

PARTNERS OF WHA is committed to advocating for the health of our communities and advancing the success of local health care volunteer organizations, through the coordination and provision of volunteer education, development resources, and leadership opportunities for health care volunteers and their organizations.

A Message from the Partners of WHA President

Mapping Our Future

Happy Spring! Cindy Hermel and I had a wonderful time sharing information and learning about your local and district organizations at spring district meetings. We visited Medford, Ripon, Beloit and Black River Falls. The weather even cooperated! We brought the news to you about a Partner's Board brainstorming session held in Baraboo on January 20, where we defined our organization's strengths and weaknesses.



Julie Steiner

We agreed on these strengths:

- The current membership of Partners has an interest, determination and passion for volunteering
- The current membership believes in the mission of Partners of WHA
- We believe in grassroots advocacy – the voice of the volunteer
- We have the ability to recognize opportunities and put them into action
- We provide member recognition: local, regional and state
- Our spirit of collegiality allows us to work toward a unified goal
- We offer open sharing of ideas
- We support the Wisconsin healthcare workforce
- We are fiscally mindful and have a strong balance sheet

We also discussed our weaknesses:

- Fewer volunteers are interested in membership in a volunteer organization or holding a position within that organization; they just want to volunteer.
- Our membership is declining
- We have a leadership problem – it's difficult to fill local, regional and state positions

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A Message from the President-elect

Our Best Asset is Volunteers

Spring Tour was a whirlwind with stops in Medford (Northern District), Ripon (Lakes District), Beloit (Southern District) and Black River Falls (Western District). There were good conversations, the sharing of perspectives on Partners, informative speakers and discussions of interesting and successful volunteer projects and programs.



Cindy Hermel

It is very clear that the best asset of Partners is our volunteers. The dedication and commitment of Partners volunteers in providing service and support to hospitals and patients is stellar.

A common concern is recruiting and retaining new volunteers across Partners groups. Data shows those people we are attempting to recruit to volunteer at our organizations are technology oriented. This is how they communicate, get their news and discover volunteer opportunities. It follows that we need to be using technology to get their attention. Hospitals have websites, most often with volunteer tabs that share information regarding opportunities and contact information. The challenge is to find ways to provide our information to them. Many employers and schools now have some form of community service for their employees and students. This may be an avenue for us to get new volunteers' attention. Providing specific information about the array of opportunities to contribute can be

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- Same people are recycled into positions, therefore fewer new/fresh ideas; less risk taking into the unknown
- Not all partner groups have collaboration with their director of volunteer services
- Our state budget continues to run in the red
- There is inconsistency from hospital to hospital in organization structure and operations
- Communication across local, district and state levels

We gained a good deal of insight into our organization having completed this exercise. For 2026 we have opted to focus on re-inventing/re-building Partners of WHA by looking at state and district structures, including local requirements and roles.

Our state organization wants to be a resource and work with you versus having bylaws that restrict how you can operate locally. We invite you to continue to share your thoughts and ideas as we map out our future.

Julie Steiner, Partners President

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developed for employers to share with their employees and schools to share with their students. Each volunteer project or activity should include a couple sentences about what the volunteer will actually be doing. We want to appeal to the prospective volunteer so he/she will feel compelled to go to our hospital's volunteer information on the hospital website.

What else do we need to successfully recruit people to volunteer? Data shows the new volunteer is value driven and wants to contribute to the good of the community. This is significant for all volunteers. The information aimed at attracting new volunteers should include short testimonials from current volunteers sharing the significance of their volunteer work to those they serve. This is a big change in how we view volunteer recruitment. Keep in mind, any volunteer, whether he/she volunteers one time per year, twice a month or two days a week, is making a contribution to our organization and the patients we serve.

I hope you will all be able to attend the Partners Annual Meeting and Conference in October. We will continue this discussion and explore new ways to appeal to the new volunteer.

Cindy Hermel, Partners President-elect

Email: clhermel@hotmail.com

Proposed Bylaws Change

The By-Laws Committee continues to review the adaptability of language in our current by-laws to better meet the needs of our organization. A proposal will be brought to the general membership meeting in October with a language change that will remove the Best of the Best Chair as a member of the Board of Directors.

In February of 2023, at the Partners of WHA spring Board of Directors meeting a motion was made and passed to "halt the Best of the Best Award at this time." The rationale for the motion was with so many changes in membership and leadership post-COVID, the nominations have been sparse and interest in the award has declined.

Suspension of the Best of the Best Award necessitates a change in the Bylaws:

Bylaw 6. Board of Directors

6.2 Members of the Board of Directors

(b) Non-voting Directors shall be appointed and removed at the sole discretion of the President. Non-voting Directors shall include, but not be limited to:

- (1) Convention Chair;
- (2) Wisconsin Award for Volunteer Excellence Chair (WAVE);
- (3) Best of the Best Chair;
- (4) Newsletter Editor;
- (5) Web/Resource Coordinator;
- (6) Parliamentarian (may be contracted); and
- (7) any Special Committee's Chair appointed pursuant to Section 9.4

The change in the Bylaw is to **remove Best of the Best Chair from the list of Directors.**

In Memoriam

Bonnie Olson



Bonnie Rose Olson, age 85, passed away unexpectedly on Feb. 22, 2026, in Maui, Hawaii. Bonnie served as President of Partners of WHA

from 2015-2016. She held other state officer roles, mentored many members of Partners, and was fondly known as "The Hat Lady." Bonnie was one of several past presidents to speak and celebrate the 70th Anniversary of Partners at the October 2023 state convention. Bonnie served as a volunteer with Volunteer Partners of Sacred Heart Hospital in Eau Claire.

May she be forever in our hearts.

Kay Lyndahl



Kay Lyndahl, age 85 of Green Bay, passed away Feb. 16 in Sun City Center, Florida. Kay served as editor of Partners' *Reaching Out* newsletter for

18 years, retiring from her position in 2023. Her untiring efforts saw to it that important information and great ideas were passed on to the Partners membership. She volunteered with the Bellin Hospital Auxiliary.

Blessed be her memory.

WAVE Award

It's time to start thinking about which of your wonderful local projects would make a great submission for a 2026 WAVE award. The WAVE Committee is looking forward to reading your submissions and marveling at the programs and events that take place at your hospital. The awards may be applied for in each of the following categories:

1. **Community Service**
2. **Fundraising**
3. **In-Service**
4. **Community Outreach and/or Collaboration**
5. **Public Policy and Advocacy**

Please review the 2026 application and guidelines when you receive it and submit either a new program or one you continue to repeat due to its success. You may also spruce up an application and resubmit if it has not won a WAVE award previously.

This year's WAVE committee includes: Chair, Ginger Arms, Partners of Crossing Rivers Health, Prairie du Chien; Carol Black, Volunteers of Prairie Ridge Health, Columbus; Julie Stellmacher, SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital Auxiliary; and Mary Ventzke, Aspirus Wausau Hospital Volunteers.



Pictured attending 2026 Advocacy Day are: Julie Steiner, State President; Cindy Hermel, President-elect; Sharon Scott, Public Policy Education Chair, and 2nd row: Linda Arentz and Linda Gillette, 2026 Partners Fall Conference Co-chairs.

Conference Update

We are busy planning an exciting and informational program to be presented at the annual Partners of WHA “**The Power of Partners**” State Conference that will once again be held at the **Stoney Creek Inn in Onalaska, WI on October 14-15, 2026**. The Planning Committee suggested adopting this standard rebranding title that will ultimately save the organization both time and money going forward.

We used your feedback and have made several modifications. Wednesday and Thursday will be filled with a variety of workshops, district meetings (**new!**), and the CEO panel. Ample time will be available to network and to browse hospital displays, the silent auction, traveling gift shops, and vendor displays. Several roundtable discussion topics will be identified prior to conference registration. Wrap-up will be on Thursday at approximately 3:15 p.m.

The keynote speaker is Patty Hendrickson, a well-known engaging and inspirational leadership speaker. Check out her website at <https://pattyhendrickson.com>.

As of this publication date, the following workshop sessions are planned:

- Active Response Training
- Before the After - Causeway Interfaith Volunteers
- Chair Yoga
- Dementia Live® - La Crosse County ADRC
- “Don’t Let Your Think Tank Hit Empty” (HeartMath)
- Empath (Emergency Psychiatric Assessment, Treatment, and Healing)
- Essential Oils
- Nourish to Flourish - Registered Dietitian
- Volunteer’s Role in Enhancing the Patient Experience

Please consider joining us to gain insights and meaningful education to continue making a positive impact in the communities you serve! A more detailed conference schedule including workshop descriptions and presenters will be published in the third quarter state newsletter and conference registration materials.

Please send questions, comments, or suggestions to whaconf2026@gmail.com.

Linda Arentz and Linda Gillette, Conference Co-Chairs, Gundersen Partners



Partners of WHA, Inc. President’s Annual Compiled District Reports

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Districts Reporting	7	7	5	5
Member Organizations	48	43	30	25
Organizations Reporting	38	31	29	22
Total Individuals in Member Organizations	3,853	3,775	2,872	2,156
Hours of Service	373,974	285,235	310,447	226,155
Total Dollars Donated to Hospital or Others	\$1,097,002	\$930,770	\$610,910	\$447,184
Scholarships Given - Number	169	136	165	116
Scholarships Given - Dollars	\$313,125	\$233,500	\$170,100	\$147,200
Number of Health Education Project/Programs	17	30	26	32
Number of Health Education Articles	85	86	45	53
Number of Contacts with Legislators	225	910	842	1,013
Number of Public Policy Articles	51	58	40	49



*You're
Invited!*

The DeWolf Innovation Center invites you to . . .

"Become a Dementia Friend"

May 19, 2026 - 1:00-2:30 pm CST

Free Virtual Webinar

You are invited to join us for an informative presentation designed to build understanding, compassion, and confidence when working with and supporting people living with dementia.

This complimentary presentation explores the important differences between typical aging and dementia, while offering practical, real-life examples that highlight how to discover joy, meaning, and purpose for individuals living with dementia—and for those who care for them. Whether you are a caregiver, family member, professional, or community member, this session will provide practical insights you can use immediately.

Attendees will gain a deeper understanding of dementia and learn how to become a Dementia Friend—someone who helps create supportive, inclusive environments within their families, neighborhoods, and communities.

This presentation offers an opportunity to grow your awareness, strengthen your skills, and make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the differences between typical aging and dementia.
- Learn effective ways to interact and communicate with people living with dementia.
- Increase knowledge that helps reduce stigma associated with dementia.
- Gain basic information about dementia and resources available through the DeWolf Innovation Center.

Faculty:

- **Kathy Good**, Founder & Former Senior Director, DeWolf Innovation Center for Aging & Dementia, Marion, Iowa
- **Mary Ann Grobstich**, Education and Outreach Facilitator, Family Caregivers Center, Mercy Medical Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Intended Audience:

- Anyone who wants to learn more about dementia and cognitive changes
- Family caregivers
- Persons living with dementia

**Click [HERE](#) to register to attend the
May 19, 2026
"Become a Dementia Friend"**

For more information, please contact:

Pam Gridley
Vice President, Corporate Relations Iowa Hospital Association
515-283-9306

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing a Zoom link and information about joining the meeting. It will come from "Iowa Hospital Association no-reply@zoom.us."

Sponsored by "Power of Connection Regional Partnership":

Iowa Hospital Auxiliaries and Volunteers
Minnesota Association of Healthcare Volunteers
North Dakota Hospital Association
Partners of Wisconsin Hospital Association

Community Health Education Report

We continue to work on the goals we have set for Mental Health education. Our fourth goal of educating the membership on resilience/recovery and accessing and advocating for mental health leads us to this article on mental health treatment and recovery programs.

Mental health treatment involves a combination of psychotherapy, medication and social support, often tailored to the individual's specific diagnosis. Key approaches include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), medication management (i.e., antidepressants, mood stabilizers), and holistic care with combined treatment often proving most effective. Support includes inpatient/outpatient care, telehealth and support groups.



Donna Nelson

Key Treatment and Recovery Options:

- **Psychotherapy (Talk Therapy):** Involves working with a professional to identify and change negative thought patterns and behaviors. Common types include:
 - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): focuses on changing thinking and behavior patterns.
 - Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT): teaches skills for emotion regulation, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness.
 - Exposure Therapy: helps individuals confront fears in a supportive environment.
 - Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT): focuses on accepting difficult emotions while committing to positive behavior changes.
- **Medication:** used to manage symptoms of mental illness, often in conjunction with therapy. Common types include:
 - Antidepressants: used for depression and anxiety.
 - Mood Stabilizers: primary for bipolar disorder.
 - Antipsychotics: used to treat psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia.
- **Supportive Services and Programs:**
 - Support Groups: connect individuals with similar experiences for shared support.
 - Community Support Programs: local initiative for chronic health support, such as those provided by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.
- **Crisis Care and Intensive Treatment:**
 - Inpatient Hospitalization: short term care for acute symptoms.
 - Partial Hospitalization/Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOP): structured, daily treatment that allows patients to live at home.
 - Crisis Services: immediate support, including the 988 suicide and crisis lifeline.
- **Treatment for Co-occurring Disorders:** integrated care combines mental health treatment with substance use disorder treatment.

Recovery Approaches

Recovery is a personalized journey that may include self-care, building support systems, and finding the right combination of professional treatments. It is important to work with professionals to create a personalized, evidence-supported treatment plan.

Resources

[FindTreatment.gov](https://www.findtreatment.gov) provides a searchable database of facilities and professional help while crisis counseling is available through 988 or the [Disaster Distress Helpline](https://www.8004774773.org/).

Be Well,

[Donna Nelson](https://www.donna-nelson.com/)

Community Health Education Chair



**MENTAL HEALTH
Awareness
MONTH**

MAY 2026

May Mental Health Month 2026

This year's theme -More Good Days, Together- encourages us all to reflect on what a good day looks like both for ourselves and for our communities. Together we can use that insight to connect people to the right support at the right time and shape advocacy, education, and community engagement to make more good days possible for all.

Additional information is available at mhanational.org.

Public Policy Education Report

Let's Make Our Voices Heard

Greetings Partners! I am very honored Julie Steiner selected me to be the new state Public Policy Chair. My predecessor, Bill McCullough, served for over six years and had a tremendous passion for policy issues, so I do have big “footprints” to fill and follow. Thank you, Bill!

During Spring Tour much was shared on the successful 2026 Advocacy Day. From the “fireside” chat with Jonathan Martin, keynote speaker; the bipartisan legislative panel; and finally to the in-person legislative visits, the nearly 1,100 attendees were able to receive valuable insight into legislative issues, network with fellow organizations, and truly have their voice heard on healthcare issues. Partners volunteers, dressed in their red, white, and blue were well represented. I encourage every Partners member to attend this event next year and even encourage their hospital leadership to attend. Advocacy Day 2027 will be April 21.



Sharon Scott

A brief summary of 2025 PPE activities includes:

- All five districts submitted annual PPE reports which included reports from 20 of the 23 local organizations
- Many vacancies exist for local and district Public Policy Chairs
- Partner’s attendance for Advocacy Day 2025 was 54
- Partner’s Heat membership totals 185
- Legislative contact reporting is a bit inaccurate since hospital staff plus Partner volunteers were included in contact totals.

Phone calls: 42..... Letters: 35..... In person visits: 337..... Post cards: 7 and Emails: 493

We all know our organization can grow our HEAT membership, PPE leadership (at both the local and district levels) and Advocacy Day attendance. Belonging to Partners provides educational opportunities and grassroots advocacy for Wisconsin healthcare. Our “voices” are heard each and every time we respond to a HEAT alert—proof in the recent passing of Gail’s Law and Next-of-Kin Legislation. Join HEAT and have immediate access to legislative updates, issues at hand, and your legislators. Easy access to joining HEAT is found on the [Partners website](#). Follow the instructions when you scan the QR code. Membership is free!!!

As the new State Public Policy Chair, I am still in the “learning” stages. Planning articles to share takes a huge amount of research, so stay with me as I peruse the many resources, find appropriate information, and share the data via Reaching Out and through contacts made with district PPE chairs.

Sharon Scott

Email: Dick-sharon-scott@prodigy.net

Apply for the Mary Licht Memorial Scholarship



Mary Licht

Mary Licht lost a courageous battle with breast cancer in September 2017 during her term as Partner’s State President. Mary’s dedication, enthusiasm and love of Partners shone brightly through her service as president of her local organization (Partners of Portage Hospital), Convention chair, Partners webmaster, and Southern District chair. Mary’s family wished to continue Mary’s legacy by establishing The Mary Licht Memorial Scholarship. This scholarship awards a first-time conference attendee their registration fee. One to two scholarships will be available in 2026. The application may be found on the [Partners website](#) on the Forms page in the Resource Center. Please consider and encourage a member of your

organization to apply. The application deadline is August 1, 2026.

Let us remember Mary by continuing her legacy through our enthusiasm, passion, and experiences as members of Partners.

Spring Tour District Photos



Lakes District meeting in Ripon hosted by SSM Ripon Community Hospital Auxiliary



Northern District Meeting In Medford hosted by Cumberland Healthcare Volunteer Partners



Southern District meeting in Beloit hosted by Beloit Health System Volunteers



Western District meeting in Black River Falls hosted by Volunteers of Black River Health

Reaching Out Deadlines

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
August 2026	Friday, July 17, 2026
November 2026	Friday, Oct. 16, 2026
February 2027	Friday, Jan. 15, 2027
May 2027	Friday, April 16, 2027

Partners *Reaching Out* is published four times a year by Partners of Wisconsin Hospital Association, Inc. Visit the Partners website at www.partnersofwha.org. Direct questions or comments to:

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