

# Designed to Make a Difference

GRACE'S HOUSE,  
A DESIGNER SHOW HOUSE  
RESTORATION IN PLAINFIELD







LEFT | Dan Reichard and his granddaughter, Grace Eline, at the under-construction Grace's House Designer Show House.

ABOVE | Grace and her grandfather explore built-ins original to the 1893 Colonial Revival Plainfield home.

When Dan Reichard met with the Historical Commission of Plainfield to discuss his plans for the 1893 Colonial Revival home he'd just purchased at auction, he assured the members he wasn't going to tear it down. Nor was he going to subdivide it into apartments. Instead, his intention was to restore the mansion at 950 Hillside Avenue. "I'm looking to put it back the way it was," he told the commission. "I'm not here to change the world." Reichard, a general contractor and owner of Berkeley Heights-based ER Development Inc., is a history buff, and his interest in vintage homes led him to this particular diamond in the rough.

And it was rough. "Hurricane Sandy did a job on it," he says. The roof was crushed and there was water damage; but Reichard saw beyond the flaws. "I opened the door and saw a parquet floor. I said, 'if nothing else, there's a parquet floor.' It was in pretty good shape." But there was more. "The lights were on. I said, 'Okay, I've got electricity.' There was an old Wolf range in the kitchen. As I walked by, it felt hot and the pilot lights were on. I thought, 'Okay, there's gas.' I was starting to feel better."

In addition to functioning utilities, the

The Grace's House show house benefiting The Valerie Fund will be open 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday and Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday from April 25 through May 19 at 950 Hillside Avenue in Plainfield. Tickets are \$35 at the door or \$30 online at [TheValerieFund.org](http://TheValerieFund.org).

## The Valerie Fund

The Valerie Fund is an organization with a mission to provide individualized care to children at medical centers close to home. Founded by Ed and Sue Goldstein, who lost their 9-year-old daughter, Valerie, to cancer in 1976, the organization is based on the idea that the most effective way to heal children is to treat them emotionally, socially and developmentally.

Neil Yaris, who chairs The Valerie Fund board, says the show house is "a wonderful idea. From the perspective of The Valerie Fund, it will raise money for our numerous programs and introduce the organization to those who are unaware of the great work TVF is doing for so many in our community. In addition, we are thrilled to help breathe new life into a piece of New Jersey history that otherwise might have been lost forever."

Tina Squeri, chair of the show house committee, says, "This is the first time I've worked on a designer show house. It is personally rewarding because I get to see the progress made every day and



Aubrey Reichard-Eline, Grace Eline and Dan Reichard (at far right) pose with members of The Valerie Fund team (from left): Barry Kirschner, executive director; Bunny Flanders, director of marketing and communications; Neil Yaris, chairman of the board; and Yaris' wife, Jane.

witness the excitement from all those involved. By volunteering, I've been able to see the difference The Valerie Fund makes in the lives of these children and their families. The entire staff works tirelessly, and their commitment is contagious."

Grace's mom, Aubrey Reichard-Eline, knows firsthand about The Valerie Fund's commitment. "From the first time we met with people there, we were family — and we loved that. These doctors and nurses don't see pretty things, and it's not just once in a while. It's every day. They're special people. I cannot say enough good things about The Valerie Fund, and I'm super thankful we chose them. They saved Grace's life."

For more information on The Valerie Fund, go to [TheValerieFund.org](http://TheValerieFund.org).





Dan Reichard, Grace and her mom, Aubrey Reichard-Eline, look out at the grounds of the residence.



ENTRY | The home's original front entrance features a leaded glass transom and sidelights.

PINK CLOSET | A linen closet — awaiting transformation for the show house — features wallpapered door panels.



home featured built-in cabinetry and detailed millwork, features that would be expensive to incorporate into a home today, Reichard notes. Planning to make the most of the home's original attributes, he began the restoration.

Shortly thereafter, though, Reichard received devastating news. His then-9-year-old granddaughter, Grace, was diagnosed with brain cancer. Reichard sprang into action. "We did what we could to help," he says, including accompanying Grace to one of her chemo treatments at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center's Valerie Fund wing. What he saw there amazed him. "All these people appeared out of nowhere," he recalls. "Doctors and nurses were hooking her up for chemo, a child life specialist was working with her with drawings and crayons." An educational liaison explained to the family that she had already spoken to Grace's school principal, her teacher, her classmates and their parents to explain what was going on with her treatment and to answer any questions they might have.

Reichard calls The Valerie Fund team "magical," and he was determined to offer support. "I couldn't cure Grace," he says, "but I could help the people who are helping her." Ironically, Reichard's next course of

action was a small step toward actually helping to change the world.

He realized the house on Hillside Avenue might provide a way to support the organization that was supporting his granddaughter. "It all came together. Grace was diagnosed. I discovered The Valerie Fund, which I'd never heard of before. I had the property and I thought, 'We need to share it with the community, to leverage it for good in some way. It's an opportunity. We've got the cause. We've got the house. Let's put the two together.'"

Though Reichard had never participated in a designer show house before, he was eager to try. "I ran it by the folks at The Valerie Fund. I said 'I don't know how much I can raise; but if you're game, we'll get a bunch of designers involved. I thought it was a good fit and I said, 'Let's try it.'" Reichard's investors were also on board with the event. "Without their approval and flexibility, I would not have been able to offer the house for use in the fundraiser," Reichard says. "They deserve a lot of credit."

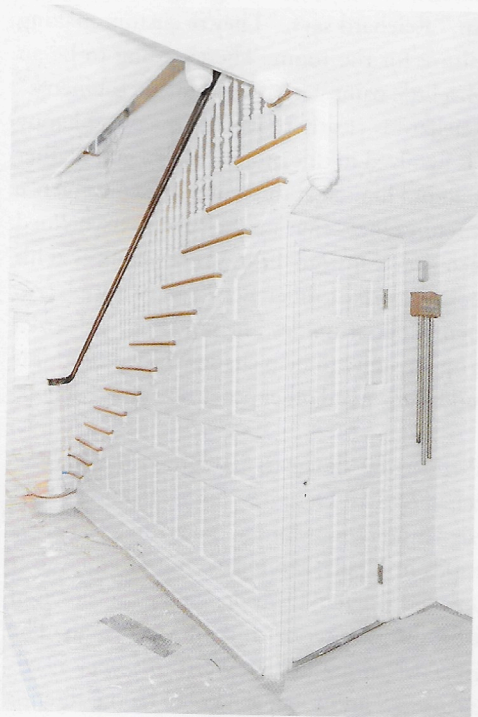
Aubrey Reichard-Eline, Reichard's daughter and Grace's mom, wasn't surprised by her father's idea. "His heart is ginormous," she says. "He adores Grace. He's doing what he likes to do. This is his opportunity to be creative



## Uncommon Grace

Grace Eline just turned 10. She's energetic and outgoing, and she's one of the kids who's been supported by The Valerie Fund during her cancer treatments. She's a talented designer who created the T-shirt logo for her Valerie Fund walk team, Gigi's Angels. She's also collaborating on one of the rooms in the show house.

Though she enjoys the creative side of design, Grace doesn't want to be a designer when she grows up. She wants to be a doctor. "She



STAIRCASE | The grand staircase in the main entry features an intricately handcrafted stair rail with a paneled wall beneath. The door leads to the basement, where Reichard discovered the original coal furnace with pieces of coal still in it.



Grace is jazzed about the show house that bears her name.

for a good cause. It was the perfect marriage — renovating this house and being able to support this amazing charity to help his granddaughter.”

As a newcomer to events of this type, Reichard had a steep learning curve. “It’s challenging because I’ve never gone out to raise money before.” Fortunately, he got a lot of support from the design community. “Mansion in May is the gold standard [for show houses], and they’ve been very helpful. I can’t say enough about them.”

He also has nothing but praise for the designers participating in the event. “I thought, for them, it was going to be a business transaction. They’re using their own money. I expected it to be a little tense. But to a person, they’d walk in the door and want to know about Grace. Then they’d ask me to tell them about The Valerie Fund.” The designers were just as gracious and flexible when it came to which spaces they were assigned. “They didn’t care which room they got; they believed in the cause,” Reichard says. “Once the spaces were assigned, Reichard gave the designers a lot of freedom. “I don’t want to put them in a box,” he says. “I told them to do whatever they want.”

says she would be a good doctor because she knows what would hurt,” her mom says. “She knows what treatment is going to be like.”

On her way to becoming a doctor, Grace hasn’t missed many school days, thanks to a robot called a VGo provided by The Valerie Fund. The VGo allows patients absent from school for an extended period to attend classes remotely. “I can go around the room and pretend I’m there, but I’m home,” Grace says. “It’s like a video camera. They can see what I’m doing. I can see what they’re doing. If I don’t want the people in the classroom to hear me talking, I can put it on mute. If I don’t want to hear them talking, I can put them on mute.” Maintaining that visual connection with classmates and teachers makes a patient feel less isolated and more like a regular kid, The Valerie Fund says.

Grace is a regular kid (just for fun, she put a Katy Perry wig on her robot), but she’s also an extraordinary child who says that 2018 — the year she was diagnosed — was a great year. “I met so many people. I had such great experiences at The Valerie Fund. I love my doctors and nurses.”



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Drummond collection (items depicted may not be available at this time)



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Grace herself — who's feeling great thanks to her dedicated doctors and nurses and to The Valerie Fund team — is helping to design one of the rooms. The wall color, she says, will be mint green, her favorite color. "It's going to be her playroom," Reichard says. "They're custom making furniture for the room. There's going to be an easel, a little paint station and built-in cabinetry."

Reichard is clearly proud of Grace and happy she is involved in this project. He's a grandfather who found himself at the center of a convergence of circumstances that might have overwhelmed someone else. Instead, he used the resources at his disposal to make a difference. "Part of my job is to recognize opportunities," he says. Reichard seized this opportunity to help change the world for his granddaughter and other pediatric cancer patients.

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Participating designers as of press time: ANEW Kitchen & Bath Design in North Plainfield; AK Design Studios in Monsey, New York; B. Garcia Designs in Upper Montclair; Butter and Velvet Home & Design in Denville; California Closets in Fairfield; CD Interiors Inc. in Manalapan; The French Martini LLC in Westfield; Gail Davis Designs in South Orange; Global Home Interior Design in Princeton; Images in Design Inc. in Cranford; JAB Design Group/Joseph A. Berkowitz Interiors Inc. in Penn Valley; JMW Interiors LLC in Millburn; Liepold Design Group LLC in Millburn; Marina V Design Studio in Ridgewood; Mendham Interiors in Mendham; Mimi & Hill Design Studio in Westfield; Samuel Robert Signature Spaces in Millburn; Swati Goorha Designs in New Providence; and Tina Ramchandani Creative in New York City.

Sponsors of the show house as of press time are *Design NJ*; Holby Valve Inc.; Jeanne and Alain Barbet; Coldwell Banker Realty of Westfield; Coughlin Duffy LLP; duCret School of Art; Ernst and Young Foundation; ERV Developers; Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery; RWJBarnabas Health; Schwartz Design Showroom; Skylands Insurance Group; Tina and Stephen Squeri; Thomasville Furniture; and Worldwide Wholesale Floor Coverings. Providing gifts in kind as of press time are ANEW Kitchen & Bath Design, Atlas Marble & Granite, Benjamin Moore, Dente Trading, Amy Wax, Jersey's Best, *New Jersey Monthly*, NJ Advance Media; Swarovski; and Window Works. 