

# Care, Comfort and Hope

## Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits

### Social and Economic Factors that Influence Health

There is a strong association between social and economic factors and adverse health outcomes. Low socioeconomic status, including poverty, lack of education, and other factors are strong influences on health. Wisconsin hospitals are dedicating resources and developing programs to address these issues and improve the health status of those individuals that often cannot access even basic health services.

#### **There's no place like home**

Homelessness is a problem with far-reaching effects. It devastates families and in our cold climate is often an issue of survival. Entering its thirteenth year of operation, the House of Mercy Homeless Center opened after Mercy Health System's President and CEO Javon R. Bea noticed more and more patients citing the family car as their primary residence when coming into the emergency department. This was alarming because, up until that point, local support resources had assumed that homelessness wasn't a significant or growing problem in the southern Wisconsin area.

In the spring of 1996, Mercy converted its former residential addiction treatment building into the House of Mercy Homeless Center, which can comfortably house 25 people for up to 30 days at a time. In August 1996, the House of Mercy Homeless Center for women and families opened after nearly one year of concerted effort. Within three days of opening, the Center's 25 beds were filled to capacity. From 1996 until March 2009, the House of Mercy Homeless Center has provided shelter to 49 percent of those children and has given 3,737 individuals a place to feel at home for a short time.

Even in tough economic times, the House of Mercy Homeless Center is able to stay in operation because of the funds accumulated through the Center's annual Charity Ball. This year, a goal of \$150,000 was set, and we're proud to announce \$180,000 was raised, showing that people are willing to help one another, even when we're all tightening our own belts.

The House of Mercy is more than a temporary shelter. It is dedicated to helping its residents find lasting housing solutions. Residents receive the services of a housing resource counselor and social worker, and support services have grown to include parenting classes, stress management training, free child care, rent assistance and budgeting education.

One past resident of the House of Mercy stated, "I came to the House of Mercy because I had nowhere else to turn. I would have never dreamed I'd be homeless, but if it wasn't for the House of Mercy it's hard telling where I would be right now, and I don't think it would be very good. I went from absolute nothing to having everything I need thanks to the help of the House of Mercy. I have an apartment. I have a job. My kids have food. They even supplied me with resources or people giving furniture away, so I had everything I needed when I moved into my apartment. It was a true blessing."

**Mercy Health System, Janesville**

#### **Hospital hosts program to assist the unemployed**

Like many communities in Wisconsin, Stoughton has been affected by the economic downturn – experiencing layoffs at many area industries and businesses.

Stoughton Hospital recognized in these tough economic times that now, more than ever, it was important to give back to their community. To that end, the hospital decided to develop an employment tools workshop.

On May 14, 2009 the hospital hosted "Stoughton Hospital Gives Back to the Community." The hospital's administrators, managers and human resources department provided their skills and expertise related to resume touch-ups, resume posting online, mock interviewing and volunteer-to-hire opportunities. Over 20 people participated in the event.

"It was a rewarding experience to provide help and support to the members of our community who are anxious to regain employment and were willing to seek out extra advice on ways to improve their job searching skills—regardless of their line of work," stated Chris Schmitz, Stoughton Hospital human resources manager.

"Hospitals are like a city within a city—comprised of a very diverse set of careers and employment functions. As a result, we sometimes forget we have many talents to share beyond just providing health care services," added Schmitz.

**Stoughton Hospital, Stoughton**

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## **Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)**

### **Compassion for the community: Sacred Heart instills hope during difficult times**

In wake of the current economic situation, Sacred Heart Hospital's deeply rooted Franciscan values not only fulfill the Sisters' Mission through charitable donations both domestic and abroad, but the hospital remains forever committed to building a stronger community and supporting those within it. For that reason, the programs that Sacred Heart provides are designed specifically to enhance the physical, spiritual, emotional, and financial wellbeing of patients and the community.

On November 12, 2008, the hospital hosted a free economic forum, "From Wall Street to Main Street: Living with Economic Uncertainty," which featured a panel discussion of the present economic circumstances that was followed by a Q & A session to allow community members the opportunity to voice their concerns. The forum compared the differences in the national, state, and local economic conditions, and was designed to answer questions, alleviate anxiety, and instill hope during a difficult time.

And on November 11, 2008, Sacred Heart Hospital's Center for Healthy Living and Friends of Sacred Heart co-sponsored a seminar for hospital employees and retirees, "In Today's Economy, Is Retirement Still an Option." The seminar was presented by Kevin McKinley, of McKinley Money, who took time to outline and explain formulas that could act as guidelines before and during retirement.

**Sacred Heart Hospital, Eau Claire**

### **Farm Family Day success**

The Friends of St. Joseph's Hospital's 6th Annual Farm Family Event, "Sustaining Working Lands and the Future of Farming," on March 30 was a huge success.

McDonald Hall was filled to capacity with 63 Chippewa County farmers in attendance. Staff offered free blood pressure screenings and a screen for prostate cancer to eight individuals. Nine local businesses and the Agriculture Advancement Fund at the Community Foundation of Chippewa County sponsored the event.

Richard Stadelman, executive director of Wisconsin Towns Association, was the keynote speaker and discussed the Sustaining Working Lands Initiative and the Comprehensive Planning Law in Wisconsin. Stadelman serves as an attorney and lobbyist for the WI Towns Association and has participated in several state planning committees including the DATCP Livestock Facility Siting Committee and most currently the DATCP Working Lands Steering Committee. Todd Schrankel, Kohel Power Equipment, Chippewa Falls, gave an overview of the new GPS technology used in precision farming.

The Friends of St. Joseph's Hospital hosts Farm Family Day on an annual basis. Carl Cronquest, chair of the Friends of St. Joseph's Hospital's Farm Committee and lifelong Chippewa County farmer, promotes the event as a way to reach out to rural farmers.

"Our goal is to offer free information on a current topic in farming as well as promote health, through screenings and education," said Cronquest.

**St. Joseph's Hospital, Chippewa Falls**

### **Building better communities — and better health — in our own backyard**

Good neighbors build better communities, and a strong community can benefit the health of its residents. That's why Theda Clark Medical Center joined forces with Children's Hospital of Wisconsin-Fox Valley to say yes to a partnership suggested by parents and staff at Roosevelt Elementary School, located right across the street from the hospitals' shared campus in Neenah.

One key element of the partnership, rooted in the school's "Wellness — Go For It" theme for the 2008–2009 academic year, was the Backyard Buddies program. Through it, employees of both hospitals spent 30 minutes weekly with students needing one-on-one time with a caring adult. Some 30 grown-up "buddies" visited with their students each week, eating lunch, helping with homework, playing games, or teaching a new skill.

"The relationship reinforced academics as well as built social and friendship skills," says Roosevelt principal Phil Johnson. "The kids' self-esteem was certainly enhanced."

Beyond this mentoring program, hospital employees facilitated assemblies for the entire student body, including a session on nutrition and an exercise-centered "fitness festival." An active, healthy lifestyle was the focus for all programming.

The partnership also yielded benefits for hospital staff and patients as Roosevelt teachers and administrators encouraged students to give back to the community. Theda Clark Medical Center employees like partnership co-chair Mary Bera worked with the school to arrange student concerts in the Theda Clark cafeteria, coordinate distribution of students' cards and potted plants to patients, place artwork in display cases, and organize a fund-raiser for a Children's Hospital "library wagon" to transport books to young patients.

Says Bera, "With the support of ThedaCare and Children's Hospital management, our employees have made a positive difference in the lives of both Roosevelt students and our patients."

**Theda Clark Medical Center, Neenah**

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## Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

### Adopt-A-School Program

Parenting has a lifetime of responsibilities.

For the children at Lincoln Elementary School, St. Mary's has adopted some of the attributes of good parents: provider, nurturer, role model.

The south Madison school is challenged by the fact that some 70 percent of students live in poverty. St. Mary's provides material needs and services as part of the Foundation for Madison Schools' Adopt-A-School Program. The long-term partnership began in 2008 with a drive for school supplies followed by two days of on-site help with landscaping, painting, library work and classroom activities.

Future initiatives may include education about careers, health and wellness, including asthma—a condition that affects many in poverty.

**St. Mary's Hospital, Madison**

*Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at [mgrasmick@wha.org](mailto:mgrasmick@wha.org).*



Read more about hospitals connecting with their communities at [www.WiServePoint.org](http://www.WiServePoint.org).