

VITAL SIGNS

The Newsletter of Aspirus Merrill Hospital Volunteers


SPRING 2026




FROM THE PRESIDENTS:


As I start this column on the first day of spring, I see snow piles that are two to three feet high out my window! "The first day of spring is one thing, and the first spring day is another." (Henry Van Dyke) That's certainly true this year. My hope is that by the time this quarterly newsletter arrives in your mailboxes, there will be significant signs that April has arrived. Now let's get you up to date.

The board meetings for the past three months have been centered on evaluating the past year's activities as well as goal setting and long-term planning for our organization.

 We've updated our membership directory, and copies will be available at

our Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon. As of April 1, there are a total of 41 Lifetime, Honorary, and Active members, Of this total, 33 are currently Active Members. We are happy to welcome our two newest volunteers, **Carol Crevier and Sheila Frederick.** As you may have noted, our active membership has declined. We encourage you to recommend those you know who might be interested in joining us!!!! **Linda Voelz** is our exceptional Membership Chair; please contact her (703-625-3831) with candidates.

 The calling tree committee team members have their updated 2026 lists. We warmly welcome **Ellen Ganz** to our team, thank **Judy Buchler** who served in this capacity, and appreciate all returning members. Your caller may contact you to see if texts, e-mails, or phone calls would be the best way to communicate with you. Our recent email "test," sent March 16, was very successful; 66% of our members responded to the email. We will continue to utilize emails in the future.

 Our long-term planning focused on two main areas: service and fundraising. We set a goal of involving more members in working with a board member and planning for our fundraising activities. You will learn more about this at the Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon. We've had good discussions on possible additional service areas for our hospital staff and our community. Our first fundraiser for this year will be our **Spring Garden Basket Raffle.** The committee will provide items for the basket, and we encourage members who are so inclined to donate gift cards to local establishments. The inclusion of gift cards has led to our most successful sales! Your caller will fill you in on the details.

Five board members attended the Partners of WHA Northern District Spring Meeting in Medford on March 24. The district meeting was followed by State Board member presentations, a registered dietician guest speaker, and the shared volunteer happenings at our hospitals. We always come away from this meeting with a better understanding of the Partner's goals for the year and with many ideas shared by our region's representatives.

Construction continues at Aspirus Merrill Hospital! There is one change that may affect our members who want to access our third-floor volunteer office or the board meeting room. You will need to scan the back side of your badges in the elevators to get to the third floor. Thanks are in order for the Med-Surg Volunteer Crew who have been EXTREMELY flexible during the recent second-floor changes. You are appreciated. Many have worked multiple days each month and are looking forward to the return of the snow birds. ☺ We welcome your participation in this service area. Contact Linda Holdorf (715-351-0133) if you'd like to join us.

We are looking forward to seeing you at the Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon on April 27.

Linda, Jane, Ramona

Public Policy Education

2026 Advocacy Day

For the first year in many, Aspirus Merrill Volunteers were not represented at Advocacy Day in Madison on February 25. Approximately 1,100 health care leaders, providers, and volunteers traveled from across Wisconsin to participate. Before meeting with their lawmakers, attendees gathered to hear from POLITICO Politics Bureau Chief and Senior Political Columnist Jonathan Martin who delivered the keynote address. Participants also heard remarks from a bipartisan legislative panel, and staff from over two dozen Wisconsin hospitals presented quality-improvement initiatives in the Capitol Rotunda. **Save the date for Advocacy Day on April 21, 2027.**

Ramona Hornischer, Public Policy Education Chair

**Aspirus Merrill Volunteers donated
3,119 hours last year!**

BIRTHDAYS TO REMEMBER:

April 22	Hilde Hantke
April 23	Nancy Dabbert
April 23	Maxine Tlusty
May 1	Vicki Hilfiker
May 13	Vicki Kuester
May 21	Kay Slewitzke
June 25	Linda Voelz
June 28	Nancy Streich

DATES TO REMEMBER:

April 5	Easter
April 27	Spring Luncheon
May 8	Spring Garden Basket Raffle Drawing
May 10	Mother's Day
May 25	Memorial Day
June 21	Father's Day

Perspective Builder

Think of every single thing you "have to" do to get through a day as things you "get to" do before "your turn" is over!

(www.tut.com)

SAVE THE DATE:

AMR Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon
Monday, April 27
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Aspirus Merrill Cafeteria

Reminder:

Volunteers are expected to wear their badges at all times when at the hospital.

NEEDED: SMILE CART DONATIONS

#2 Pencils
Word-Find Books (in-demand, most popular)
Crossword Puzzle Books (challenging for many patients)
Decks of Playing Cards
Current Magazines and Periodicals

Thanks to those of you who regularly drop items off

Community Health Education

The Relationship Between Resilience and Mental Health

Our mental health affects how we think, feel and act. It also influences our ability to cope with stress, challenges, interact with others and handle life's setbacks and hardships.

Good mental health is not only the absence of mental health problems. Being mentally and emotionally healthy is more than not experiencing depression, anxiety or other psychological issues. In “**Building Better Mental Health**” Melinda Smith and Jeanne Segal state good mental health reflects the presence of positive characteristics that allow us to deal with the ups and downs of daily life.

People who are mentally healthy have the following: contentment, a zest for life, the ability to laugh and have fun, meaning and purpose in activities and relationships, self-confidence and high self-esteem, fulfilling relationships, the ability to deal with stress and bounce back from adversity, and a balance of work and play, rest and activity in their lives.

If you are looking to cope with a specific mental health problem, deal with your emotions, or to feel more positive and energetic, there are things you can do to feel more control over your mental health. Having good mental health does not mean you will not go through bad times or experience negative emotions. We all experience loss, change and disappointment as a part of life. These difficulties can cause sadness, stress and anxiety. Just as physically healthy people are more apt to recover from illness and injury, people with sound mental health are better able to recover from adversity, trauma, and stress. This ability is called resilience.

Those who are emotionally and mentally resilient, have tools to cope with difficult situations while maintaining a positive outlook. They remain focused, flexible and productive in bad times as well as good times. Even if they do not know how a challenge will be resolved, they are confident a solution will be found.

One in five Americans will have a diagnosable mental or emotional disorder. Despite the prevalence of mental health problems, we often ignore signs that something is wrong and try to tough it out by self-medicating with alcohol, drugs or self-destructive behavior. We hope others won't notice and our situation will magically improve.

The good news is there are practices we can adopt to elevate our mood, become more resilient, and ultimately enjoy our lives more. These keys to good mental health include: **Social Connections** are critical to our mental and emotional health. We need the company of others to feel and function at our best. Telephone calls and social media offer some support but nothing comes close to the stress-busting, mood-boosting power of quality face-to-face interaction with other people. **Staying Physically Active** is good for both our physical and mental health. When we improve your physical health, we experience greater mental and emotional well-being. Physical activity releases endorphins that improve mood and increase energy, relieve stress, and improve memory. **Managing Stress Levels** is a frequent challenge in our daily lives. Stress takes a heavy toll on mental and emotional health. We can utilize these strategies to control stress:

engage in face-to-face social interaction frequently, listen to music, think about something we are grateful for each day, engage in yoga, deep breathing, and meditation. Using these techniques regularly brings our mind and body back into a balanced state. **Eat a Brain-Healthy Diet.** An unhealthy diet can negatively affect our brain and mood, disrupt sleep, and weaken the immune system. Switching to a wholesome diet, low in sugar and rich in healthy fats can improve your mood and give you more energy. **Getting quality sleep** is an important component of good physical and mental health. Experts recommend adults get seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Establishing a sleep routine is effective in providing our brain time it needs to unwind at the end of the day. This routine includes turning off TV, phones, and computers an hour before bed, taking a warm shower or bath, reading, listening to music and utilizing a consistent sleep schedule. **Identify what provides meaning and purpose in life.** Finding meaning and purpose in life is essential to brain health as it helps generate new cells and create new neural pathways in the brain. We seek ways to benefit others as well as ourselves. We can derive this feeling through meaningful work, important relationships with family and friends, and volunteering in the community. However you experience meaning and purpose in life, it is important to do it each day.

Anyone can suffer from mental health problems; and most of us will during our lifetime. Using these six keys to mental health can assist us in meeting the challenges we face and achieving a sense of balance and control.

*Judy Buchler, Community Health Education Chair
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YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE

1. *"We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give." – Winston Churchill*
2. *"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?" – Martin Luther King, Jr.*
3. *"You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give." – Kahlil Gibran*
4. *"There is no better exercise for your heart than reaching down and helping to lift someone up." – Bernard Meltzer*
5. *"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." – Dr. Seuss*