfume sampler for Mother's Day this year, it may have seemed like a small gesture.

For Jordyn's mom, Andrea, it meant everything. "There was a time when I didn't know if we'd ever get here," Andrea said.

Today, Jordyn is an 18-year-old business major at The University of Akron Wayne Campus. She enjoys spending time with friends, working and planning for the future. But just a few years ago, her family was navigating a very different reality — one marked by depression, uncertainty and fear.

Their journey through mental health challenges and recovery is one they now share openly in hopes of helping other families find strength, support and a path toward healing.



*Jordyn's journey through mental health issues helped her rediscover joy.*

## A gradual change

Throughout her childhood, Jordyn was social, active and deeply connected to the people around her. Then came a series of life changes that slowly altered her outlook.

Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, Jordyn experienced the loss of her grandfather. While his death wasn't unexpected, Andrea says her daughter struggled to process the grief. Soon afterward, pandemic shutdowns brought isolation, remote learning and separation from friends.

"Her depression really started during COVID when everything went to home instruction," Andrea said. "She's a very social girl, and suddenly she couldn't get out of the house. She was miserable."

As the months passed, Jordyn began withdrawing from the activities and relationships she once enjoyed. She slept excessively, lost interest in things that had previously brought her happiness and faced social challenges after experiencing bullying at school.

"It was like her joy button was gone," Andrea said.

Looking back, there were warning signs the family didn't fully understand at the time.

"I could kick myself for missing the red flags," Andrea said. "It should have occurred to me that she needed counseling earlier."

According to Dr. Selena Magalotti, child and adolescent psychiatrist and Jordyn's physician, depression can develop gradually in teens. It can be misinterpreted as typical teenage behavior, grief or physical concerns.

"Families may notice changes from their teen's usual demeanor, like consistent changes in mood, increased sadness, decreased interest in activities they used to enjoy, becoming withdrawn or increased irritability," she said. "Talking with your teen about how they are feeling, and seeking professional support when needed, can be very helpful."

## Searching for answers

As Jordyn's condition worsened, her struggles eventually escalated into serious mental health crises requiring intensive treatment and close supervision at home.

"At one point, we were simply fighting to keep her alive," Andrea said.

The family eventually turned to Akron Children's Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP) and Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP), where Jordyn received structured therapy, psychiatric care and ongoing support from a multidisciplinary team.

Initially, Andrea expected treatment to provide an immediate solution.

"I walked into Akron Children's expecting a miracle," she said. "I wanted to hand my daughter over to the professionals to be 'fixed' and had no idea how long and difficult the next few years would actually be."

"It can be very challenging for families when their teen is struggling seriously with their mental health. Recovery can take time," said Dr. Magalotti. "It's important to work collaboratively with a trusted mental health team, maintain consistency in therapeutic interventions, and if indicated, medication treatment. It's key to maintain hope and have patience in the process."

> "Now she's finding joy again — spending time with friends, driving, working and thinking about her future. What might seem like typical milestones to other parents are, for us, an answer to our prayers."
>
> *- Andrea, Jordyn's mother*



*Small moments, like Jordyn reconnecting with her brothers, indicated her progress in therapy.*

## Redefining progress

Over time, Andrea learned that healing doesn't happen all at once.

"It's a slow, deliberate process that requires immense patience and hard work," she said.

The experience also transformed how Andrea measured success. Rather than focusing on dramatic breakthroughs, she learned to celebrate small victories.

One of those victories came when Jordyn began reconnecting with her brothers.

"She started having normal conversations with her siblings again," Andrea said. "Those little moments meant everything."

"What may seem like small signs can be a great indicator of progress in treatment. Maybe your teen wants to watch TV with the family for a little bit, instead of lying down in their room all evening," said Dr. Magalotti. "These are moments to be celebrated. Over time, small changes add up into meaningful recovery."

Looking back, Jordyn said setting small, attainable goals had the biggest impact on her recovery.

"I really wanted to go back to public school, instead of being at home," she said. "Once I reached that goal, I focused on getting good grades and eventually took some College Credit Plus classes.




*Healing took time, but Jordyn's parents encouraged her every step of the way.*

"I also wanted to get my driver's license and get a job," she added.

Regular virtual sessions with her therapist also helped Jordyn apply what she learned in PHP and IOP to real-life situations. The sessions also helped her mom learn how to communicate with Jordyn in a more constructive, healthy and collaborative way.

## Finding her way forward

Today, Jordyn continues to attend therapy and access support services while building the next chapter of her life.

"She's extremely artistic and science-minded," Andrea said. "Maybe she'll pursue a career in mental health one day; she's certainly lived it."

Jordyn has also discovered a newfound sense of independence. She enjoys working, earning her own money and making decisions about her future.

## A message of hope

Andrea encourages other families to seek help early and trust the process, even when progress feels slow.

"Your child may not be ready to fully accept the therapy in the beginning, but the information is being planted," she said. "Over time, those tools can make all the difference."

She also wants parents to know they don't have to face mental health challenges alone.

"Figure out who your tribe is," Andrea said. "Put away your pride and admit you need help. It can be very hard on families and marriages, but support matters."

Dr. Magalotti said one of the most important parts of treatment is having hope.

"I work with families on this every day and consider it the foundation of therapeutic treatment. I see amazing progress all the time, and it's the reason I love the work that I do," she said. "Being a part in helping kids go from struggling to thriving takes time and effort, but recovery is absolutely possible."

For Jordyn, the future looks far different than it once did.

"There was a time when her future felt completely out of reach," said Andrea. "Now she's finding joy again — spending time with friends, driving, working and thinking about her future. What might seem like typical milestones to other parents are, for us, an answer to our prayers."




See new locations, services and providers near you:

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Kids grow fast. We're growing, too. With even more 100% kid-focused care close to home, we help families spend more time enjoying childhood – from cradle through college.

Akron Children's

# Finding hope amid chronic illnesses

*by Heather Bauders*




*Gaby wants other people with chronic conditions to know they're not alone.*

Imagine feeling bloated every time you eat, like you ate too much on Thanksgiving, and you often vomit afterward. That's what life has been like for 17-year-old Gaby Camacho of Amherst, Ohio. With a new diagnosis of "gastroparesis," a chronic condition where stomach muscles don't work properly to push food to the small intestine, it's a daily struggle to feel decent and maintain her weight. But thanks to the Akron Children's Motility Program, Gaby has hope for a better future.

## Gaby's health issues

She has faced health problems her whole life. She has "Hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (hEDS)," a genetic disorder affecting the body's connective tissue that supports structures like joints, ligaments, tendons, skin, blood vessels and internal organs. Her hEDS symptoms include many gastrointestinal problems, and her skin can tear easily.

In addition, she has "Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS)" that causes a fast heart rate and dizziness when standing up. Gaby also suffers from migraine headaches.

She started seeing an Akron Children's gastroenterology doctor in 2024 because she constantly felt nauseous and bloated. "I vomited so often that I had to switch from public school to homeschooling," Gaby shared. "Even drinking water made me feel full, and I didn't want to throw up in my school bathroom all the time."

Gaby participated in school plays and productions, as well as competitive dancing, beginning at age 8. "She started having unexplained health complications in middle school," her mom, Gina, said. "Her last dance competition was at age 15, and then she had to give up dancing due to severe complications with gastroparesis, hEDS and POTS. It was devastating."

## Testing and searching for answers

A gastric emptying scan in October 2025, which measured how quickly food left Gaby's stomach, came back normal. As her symptoms worsened, she was referred to the Akron Children's Motility Program in February 2026. "Motility" refers to the way food and fluids move through our gastrointestinal tract, starting at the mouth and ending at the rectum.

"When I met Gaby and Gina, I asked them to give me time to figure this out," said Dr. Shivani Gupta, director of the Akron Children's Pediatric Neurogastroenterology



*Dr. Shivani Gupta (center) is hopeful a gastric stimulator will improve Gaby's quality of life.*

and Motility Program. "I began studying Gaby and her rare combination of conditions because I want to help her feel better."

Gaby had a six-hour diagnostic test in April. It measured and recorded muscle contractions in her lower stomach and upper small intestine when she ate or had stomach-stimulating medicine. The test can help to identify the cause of hard-to-diagnose gastrointestinal symptoms.

The test showed Gaby has gastroparesis. It's not curable, but there are ways to manage the condition.

Dr. Gupta started by trying different medications for Gaby, and they didn't help much. Gaby experimented with eating several small snacks and high-calorie foods throughout the day instead of meals, as recommended by the dietitians who are part of her Motility Program team. "I have a mini fridge in my bedroom that's stocked with Ensure shakes; I drink those and a lot of water each day," she shared. "Calories are important to maintain my weight, even if they're not the healthiest foods, so I eat Twinkies and Goldfish crackers. Baby food, canned fruit and applesauce are also parts of my diet."

## Next steps

Gaby had a two-week trial of an external gastric stimulator in September, also called a gastric pacemaker. This is a small device that sends slight electrical pulses to the stomach muscles, causing the stomach to churn with the goal that food will pass more easily through the stomach to the small intestine. This technology has been shown to reduce the frequency of vomiting and nausea — ultimately improving patients' quality of life.

If Gaby experiences symptom improvement, she'll have surgery to get a permanent stimulator implanted. "We'll place it under the skin of her abdomen, with two wires connecting the device to her stomach muscles," Dr. Gupta explained. "We'll start on the lowest setting of the device. We can change the frequency and power of the pulses, noninvasively, by holding a programming device over the skin where the stimulator is located."

## 'This is happening for a reason'

Gaby and Gina joined the "Zebras Assemble" group on TikTok; zebras are the mascot for people with rare diseases like hEDS. They now have their own TikTok handle — Zebra Coded — and welcome anyone struggling with chronic conditions and mental health.

"I believe this is happening for a reason," Gina said. "We're sharing our story in the hopes that people with hEDS, gastroparesis and other conditions keep fighting like Gaby has. We want them to know they're not alone."

Their efforts are working, as they have more than 6,000 TikTok followers. They post videos, answer questions, share information and even referred a person from New York to Dr. Gupta.

While Gaby and her family eagerly wait for the next steps with the stimulator, they're grateful for Dr. Gupta and the Motility Program team. "They are awesome," Gaby said. "Dr. Gupta said she was going to help, and she gave us hope for the first time in a long time. Before, I felt dismissed and alone. Now, I feel seen and heard."

Look for a follow-up story about Gaby in the next issue of the "More childhood, please." magazine.

# Parents value better healthcare access for their kids

*by Heather Bauders*



*The Lee family is grateful to have Akron Children's pediatric experts so close to home.*

## Meet Rebecca

Rebecca Lee and her older sister grew up in Parkersburg, West Virginia. They had a primary care doctor nearby but did not have convenient access to specialists.

"My sister had to go to Charleston, West Virginia to see her specialists," Rebecca recalled. "My specialists were in Columbus and Akron."

Rebecca had severe migraines as a child and had frequent appointments with neurology specialists. "My hand would clamp up and be stuck like a fist until the migraine ended, which could be anywhere from 30 minutes to a few hours," she said. "I'd have to miss a day of school anytime I had a specialist visit, and my mom would have to take off work."

Every parent wants a happy, safe and healthy life for their kids. Access to high-quality, convenient healthcare is an important piece of the puzzle.

That is one reason Akron Children's continues to grow. By opening more primary care offices and specialty locations, families can get expert care for their children closer to home. Regional health centers, including those in Beachwood and Medina, offer many services in one place. Tools like MyChart and virtual visits make it easier than ever for families to stay connected with their child's care team.

Let's hear from two parents who are grateful for the improved healthcare landscape their kids enjoy.

Today, Rebecca rarely gets migraines. She's a busy mom to 3-year-old Elliott and 1-year-old Piper. Both kids have a condition called "eosinophilic esophagitis (EoE)." This happens when white blood cells build up in the esophagus. The buildup causes swelling and makes the esophagus stiff, which can make swallowing painful.

The kids receive care at Akron Children's Gastroenterology (GI) in Marietta. "We had some issues with Piper's diet because of her allergies, along with her EoE," Rebecca recalled. "We had a bad experience at another healthcare facility. That's why I decided to find a provider through Akron Children's."

Elliott and Piper get regular GI checkups in Marietta from Certified Nurse Practitioner Breaunna Williams. “She’s a wonderful healthcare provider; my kids and I love her,” Rebecca said. “I don’t know what we’d do without her.”

The Lee family only has to travel to the main Akron Children’s Golisano campus once a year for an upper GI scope. “The Akron Children’s team has been amazing, and the kids are doing great,” Rebecca said. “I still live in West Virginia, and it’s so convenient to have Akron Children’s right across the Ohio River. We can get to the Marietta office in 17 minutes. That’s so different from my childhood, when going to a specialist would take an entire day due to the travel time.”

## Meet Juan

Juan Goodwin grew up in the Hough neighborhood of Cleveland, now called Midtown. His mom didn’t drive, so she would walk Juan and his brother to the Hough-Norwood Clinic for medical care. “Unless your leg was falling off and you needed to go to the emergency room,” Juan joked, “we went to the outpatient clinics for everything.”

Going to the doctor wasn’t a pleasant experience for Juan. “The doctors and nurses were overwhelmed, so the care felt transactional. We never talked about family health and wellness because they had so many other patients waiting,” he recalled. “We’d wait for hours to be seen, and then we’d walk home.”

Access to medical care is much better for Juan’s daughters: 11-year-old Lily and 7-year-old Lena. They get primary care at the Akron Children’s Pediatrics office in Mayfield Heights — just a six-minute drive from their house. Lily also gets specialty care.

“She’s battled with eczema her whole life. The first dermatologist we saw at another facility said we needed to get rid of the family dog because Lily was allergic,” Juan shared. “We changed to nurse practitioner Jennifer Messenger with Akron Children’s Dermatology.

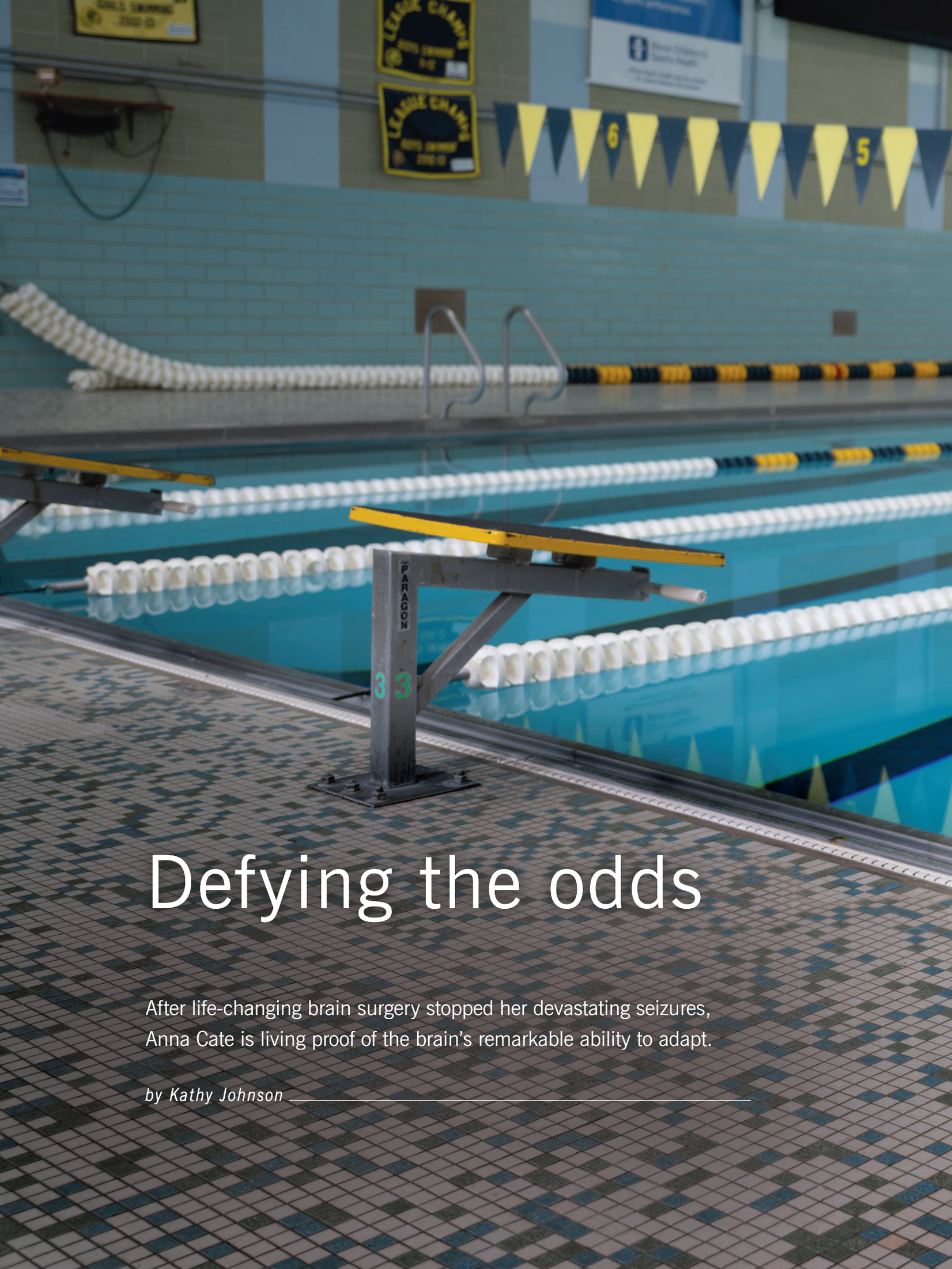
The treatment plan for Lily was totally different, and it changed the quality of life for our whole family. Her medications are delivered by mail, and that’s also been a game-changer.”

Now, Lily can play outside without worrying about an itchy flare-up that will keep her up all night. “She feels better physically, and she’s not self-conscious about her eczema anymore,” Juan said. “Now that she’s in middle school, her self-confidence is so important.”

Juan recalls his parents talking about their lack of access to everything from medical care to fresh fruits and vegetables. “Different things matter to you when you get older — like hospitals and green spaces,” he said. “I didn’t think about that stuff as a kid. But now that I’m a dad, those things really matter.”

*A new treatment plan for Lily’s eczema has improved the Goodwin family’s quality of life.*






# Defying the odds

After life-changing brain surgery stopped her devastating seizures, Anna Cate is living proof of the brain's remarkable ability to adapt.

*by Kathy Johnson*


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*Anna Cate and her brother, Andrew, enjoy a night at Blossom Music Center.*

Looking back, Jon Dies can trace the signs all the way back to when his daughter was 3 years old.

One night, Anna Cate wandered into her parents' bedroom unable to walk. "We thought her right leg had just fallen asleep," he recalled.

Around the same time, she was slower to develop speech than other children her age. Jon and his wife, Elizabeth, had begun exploring possible interventions when everything changed.

Jon witnessed Anna Cate having a seizure during a nap and immediately called 911.

"The paramedics came and insisted on taking her directly to the hospital," Jon said. "She didn't have use of the right side of her body, and they were worried she may have had a stroke."

Doctors ordered a CT scan largely as a precaution. What it revealed stunned everyone.

"Nobody felt like there was anything significantly wrong, but they wanted the CT to double check," Jon said. "That's when we got the shocking news that Anna Cate was missing 50% of her brain on the left side."

Despite that discovery, Anna Cate had already adapted in remarkable ways.

"Doctors were shocked that she could walk and talk as well as she could," Jon said. "Her brain had rewired itself to compensate. You never would have thought anything was catastrophically wrong. But looking back now, there were signs."

According to pediatric epileptologist Dr. Chinasa Nwankwo, regular developmental screenings can help identify underlying neurological conditions before more serious symptoms emerge.

"During these screenings, we look for signs that both sides of the brain are working well together and that children are progressing along their curve," she said. "Signs such as early handedness, delayed walking or challenges with maintaining eye contact during movement may indicate a bigger issue where intervention is needed."

## When the seizures changed

For several years, medication kept Anna Cate's seizures under control. But as she grew older, new concerns emerged. Learning became more difficult, and the side effects of medication began to take a toll.

Then, during a routine appointment with Dr. Nwankwo, everything changed again.

"Dr. Nwankwo told us to walk across the bridge to the hospital and go to admitting," Jon recalled. "We did that, and Anna Cate was admitted to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit."

Doctors discovered she was experiencing prolonged seizure activity beneath the surface caused by "Electrical Status Epilepticus in Sleep (ESES)." This rare and severe form of childhood epilepsy can lead to cognitive, behavioral and language regression.

"With this condition, near continuous abnormal activity is noted during sleep, a time when most brains are working to reset, consolidate memories and prepare for ongoing learning," Dr. Nwankwo explained. "If this process of recovery during sleep is disrupted, serious cognitive and behavioral regressions may be seen as well as ongoing language issues and/or loss of language.

"Prompt identification and treatment is crucial to halt the regression process and allow children the chance to have their brains grow and develop appropriately," she added.

Anna Cate had to be placed in a medically induced coma to stop the seizures.

> "She walks a little slower, and she has a helper when needed at school. Otherwise, she's your typical teenage girl who loves Starbucks and Sephora."
>
> *- Jon, Anna Cate's father*

## An impossible decision

The family explored every noninvasive treatment option available. But because of the severity of Anna Cate's condition and her age, surgery ultimately offered the best chance to stop the seizures and preserve her quality of life.

On June 3, 2019, she underwent a "left anatomic hemispherectomy," a procedure that removed the remainder of the left side of her brain. Drs. Gwen Hughes and Tsulee Chen, Akron Children's neurosurgeons, performed the surgery.

Amid one of the most difficult seasons of their lives, the family found an unexpected source of comfort.

Jon's lifelong best friend, Jake Sisko, happened to be a physician assistant on Dr. Hughes' team and became part of Anna Cate's care team.

"I've known Jake since kindergarten," Jon said. "The world works in mysterious ways. He held Anna Cate the day she was born, and now he's involved in her care."

Recovery wasn't measured in days, but in months of physical, occupational and speech therapy, where every regained skill represented another step forward.

## Defying expectations

Nearly six years after her hemispherectomy, Anna Cate remains seizure-free.

She has undergone five brain surgeries, including a shunt revision in 2025, but she has not experienced a seizure since 2019. She has successfully been weaned off all antiseizure medications.

Now a seventh grader at Highland Middle School, she continues to exceed expectations.

Jon credits both the school and his mother-in-law, an educator who tutored Anna Cate after COVID-related learning disruptions, with helping her thrive academically and socially.

Today, at 13, you would never guess everything she has endured simply by looking at her. Although she can't use her right arm, she walks independently — something many doctors once believed might not be possible.

"She puts 80% of her body weight on her left side," Jon explained. "Her brain rewired itself so she could walk."

She also swims with her school's swim program, an activity that has improved the range of motion in both her arm and shoulder.

"She walks a little slower, and she has a helper when needed at school," Jon said. "Otherwise, she's your typical teenage girl who loves Starbucks and Sephora."

For her family, there's nothing more extraordinary than that.



*Anna Cate endured five brain surgeries and countless hours of therapy. She's been seizure-free since 2019.*

# Honoring local heroes with the 2026 “More childhood, please.™” awards

On Sept. 23, the second annual “More childhood, please.” awards showcased the power of people of all ages who impact kids and families in their communities.

“We take great pride in helping the kids of our region grow up safe and healthy,” said Chris Gessner, Akron Children’s president and CEO. “But we cannot do it alone. These awards recognize the great work of wonderful people and organizations who join us in putting kids first.”

Congratulations to this years honorees:




### *Family Impact*: the Jacobs Family, Copley

Carrie and Eric Jacobs got devastating news in 2015 that their 5-year-old daughter, Kylie Rose, had cancer. Thankfully, Kylie survived and remains cancer-free today. Her family created a foundation that has raised more than $400,000 and donated 7,000 “Kylie’s Bags of Love” to Akron Children’s patients.

### *Business Impact*: Sonny Johnson, Garfield Heights

Through his organization, NEO Youth Elite, Sonny runs basketball camps, skill development sessions and sports showcases. By creating safe and supervised spaces, he ensures young athletes have a constructive outlet that keeps them active and focused. The kids also benefit from connecting with mentors and learning from positive role models.

### *Community Hero*: Jodi Kauffman, Wooster

Jodi, a Wayne County Sheriff’s deputy and school resource officer at Triway Local Schools, works to keep students safe. She cares about their well-being and works to build strong relationships with them. Jodi has led projects like Kindness Month at the high school, a buyback program to reduce vaping and safety demonstrations that teach students about the dangers of impaired driving.

### *Civic Impact*: Deborah Sesek, Cuyahoga Falls

As volunteer coordinator at St. Mary Akron School Enrichment Center, Deborah has grown the after-school program into a vital community partnership that supports students academically and emotionally. The retired lawyer and former Peace Corps volunteer began organizing the program in 2017 to match volunteers with students, helping them with everything from tutoring to mentoring life skills.




### *Young Leader*: CJ and Cree McAfee, Canton

For the past six years, 14-year-old CJ and 12-year-old Cree McAfee have planned and operated a lemonade stand. The brothers donate all of their profits — around $22,000 so far — to Stark County kids with cancer. The lemonade stand, located in a Whipple Avenue parking lot, now includes food, cookies donated by local bakeries and social media attention. The lemonade stand has become a much-anticipated event every June.

### *Luminary*: Teresa Fletcher, Medina

As the lead advanced practice provider for Akron Children's School-Based Health Center, Teresa has improved healthcare access and outcomes for more than 24,000 students across 24 Ohio school districts. She has contributed to growing school-based asthma treatment protocols, starting scoliosis screenings and supporting a behavioral health program in Akron Public Schools.

### *Nonprofit Impact*: Victory Gallop, Bath Township

For more than 30 years, Victory Gallop has provided innovative equine therapy programs. The children and teens Victory Gallop serves have chronic illnesses, behavioral disorders and other concerns. Beyond the farm, Victory Gallop was the first program certified in the U.S. to bring a therapy pony into hospitals including Akron Children's.



# How one Beachwood physician helps families breathe easier on surgery day

*by Brooke Uehlein*

For families across Greater Cleveland, Akron Children's services in Beachwood are meeting an important need with timely, specialized pediatric care close to home. At the center of this growing effort is Dr. Daniel Goldstein, a pediatric anesthesiologist and medical director at the Akron Children's Outpatient Surgery Center, Beachwood. For Dr. Goldstein, the work is personal. Raised in the area and now raising his own family there, he's proud to help bring exceptional surgical care to the community he calls home.



*Dr. Daniel Goldstein, anesthesiologist and medical director at the Beachwood Outpatient Surgery Center, believes that the best medicine is sometimes a good laugh.*

"We have replicated the care we provide in our outpatient surgery center in Akron with the same surgeons, anesthesiologists and surgical services staff caring for patients in Beachwood," he explained. "We're increasing access by alleviating long wait times for surgery and making it easier and more convenient for families to receive exceptional surgical care close to home."

On many surgery days, Dr. Goldstein is one of the first reassuring faces a family sees.

## A calling rooted in compassion

Dr. Goldstein's path to pediatric anesthesiology began because he loves working with children. He describes his role as a blend of science, precision and human connection all taking place on what often is among the more stressful days of a family's life.

"One of the most rewarding parts of my job is earning a family's trust in just a few minutes," he said. "Knowing they're placing their child in safe hands is something I never take lightly."

## Helping families feel safe

Surgery day can stir up big emotions. Dr. Goldstein sees his job as caring for both the child and the parent.

"Children take their emotional cues from the adults around them," he said. "Helping parents feel informed and confident is just as important as helping the child."

Sometimes that means explaining an anesthesia plan in detail. Other times, it means making a nervous 5-year-old laugh with a silly joke or chatting about superheroes, stuffed animals or favorite sports teams. He jokes that some days his most important piece of equipment isn't a monitor: It is his ability to make a child smile.

Dr. Goldstein observes that, "When a child smiles and parents start to visibly relax, I know we've already started taking good care of them."

## Clearing up misconceptions

Dr. Goldstein places clarity around what takes place on the day of surgery. "Many families arrive thinking anesthesia simply means 'putting someone to sleep,'" he said. "In reality, it is a carefully monitored medical state managed by a physician whose entire focus is the child's safety."

Every anesthetic plan is individualized based on age, medical history and the procedure.

## What surgery day really looks like

The day begins with meeting the child and family, reviewing medical history and answering questions. From there, Dr. Goldstein works closely with nurses, nurse anesthetists, advanced practice providers, child life specialists, surgeons and the entire perioperative team.

"As medical director, one of my greatest priorities is fostering a culture where every member of the team works together seamlessly," he said. "Outstanding pediatric care is a true team effort."

Once in the operating room, the team monitors every aspect of the child's well-being. After the surgery, the focus shifts to comfort, relieving pain, preventing nausea and ensuring each child can go home safely.



*Dr. Goldstein greets each patient as they make their journey into surgery.*

## Moments that stay with Dr. Goldstein

For Dr. Goldstein, the most memorable experiences are not dramatic ones. They are the tender times. He describes the moment when fear gives way to relief in a patient as those he never forgets.

He shares, "it is the countless children who come in frightened and leave smiling. I especially love when a child who was crying before surgery wakes up asking if it's already over."

## Life outside of the operating room

When he is not caring for patients, Dr. Goldstein is busy with his own family. He and his wife have three young children who fill their days with sports, school activities and plenty of adventures. Their cockapoo, Leo, adds to the fun and has perfected the art of convincing the family he deserves treats at every meal.

Being a father, he says, has made him an even better physician. "It reminds me every day that every child in our operating room is someone's whole world," said Dr. Goldstein.

## *Level I Children's Surgery Center*

Akron Children's surgical enterprise is an American College of Surgeons (ACS) Level I Children's Surgery Center. The health system was the first hospital in northeast Ohio to achieve this distinction. Level I is the highest level of verification offered by ACS, reserved for hospitals that demonstrate the staffing, training, facilities, protocols and outcomes needed to care for children requiring surgery — from routine procedures to the most complex cases.

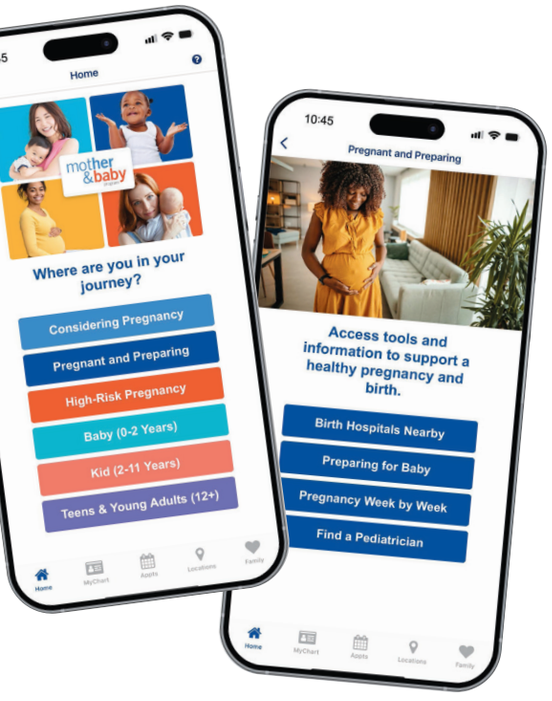
# Health system happenings

## New app supports women through their pregnancy and parenting journey

With the Akron Children's Mother and Baby App, parents have all the tools they need to keep themselves and their babies healthy.

For women who are considering pregnancy, the app features a variety of resources to help them prepare their bodies for a healthy pregnancy. For women who are pregnant, the app includes a weekly pregnancy calendar, find-a-provider tool and list of birthing hospitals affiliated with Akron Children's.

Once the baby arrives, the app offers content to help kids thrive from birth through their teenage years. The app features a symptom checker, along with links to MyChart and appointment scheduling.




*From pregnancy to parenthood, support is just a tap away with the new Mother and Baby App.*

"There are 6,574 days from a child's birth to age 18," said Dr. Marya Strand, neonatologist and chair of the Akron Children's Department of Neonatal and Perinatal Medicine. "Parents can get nearly two decades' worth of helpful tools and information from the Mother and Baby App. It's an important way we support parents and help kids get the most from childhood."

*Opening doors to greater convenience: Pharmacy staff at the Beeghly campus of Akron Children's cut the ribbon to open the Boardman outpatient pharmacy.*



## Outpatient pharmacy opens in Boardman

Akron Children's recently opened an outpatient pharmacy on the Beeghly campus in Boardman. Located in Building A, it is open to all community members — not just Akron Children's patients — including adults. All major insurance plans are accepted.

"This pharmacy fills a gap in care for patients who are being discharged," said Kyle Finnerty, director of pharmacy at Akron Children's. "Whether from the emergency room, a general care floor or a clinic appointment, patients can now leave with their medication in hand. This is a huge step forward in enhancing the continuity of care for our Beeghly campus patients."

The new pharmacy is something for the entire community to celebrate, as an increasing number of areas in the United States become "pharmacy deserts" due to the closing of both independent pharmacies and those that were part of national chains.

"In 2024, there were almost 300 pharmacy closures in Ohio," Kyle said. "This is one of the reasons we wanted to make this pharmacy open to anyone, not just our patients. It's a commitment to our families and the community we serve."




*(L-R) Shelly Brown, Akron Children's chief development officer; Chris Gessner, Akron Children's president and CEO; Pip, Akron Children's mascot; Josie Greco, Akron Children's patient and volunteer; and Annie Murphy, Golisano Children's Alliance coordinator celebrate the unveiling of the Akron Children's Golisano Campus name in conjunction with the Come Grow With Me campaign launch.*

## Akron Children's financial strength ensures a bright future for kids

On Sept. 10, Akron Children's Foundation launched a $250 million Come Grow With Us campaign, which is all about giving kids the best chance to grow and thrive. Every gift makes a lasting difference for families facing a child's injury or illness.

Philanthropic support directly and immediately improves care for children by funding a range of essential programs, impactful research, specialized equipment, family engagement and pediatric training for providers. With your help, Akron Children's brings kids — and their families — more childhood. Our five focal priorities will have the greatest impact for patients and families: kids' community health, patient and family engagement, pediatric subspecialties, behavioral health and nursing excellence.

"The Come Grow With Us campaign will help us achieve our strategic priorities in a bigger way, by treating more people and being present in more communities," said Shelly Brown, chief development officer.

If you'd like to get involved, scan the QR code to learn about the variety of ways you can support the Akron Children's Foundation. Whether you make a one-time or recurring gift, include Akron Children's in your estate planning, donate your vehicle or organize a fundraiser, you will help kids enjoy more childhood.

## Akron Children's earns rare fifth Magnet designation

Being a five-time recipient of Magnet Recognition is an elite distinction achieved by fewer than 2% of hospitals nationwide. Awarded by the American Nurses Credentialing Center, the Magnet designation reflects an organization's commitment to quality, safety and patient outcomes.

Research has shown that Magnet-recognized organizations often achieve higher patient satisfaction with nurse communication and care; lower mortality rates and improved patient safety outcomes; and higher nurse engagement and retention.

"Magnet recognition challenged us to deepen our approach to family-centered care, ensuring patients and their loved ones are involved at every step," said Chris Young, chief nursing officer at Akron Children's. "This recognition reflects the extraordinary work of our nurses and the many collaborative teams across Akron Children's who show up for kids and families every day."

# Defying expectations

Every family is unique, and so are their healthcare experiences. In "The parent's perspective," you'll learn about amazing patients from the people who know them best.

*by Sarah Tschantz*



*Born at just 29 weeks with an intestinal condition and bowel perforation, Rory is a little fighter who overcame every challenge.*

Even after a complicated first pregnancy, I could not have predicted how my second pregnancy would go. At just 29 weeks, I developed both preeclampsia and HELLP syndrome, severe health complications that affect blood flow to the placenta.

The best course of action was to deliver our baby boy. On Jan. 5, 2026, Rory Kai Tschantz entered this world weighing 2 pounds, 14 ounces and measuring 14.5 inches long.

Being that tiny, he was immediately taken to Akron Children's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Because of how sensitive babies in the NICU are and the fact that we were right in the middle of flu season, our 6-year-old son, Leo, could not meet his baby brother. My husband, Aaron, and I quickly learned what it meant to split our time between the NICU, being home with our school-aged son, while also ensuring that I could heal from an emergency cesarean section.

But if I thought that my second pregnancy was unpredictable, our time in the NICU was even more so. Our sweet Rory developed necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), a life-threatening intestinal disease that typically affects early-term babies, and a bowel perforation. He had to have emergency surgery, during which his diagnosis progressed to NEC Totalis, which is a severe form of NEC and is usually fatal.




*The Tschantz family — Aaron (father), baby Rory, Sarah (mom) and big brother Leo — as they leave the NICU after a 143-day stay.*

That night, we anticipated this would be the first and last time our family could meet Rory, so the NICU permitted a visit. We tried to find a way to delicately explain to a 6-year-old what was going on. Leo was in awe when he saw Rory and could not believe he was finally meeting his baby brother. Leo even said, "Mommy, he's so cute! Can we keep him?"

But despite Rory's drastic diagnosis, losing 60 centimeters of small intestine and part of his colon, he defied all odds and pulled through. He was then diagnosed with Short Bowel Syndrome, and today, he is Total Parenteral Nutrition (TPN) and G-tube dependent. We are working on building up a feeding tolerance to hopefully come off TPN in the future.

After Rory overcame NEC, he still needed a lot of care in the NICU, so we were still splitting our time between the hospital and home. When we were apart from Leo, we would often FaceTime him and show him pictures of his baby brother. The nurses would even write him notes "from" Rory.

Then, after more than 143 days in the NICU, we got to take our sweet baby boy home. And if there is anything we learned throughout that time, it's that sometimes things happen that are beyond us. If your family experienced pregnancy complications or even preterm birth, it is not your fault. Never be afraid to ask for help, be involved in your baby's care and be the voice for your child. Lean on your care team as much as you can. The staff at Akron Children's NICU supported our decisions, even when they were incredibly hard. They made sure we were educated, supported and encouraged.

Now, we have been home for a few months. While it was a big transition for us, we have fallen into a routine that suits Rory's needs while also ensuring Leo isn't left behind. We've learned to slow down and cherish every second we have with our family. This summer, we got to bring Rory to his big brother's baseball games and taekwondo practices. We're so grateful to be leaning into these little slices of normalcy after so much unpredictability.

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