

When Volunteers of America announced that receiving the Covid-19 vaccine would be required for all employees, Stephanie Hoskins was unsure what to do.

“I was starting to have serious conversations with my husband – I love this agency, but just wasn’t sure about the vaccine,” Stephanie said.

As Director of Rural Addiction Recovery Services, Stephanie is a respected and valued VOA team member, overseeing critical – and growing – services in Southeastern Kentucky. But like many people, she wondered about the safety of something developed so quickly.

“I thought about all of the vaccines that had been around forever and you knew were safe. But the Covid-19 vaccine was new,” Stephanie said.

After carefully considering staff concerns, as well as consultation with doctors and infectious disease experts, VOA decided to make vaccines mandatory for all employees due to the risk to clients, many of whom are medically fragile. All the evidence available about the effectiveness and public health benefit of the vaccines clearly demonstrated that the right step to protect the health and safety of both our workforce - and the clients we care for, particularly in the round-the-clock residential settings that our clients call home – was to require staff to be immunized.

As VOA was sharing its policy regarding vaccinations, Stephanie’s life changed.

Despite being careful and socially distanced at Thanksgiving in 2020, Stephanie noticed some symptoms that made her think she might have a sinus infection. Then she lost her sense of smell. At the same time, her sister became sick. As a precaution, they received Covid-19 tests. Both were positive.

Her sister struggled with a high fever and body aches. Stephanie lost her sense of taste and smell for two weeks. Their biggest concern became the health of their mother, Barb, and their dad, Bobby. He had a heart and kidney condition and was receiving dialysis. As a high-risk patient, they prayed that their dad would not test positive for Covid-19.

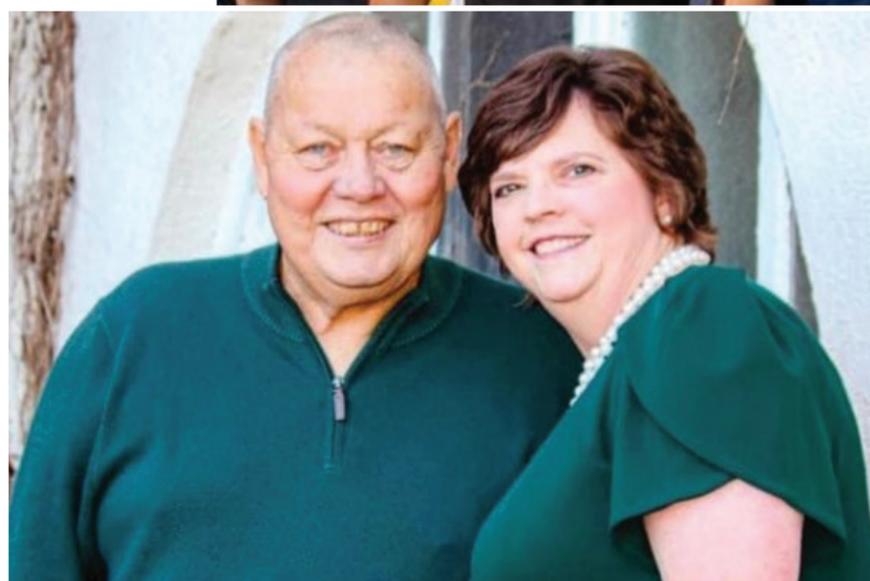
Bobby was experiencing complications from surgery on his leg and returned to the hospital in December. That’s when Stephanie’s family received the news that he was positive for Covid-19.

Stephanie and her family then experienced a setback that so many others faced during the pandemic – the inability to be with a loved-one who is quarantined with a highly infectious disease. They couldn’t enter Bobby’s hospital room to be with him as he recovered from surgery and confronted Covid-19.

“You want to do more, but you can’t even go in to see him. That’s one of the hardest parts,” Stephanie said.

When Bobby started to have trouble breathing, he was given plasma treatment, which improved his condition. Stephanie and her family became more hopeful.

After all, their dad had always been the rock of the family – the person everyone always counted on.



# STEPHANIE HOSKINS FACES THE VERY PERSONAL IMPACT OF COVID-19

**“Something has to change. We’ve lost too many people to this disease.”**

“No matter what happened – my dad was the first one I called. Something with the car, something around the house. He was always there for us,” Stephanie said.

Stephanie has two sisters, Misty and Kayla, and a brother, Brent. Bobby called them every day.

“He never missed, and would call each of us at about the same time every day just to check in,” she said.

Along with his reliability and stability, Stephanie always thought of her dad’s sense of humor. Before retirement, he worked as a blaster for coal companies, traveling throughout Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia. He was a foreman in charge of setting dynamite at mines. His favorite t-shirt read, “If you see me running, you better catch up.”

Stephanie’s daughters, Alivia and Laura Beth, thought Bobby’s CB handle was hilarious. He used “Big Bobby Louie from St. Louie Missouri” – even though he was born and raised in Clay County. He was always ready to make people laugh.

“He was just one of the funniest people I knew – always telling jokes and having fun. And he kept me in line because he would call me out on any BS,” she said.

Stephanie also thought of his generosity. He loved to travel and take family vacations.

“He would always complain about what things cost, but the truth was he was the first to take out his wallet. All of our needs and wants were always taken care of,” Stephanie said.

After improving for a few days after his plasma treatment, Barb talked to Bobby on the phone, and knew something wasn’t right.

“My mom could hear it in his voice. The next day, she called

and he told her, ‘Barb, I’m not feeling too good.’”

That morning, Bobby was moved to the Intensive Care Unit and placed on a ventilator. Soon, a medivac helicopter was called to take him from a London Hospital to Lexington. Stephanie, Barb, Brent, Kayla and Misty stood on the landing pad and were able to touch Bobby for the first time in two weeks. They prayed while they held their dad’s hands.

When Bobby arrived in Lexington, he was put on a ventilator, and had the first of a series of heart attacks. After multiple heart attacks and CPR through the night, and after consultation with the doctors, Bobby was taken off the ventilator. He was surrounded by doctors and nurses who formed a circle and prayed. He passed that evening.

“God blessed me with the best dad I could ever have. I couldn’t ask for anyone better. Anything that we did, he was there. That’s what makes it so hard,” Stephanie said.

Through her grief, Stephanie has thought a lot about Covid-19, how it affected her family forever and how it has changed so many lives.

“Now I think, if the vaccine had been around prior to December, would we have a different life today? Would my dad have survived? You don’t think it will happen to you, but it can happen,” Stephanie said.

As a VOA leader, Stephanie has been eager to share what happened to her family to other caregivers and staff at VOA, and to urge them to take steps to protect themselves and their families. She tells her story as she leads VOA’s expansion into Southeastern Kentucky, where she is proud of the changes VOA is bringing to the community she has always called home.

As one way of honoring Bobby’s memory, she filmed a video encouraging her VOA colleagues to get the vaccine.

“Something has to change,” she said in a message shared with all VOA employees. “I don’t want to lose anyone else. We’ve lost too many people to this disease.”

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