

DON AND SUSAN COX

A house full of hugs

You might say that the For the Love of Christi center was born out of grief and love.

In October 1985, a drunken driver struck and killed Christi Lanahan as she walked

For 20 years, the grief-stricken have found solace at For the Love of Christi center, founded by parents who understand

with friends in downtown Austin. At the time, she was an honors student at the University of Texas. Pinned beneath the car, she was dragged 800 feet and died at Brackenridge Hospital.

Her parents, Don and Susan Cox, overcome with grief, found there were few places that offered the sort of help they needed.

"I needed help daily," Susan Cox said.

Don added: "It was like we were blinded by grief, not like losing your sight, but like going around in a fog."

There were private counselors and some groups that met in people's living rooms or churches, but not a place dedicated to dealing with grief. Not a place where people could go if they didn't have insurance or money. So in 1987, the Coxes founded For the Love of Christi to help the broken-hearted.

For 18 years, Susan Cox ran the center as a volunteer. Thanks to the generous gifts of corporations and individuals, the center now has a full-time paid executive director.

The center has moved seven times since it opened, but it now has a permanent home on Hancock Drive in North Austin. The gray house and annex building with a huge wooden heart on the grounds is a place for "zebras."

That is how the Coxes describe them-

selves and others whose lives have been forever changed by a death. Zebras look like horses, Don Cox explains, but they are different. Sometimes the horses don't recognize those differences, but zebras always do.

This year, the couple celebrated the 20th anniversary of For the Love of Christi. Since it opened, the center has helped more than 70,000 people through counseling and training services.

Many people who come to the Christi center have lost loved ones from an illness, violent crime or traffic accident. It offers free counseling to adults and children. Sometimes the center provides training and counseling for large groups, schools and churches.

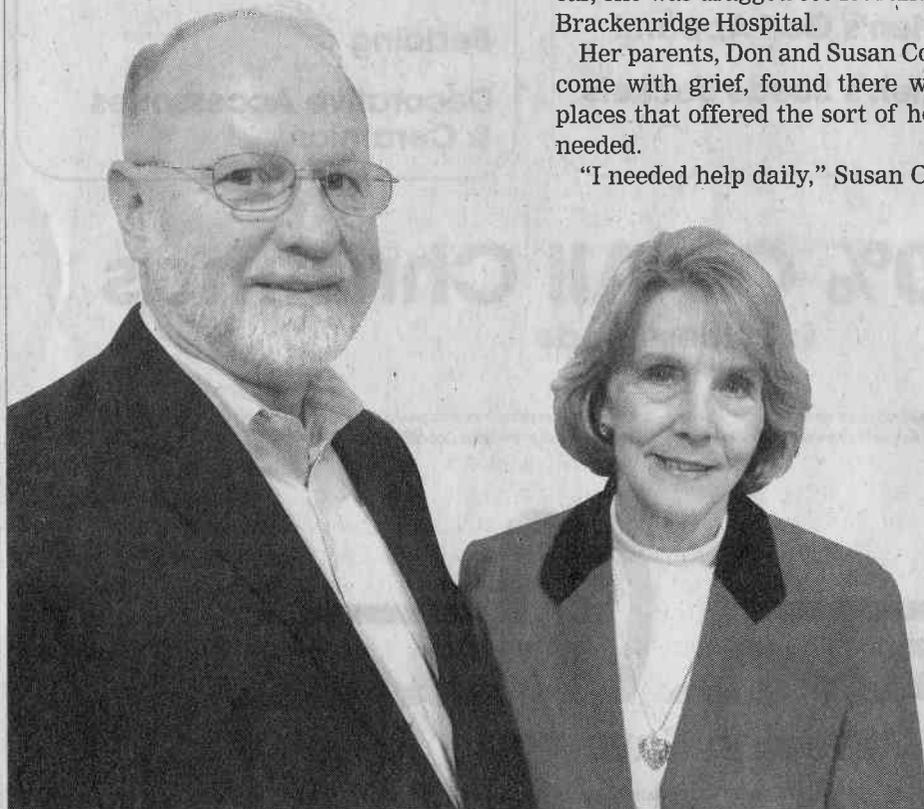
"We wanted a place where people could come and talk, or get a hug whenever they needed it," Susan said. Don added, "We wanted some place that would be open to anyone who suffered the death of a loved one."

Thanks to the Coxes, no one in Central Texas need take that journey alone.

— Alberta Phillips

Don and Susan Cox say that For the Love of Christi is a place for 'zebras,' people whose lives have been changed forever by a death and who feel lost in a world of horses.

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