

Health Care

CATHOLIC COURIER SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

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S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Elaine Schieder, a retired dental nurse, has spent the last two years volunteering at the registration desk inside Hornell's St. James Mercy Hospital.

Volunteers provide essential services to Catholic hospitals around diocese

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

One day at St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, Patricia H. Howard was delivering flowers to a patient for the third time that day.

"The guy tried to give me a tip," she recalled as she sorted mail in the hospital's volunteer office.

Of course, Howard refused the tip since she gives her time to the hospital for free — as do hundreds of other people who volunteer at the three diocesan hospitals: St. Mary's; St. James Mercy in Hornell; and St. Joseph's in Elmira.

"I really like it here," Howard said of St. Mary's. "I like helping the patients. It's like a family. It makes you feel good."

But volunteering is more than just a way to make people like Howard feel good. Volunteering makes it possible for St. Mary's to operate on a sound financial basis.

According to one financial analyst at St. Mary's, the hospital would have to pay \$340,000 in salaries to the employees needed to perform almost 33,000 hours worth of work currently performed by volunteers.

In addition to the money St. Mary's 351 volunteers save the hospital, volunteers who participate in fundraisers raise more than \$100,000 for St. Mary's annually, according to Annabelle

Pugliese, director of volunteers.

"St. Mary's could not function without volunteers," Pugliese said.

John Koskie, director of volunteers at St. James' Mercy in Hornell, echoed Pugliese's remarks in terms of his own hospital.

"They do so many things that would be tying up the time of the employees," he said of St. James' 86 volunteers. "The volunteers take up that slack. When most of the (employees) say, 'we've got a good volunteer,' they also say, 'what would we do without them?'"

It's apparent that without volunteers all three hospitals would have virtually no one to staff their gift shops, and lack key people in such areas as patient admissions and discharge; the mailroom; and pastoral care.

Numerous volunteers can also be found throughout the hospitals working as part-time secretaries or transporting patients from room to room. Still others can be found helping patients through their physical therapy, or entertaining them with music.

Some of the 125 in-hospital volunteers at St. Joseph's in Elmira interview patients as part of a "quality control check," according to Eileen Kirkpatrick, assistant director of volunteers. Volunteers learn whether patients are satisfied with their care, their food and other aspects of their hospital stay, she remarked.

St. Joseph's even uses volunteers who live at home, Kirkpatrick said. About 75 such at-home volunteers, known as the "Busy Hands," perform such services as crocheting items for the gift shop, she said.

Despite the wide variety of tasks assigned to volunteers, all three hospitals employ similar methods of screening and placing people who want to help out at their hospitals.

Volunteers generally fill out an application and are interviewed to determine which area they would like to work in the hospital. They are also asked what hours they are available and when they like to work.

After the interview process, volunteers often meet with a department director who also speaks to them about their interests. If it seems like a volunteer candidate is qualified for a position at the hospital, he or she must then undergo a physical examination and a test for tuberculosis.

Job-training and hospital orientation then follow for candidates who make it through the entire process, according to volunteer directors.

Volunteers range from high school students and former patients to ex-employees and retired religious, according to directors.

"Oftentimes they've been a patient, or a loved one's been a patient," Pugliese commented.

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