

Painting a Brighter World in Cancer Care



*“If you have been recently diagnosed with cancer,
it’s a significant moment in your life. Art gives
you an opportunity to step away from that moment.
Art allows you to express what you’re going through
in a beneficial and impactful way.”*

SCOTT FEIGHT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FOUNDATION FOR HOSPITAL ART

A New Idea for Support and Healing

The Foundation for Hospital Art (FFHA) is a unique, captivating organization, yet many do not know about the foundation’s geographic footprint and the uplifting impact it has made in the lives of so many cancer patients across the world. Over the last 30+ years and with the help of more than 1 million volunteers and patients, the Foundation for Hospital Art has created more than 44,000 paintings for more than 4,000 hospitals in 195 countries. It is the foundation’s mission to extend compassion through art. Founder John Feight conceptualized the idea of conducting PaintFest in 1975 when he volunteered to paint a mural at Northside Hospital in Atlanta, Ga. The idea developed over the many years Feight spent painting in hospitals and seeing the comfort art provided to patients, medical staff, and visitors. The end result: the 1984 establishment of the Foundation for Hospital Art.

John witnessed firsthand traditional hospital settings, typically exemplified by white, sterile walls and ceilings. Exam rooms, waiting rooms, and corridors—areas where healthcare professionals and other caregivers work long days, and where families and patients spend many hours waiting—are too often colorless,

lifeless, and certainly not inviting. As Feight painted murals across the country, experience after experience proved to him that nothing a hospital could provide in the way of technological and scientific advances was as supportive as an atmosphere of compassion—both human and aesthetic—in institutions where patients, caregivers, and staff spend time to be healed or, for some, to die.

From concept to execution, the Foundation for Hospital Art is officially dedicated to involving patients and volunteers worldwide to create colorful, soothing artwork donated to hospitals to help soften the often-stressful hospital experience.

Each PaintFest is a unique and special event, but all are filled with smiles, joy, and the common goal of caring about people. The amazing thing about PaintFest is that no artistic experience is needed! The Foundation for Hospital Art leverages a paint-by-color block methodology design and technique that allows everyone to participate—regardless of their skill with a brush. Through the years, volunteers as young as three and as old as 103 have participated in PaintFest events, culminating in beautiful, colorful, and healing environments in communities across the world.



Top: 2016 PaintFest America participants. Bottom: “Stars of Hope” mural.

Engaging Cancer Programs Across the U.S.

One of the most unique projects ever undertaken by the Foundation for Hospital Art was the 2016 PaintFest America endeavor. The idea for PaintFest America came from Scott Feight, the foundation’s executive director. The initial concept was simple: unite cancer patients across the country with a common goal of care and comfort. The execution, on the other hand, was quite complex and relied on the dedication of cancer programs from around the nation. In just 50 days, the Foundation for Hospital Art painted and donated more than 200 murals across 51 cancer programs in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia. The mission became one state per day for 50 days. FFHA staff and volunteers crossed the country kicking off the project on July 5 in Washington, D.C., at the MedStar Washington Hospital Center, Washington Cancer Institute. The team then traveled from East Coast to West Coast, from north to south and everywhere in between, until the PaintFest America finale on August 23 in New York City at the Mount Sinai Beth Israel Cancer Center. Each participating cancer program painted between 3 and 10 murals with images depicting living organisms, such as plants and animals, to bring life and vibrant color to sterile hospital walls. A special Foundation for Hospital Art mural designed for the PaintFest America event, titled “America the Beautiful,”

was inspired by Katharine Lee Bates’ historic lyrics and was a favorite of patients at every stop.

Creating a Living Mural


Perhaps the most special mural of all was created by cancer patients and survivors who painted part of a national mural titled “Stars of Hope.” For this piece, each state’s panel depicts the state bird and flower superimposed upon stars and a map of the United States. A ribbon signifying hope flows throughout the entire design. On the final day of the tour, all 50 panels were assembled in New York for all to see. More than art, the mural represented the beautiful stories of cancer patients in every state across this wonderful country. The power to overcome adversity was on full, colorful display.

The intent of PaintFest America was certainly to bring people, who had been touched by cancer, together through art, but the project achieved so much more. PaintFest America brought hope, healing, and brief reprieve to hundreds of patients, family members, physicians, and hospital staff members, creating beauty in the midst of hardship for the few hours they spent painting. The time and dedication of these volunteers transformed into more than 400 warm, vibrant murals that will continue to spread comfort to patients for years to come.

Hosting a PaintFest for Your Community

PaintFest events are the perfect complement to a long day of meetings. Easily organized in a social setting, PaintFest enhances networking, relationship-building, and a company's corporate citizenship profile. PaintFest is scalable and can be held during patient, community, and team-building events; or at conferences and meetings for hospitals and health systems. Remember: Artistic talent is not required; everyone can successfully participate. Designs are drawn in advance, and volunteers simply follow the dots and their hearts. If you are interested in hosting a PaintFest event for your cancer program, hospital, or health system, the Foundation for Hospital Art can help develop the perfect PaintFest event for your community, provide a budget, and describe how the funding works. The Foundation for Hospital Art provides customized budgets for each PaintFest. Factors such as the number of painters, the number of paintings and paint stations, and the location of the event impact program costs.

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Once everything is finalized, foundation artists prepare the color-coded artwork and supplies in our studio and ship them directly to the PaintFest location. Foundation for Hospital Art staff can attend and help orchestrate the event or, if you choose, provide instruction so that you can conduct smaller events on your own. During a PaintFest event, volunteers team up to complete the paintings by following the "color code." The artwork is touched up by our staff and then donated to your organization or to a requesting hospital on behalf of the sponsor. The sponsor is acknowledged in the signature on the painting. Publicity is optional, but we have found that media coverage can be significant and positive. Interested cancer programs can visit hospitalart.org or call 678.324.1705 for more information. 

Scott Feight is the executive director of the Foundation for Hospital Art (FFHA), Marietta, Ga. Kelley D. Simpson, MBA, is an FFHA Board Member and senior partner of Oncology Solutions, LLC, Atlanta, Ga. Visit hospitalart.org or call 678.324.1705 for more information.

A Survivor & Patient Perspective

The Foundation for Hospital Art received so much from each local event held during PaintFest 2016. The stories are innumerable—and uplifting—but one story in particular touched us very closely. Two sisters, one with cancer and one who provided support, attended a PaintFest event held in the northeast. The supportive, caring sister wrote:

"One week after that fun experience, my sister went into the hospital on an emergency basis. She was in ICU for a long, long time and then back to the hospital, into rehab, back into the hospital, and is now, as of today, in what seems to be her final rehab visit. She had all kinds of things medically go awry at once. It was like a perfect storm of maladies, and it knocked her for a loop. And I was so upset because we just shared a great time painting.

I have spent all fall and this winter flying to visit her in the many medical facilities she's been treated in. The reason I am telling you this is that this year—for the first time ever—my sister decided she wanted to put a photo of herself in her Christmas cards to be mailed to our family and friends. She chose the photo of herself holding up part of the orange mural she painted at 2016 PaintFest America. I decided to follow in her footsteps and put a photo of myself and a photo of the two of us from 2016 PaintFest America in my Christmas cards.

I wanted to let you know that PaintFest America was inspiring for me as a cancer survivor, but this year it took on new meaning as the artistic spirit of the event spread beyond the local hospital murals. The spirit of the PaintFest photographs became artistic memories for my sisters and our family and friends as the art spread forward from us to those on our mailing lists. The movie Pay It Forward came alive this year for my family as PaintFest gave us the opportunity to do just that.

My sister is doing so well now at her final rehab place. She has been walking, eating, breathing, and talking on her own now, and she will be back home by late winter/early spring or maybe sooner. I stayed with her last summer for one solid month. On the last day, when I asked her to name her top three favorite activities we did, her first one was PaintFest America. Thank you for organizing the event. You will never know how much it meant to our family and my sister's healing."



2016 PaintFest America participants.

2016 PaintFest Stories at ACCC Member Programs Across the Country

- “PaintFest America Visits Winship” at Winship Cancer Institute of Emory University, Atlanta, Ga. (winshipcancer.emory.edu/roundup/issues/2016/july-18.html)
- “The Healing Power of Art” at Lahey Hospital and Medical Center, Burlington, Mass. (lahey.org/News/The_Healing_Power_of_Art.aspx)
- “ECCC Selected to Represent West Virginia in National PaintFest America” at Cabell Huntington Hospital, Edwards Comprehensive Cancer Center, Huntington, W. Va. (cabellhuntington.org/news/wns/eccc-selected-to-represent-west-virginia-in-national-paintfest-america)
- “PaintFest: A Creative Force at PCAM” at Abramson Cancer Center, Philadelphia, Pa. (pennmedicine.org/news/internal-newsletters/hupdate/2016/august/paintfest-a-creative-force-at-pcam)
- “National Painting Event for Cancer Awareness Stops by Florida Hospital” at Florida Hospital Cancer Institute, Orlando, Fla. (orlandosentinel.com/health/vital-signs/os-paintfest-america-florida-hospital-20160713-story.html)
- “PaintFest America: UAB Mural Painting Event Helps Cancer Patients through Art” at University of Alabama at Birmingham Comprehensive Cancer Center, Birmingham, Ala. (al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2016/07/paintfest_america_uab_mural_pa.html)
- “PaintFest America Makes a Colorful Stop for Davenport Cancer Patients” and “Cancer Patients to Participate in PaintFest America” at Genesis Cancer Care Institute, Davenport, Iowa (wqad.com/2016/07/26/paintfest-america-makes-a-colorful-stop-for-davenport-cancer-patients) and (wwik.org/post/cancer-patients-participate-paintfest-america#stream/0)
- “Cancer Patients and Survivors Give Each Other Essential Support, through Painting” at Olathe Medical Center, Olathe, Kansas (fox4kc.com/2016/07/25/painting-brings-together-cancer-fighters)
- “PaintFest America Aims to Brighten Walls, and Patients’ Days” at Mount Sinai Medical Center, The Derald H. Rutenberg Treatment Center, New York, N.Y. (inside.mountsinai.org/blog/paintfest-america-aims-to-brighten-walls-and-patients-days)
- “PaintFest America is Coming to Sussex County!” at Beebe Healthcare, Robert & Eolyne Tunnell Cancer Center, Lewes, Del. (beebehealthcare.org/news/tunnell-cancer-center/paintfest-america-coming-sussex-county)

