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## Transplant House is lifesaver

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Five years ago when Sherry Behrens was at her lowest point, she felt all alone. Doctors diagnosed the 51-year-old Scottsdale woman with liver cancer and doubted she would survive. Behrens hung on and, several weeks after the diagnosis, received a liver transplant.

Behrens' father and brother visited from Washington state briefly, but they weren't part of her necessary post-transplant recovery.

With no family in Arizona and unable to take care of herself, Behrens took advice she received at the Mayo Clinic and went to the Arizona Transplant House in Scottsdale.

"I felt so alone," Behrens said. "No one understands what you go through unless they have done it. It wasn't so much physically difficult as mentally. Then, I found the Arizona Transplant House. It saved my sanity."

Since 1999, Arizona Transplant House at Brusally Ranch, formerly an Arabian horse facility, has been a home away from home for all types of transplant patients from Mayo Clinic. The 50-year-old Spanish colonial-style, totally renovated, 6,000-square-foot home sits on six acres enhanced by large shady trees, benches, open desert and native trees and plants.

In addition to a serene environment, guests have use of a covered front patio and an open back patio with barbecue grill, picnic table and a putting green. The home is filled with fine woodwork, tile and ironwork. Each bedroom has a private bath, and guests have separate telephone extensions.

All bedroom and bath linens are provided, and there are laundry facilities on site for guest use. The house also features a large living room with a big screen television, and there is a spacious dining room for guests and a fully equipped kitchen.

"I stayed about a week," Behrens said, adding she hired a 24-hour nurse to help with care. "I wouldn't recommend anyone going through a transplant alone. It (being alone) hurt. I don't think the doctors would have transplanted me had they known I had no support system. I have friends here, but they work.

"It got to the point that I'd sit on the couch sobbing, not having the strength to get a glass of water. Being able to go to the Transplant House and getting help from them rather than just having a nurse at home made a big difference to me."

Besides having a place to recover, Behrens had kindred souls in her midst. Others at the house had liver or, mostly, bone marrow transplants, according to Behrens.

She was able to talk about her problems with people who experienced some of the same things, which she said helped immeasurably.

"It's just a great place," said Behrens, who began volunteering at the house and is now a member of its board of directors. "It's not a medical facility, but there's support. We ask for a donation (\$25

per night), but you don't have to pay. It's a safe place to go after a transplant."

The only downside is the house has just seven rooms for patients and caregivers. Behrens said people are turned away on a regular basis because the facility is filled. She said the house probably needs three times the room it has.

Still, it helps people like Behrens, who returned to work in commercial real estate lending.

"Did I ever believe I'd get to this point?" Behrens said. "No. I had a hard time physically. I had a couple surgeries. I was fearful about getting back to work. It took four years. I'm so proud of what the Transplant House did for me and what I do now to help people in the same position I was in. Going to the house was the best thing that ever happened to me."