

Retirement

Nurse evolves from employee to volunteer

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ELMIRA — Seems that Rita Wayne can't get her former place of employment, St. Joseph's Hospital, out of her blood.

So it's fitting that Wayne now volunteers at the hospital by giving free blood pressure screenings.

Wayne, 67, spends part of her Wednesday afternoons in the St. Joseph's outpatient area, ministering to a steady stream of people between 4 and 6 p.m.

"Sometimes I come a little early," Wayne noted one recent Wednesday. "I came in at 3:30 today, and that's a good thing because there are always people waiting."

Wayne's duties consist of testing patients' blood pressure in both arms and recording their name, age, address and phone number. She sends the information on to a hospital nurse, who will then contact a patient's level if the blood-pressure is unhealthy.

Hospital work is certainly nothing new to Wayne. She graduated from the St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing in 1951 and devoted much of her career as a registered nurse to St. Joseph's, working part-time while raising her family. She and her husband, William, have eight children and 20 grandchildren.

"This was my life, between here and the house," Wayne remarked.

Wayne staffed the hospital's emergency, intensive care and maternity units. She retired in 1988 when the maternity unit closed.

Less than two years later, Wayne began giving blood pressure tests at one-day health fairs around Elmira. This experience led her back to St. Joseph's, where she realized a big chunk of her heart remained.

"I have always enjoyed being a nurse. It's great being here," Wayne remarked.

Wayne noted that many of the doctors she worked for are now retired or deceased.

"I miss the Sisters of St. Joseph being around, also," she added. "There are only a few now."

However, Wayne said last week that she was eagerly awaiting a St. Joseph's Hospital tradition that continues: the St. Joseph's Day table on March 19.

"We always came down for the table," she recalled. "You just didn't miss St. Joseph's Day."

As she continued to reminisce, Wayne said she was grateful to the hospital administration for taking her back whenever her maternity leaves concluded.

"There aren't too many jobs where you can do that," she said.

Wayne is among 15 volunteers who administer blood pressure screenings at the hospital. Most, like herself, are former St. Joseph's Hospital employees.

Along with her blood pressure work at St. Joseph's, Wayne is a member of the hospital's auxiliary. She also belongs to the local Lay Dominican society and serves as eucharistic minister at Our Lady of Lourdes Church. Her daughter, Eileen Sokolowski, is Our Lady of Lourdes' religious-education coordinator; and another daughter, Sister Kathleen Wayne, RSM, is pastoral associate at St. John of Rochester Church in Perinton.

Wayne, an Elmira native, said she recently returned from a long vacation in Florida but has no desire to move away from upstate New York.

"This is the first time we've ever been away for a month," she said. "You enjoy the weather, but we miss the family."



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

After raising eight children and pursuing a career at St. Joseph's Hospital, Elmira, Rita Wayne remains active as a volunteer at the hospital.

Wayne added she plans to maintain her busy agenda for as long as she is able. "I think it's good to keep busy — and I do," she stated.

She suggested that any retiree with some free time consider becoming involved at St. Joseph's.

"We're always looking for more volunteers," she said.

Control blood pressure, doctor says

(CNS) — High blood pressure, once thought to be a natural part of the aging process, is now approached by the medical community as something that can and should be controlled.

"It's not just part of getting older," said Dr. Scott Massa, director of the geriatrics assessment program at Good Samaritan Hospital in Cincinnati. "It's a disease state, and if you treat it, you're reducing the chance of having a heart attack or stroke."

The biggest risk factor for strokes is high blood pressure. Along with with smoking and high cholesterol, it's also a major risk factor for heart disease.

To reduce blood pressure, doc-

tors first will look at a person's lifestyle, including eating habits, salt intake and how sedentary a person is, Massa said.

In some people, being overweight is related to high blood pressure, Massa said. Sometimes the situation is complicated by other health problems, such as arthritis, which limits activity levels. People with such limitations might be able to do something like water aerobics to increase

their activity levels, he added.

If blood pressure cannot be controlled with a change of lifestyle, doctors might prescribe medication, Massa said. He added that there are a variety of blood pressure medicines available so that doctors can find the medication that best suits a patient.

Changes in lifestyle and/or in medication regimen should be done in concert with one's physician.

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