

LVHN dedicates 'Remembrance Wall'

Craig Vito was homeless. He continued to live on the street while battling a fatal illness because there were people in the hospital sicker than he was. He didn't want to take up a hospital bed until he absolutely needed it.

Vito's is one of 15 names listed on a new "Remembrance Wall" at Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN) - One City Center, a gift from Dr. Brian Nester and his wife, Dr. Tina Pippis-Nester.

The wall, located along Hamilton Street near the facility's main entrance, memorializes patients of the health network's "Street Medicine" program who lost their lives while homeless on the streets of the Lehigh Valley. The wall was unveiled during a candlelight ceremony Dec. 21, "National

Homeless Persons' Memorial Day," which is the first day of winter and the longest night of the year.

The Nesters first experienced the tragedies and medical consequences of homelessness while working as Emergency Physicians in Philadelphia.

"The homeless people we cared for were often very sick," Dr. Pippis-Nester said, "but sometimes they just came to the ER for a warm place to rest and a simple meal."

During her remarks at the ceremony, she referenced LVHN's hospice program "No One Dies Alone," adding that with the "Remembrance Wall," it is the hope that no one dies "unknown."

Colleagues in LVHN's "Street Medicine" program provide health care for homeless people in

shelters, soup kitchens, on the street and under bridges. The "Street Medicine" team works on the belief that "everybody matters." They have served more than 2,000 patients over the past two years and receive support from more than 200 colleagues who volunteer to care for the poorest of the poor.

Brett Feldman, director of LVHN's Street Medicine program, says each time he passes the "Remembrance Wall" during his daily rounds, he will be reminded of all the things he learned from patients who passed away. "They are my greatest teachers," Feldman said. "They will remind me of my successes, the need to share my love and, most of all, the need to give until it hurts."