

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

The Power of Education

Education is crucial for us as volunteers. It equips us with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to contribute to our Partner's organization(s). It helps us cultivate a deeper understanding of issues we are addressing and allows us to develop valuable personal and professional skills. It also serves to increase our engagement and commitment to our organization.



Julie Steiner

If you were able to attend your district meeting in April, you may recall that education was one of the topics I touched on as a reason to belong to Partners of WHA. At that meeting alone, think of what new information you were able to glean from guest speakers; your district, state, and local officers; and networking with attendees from other communities.

This fall, you will have the opportunity to experience education again during our Partners Fall Conference, October 7 and 8. Topics will include Gentle Nutrition, Stop the Bleed, Estate Planning, How to Form a Women's Support Group, and Government Relations, just to name a few. Our Partners Fall Conference is the largest yearly educational event we offer. I invite you to attend and participate.

I had the wonderful opportunity in June to be educated at the Gundersen Partner's 75th Anniversary Celebration in La Crosse. Their program included a presentation from Josh Court, Director of Emplify Health by Gundersen Behavioral Health. He spoke about the new EmPATH (Emergency Psychiatric Assessment, Treatment and Health) unit. It was so... interesting and aligns with our Partners community health education focus of mental health. Applause to Gundersen Partners for pledging a significant donation to this unit. Congratulations to Marilyn McElligott, the recipient of Gundersen Partners Ambassador/Advocate Award.

It's important for all of us to educate others about Partners. Why not reach out to friends and acquaintances and ask them

(Continued on page 2)

A Message from the President-elect

Summer Greetings!

Hopefully you are enjoying summer fun with family and friends. Your Partners team is busy making arrangements for the 2025 annual conference, *The Power of Unity*, scheduled for October 7 and 8, 2025, at the Stoney Creek Hotel, 3060 South Kinney Coulee Road, Onalaska, Wisconsin. I look forward to seeing you there.



Cindy Hermel

It is a priority for Partners to help our local and district organizations be successful in all their efforts to support the hospitals and serve the patients in their respective communities. To increase opportunities to share our collective experience and ideas with one another, a digital listening session will be held to discuss ways to strengthen our organizations and what kind of opportunities will best assist local and district membership reach their goals.

Please share with me your top choices for topics of discussion for the listening session. You can email your suggestions to clhermel@hotmail.com by September 1, 2025. This will allow for meaningful exchanges of ideas at networking sessions at *The Power of Unity* Partners Annual Meeting in October, and the digital listening meeting to be held in late November 2025.

Details of the November digital listening session will be announced at the annual meeting.

Cindy Hermel, Partners President-elect
Email: clhermel@hotmail.com

A Message from the President...continued from page 1

to join you at a Partners meeting or event. Educate your hospital leaders as well as volunteer coordinators/directors who may not be familiar with our organization. I will be speaking to CEO's/hospital leaders at online regional meetings this fall, educating them about the value of Partners.

One final comment on education—I would be happy to reach out to hospitals in your districts that have volunteer groups that do not belong to Partners and may not be aware of what we do. Please contact me if you are aware of such a group. As we continue to lose some of our Partners due to burnout and declining membership, we need to extend a warm welcome to others. Please join me in helping to grow our valuable organization.

Julie Steiner, Partners President

Email: steinerfam@mwt.net

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank Linda Arentz and Jane Rada for their valuable assistance with editing and refining the content of this newsletter. Their attention to detail greatly contributes to the clarity and quality of these articles. Their keen eyes made all the difference. (On a side note – these ladies saved my sanity after my computer crashed and all my *Reaching Out* articles were lost. Thankfully, Linda and Jane were able to do CPR over the computer and had all the articles saved). They saved the articles but more important they saved MY SANITY!

With gratitude to Jane and Linda.

Jan Molaska, Newsletter Editor



Report on Strategic Planning Goals

The Strategic Planning Committee met in March 2025 and established the following goals for 2025-2026:

1. Strengthen membership of Partners of WHA

- The Member-at-Large application for individual membership has been completed and is available on the Partners website.

2. Share the value of Partners

- Julie Steiner, Partners President, will be speaking to CEOs/hospital leaders at online regional meetings to educate them about the Value of Partners. Thus far, four meetings are scheduled:
 - West Central Region, August 28
 - Packerland Region, September 5
 - Southwest Region, September 10
 - Southern and Western Region, October 29

3. Improve communication among all Partners members

- The first virtual meeting is planned soon relating to the Partners of WHA Conference and Annual Meeting scheduled October 7-8.

4. Provide more networking opportunities

- State leaders spoke at all 2025 Spring District meetings.
- Activities for members to network at the October conference and annual meeting are planned.

Committee members are working on additional plans to implement the steps established at our meeting to complete the above goals.

[Sherry Jelic](#)

Chair of Strategic Planning Committee, Partners of WHA

Partners of WHA Conference and Annual Meeting

“The Power of Unity”

We are excited to invite you to the upcoming Partners of WHA statewide *The Power of Unity* conference. This inspiring event brings together volunteers from across the state to reconnect, learn, and grow. Join us for a perfect blend of professional growth and camaraderie in a warm, inspiring atmosphere. Reconnect with familiar faces from past years, make new friends, and share in the collective energy that makes our organization so special. Some of the highlights of the conference will include:



- **Inspiring keynote speaker – Business Humorist Lisa David Olson**
- **Engaging workshops** on essential topics such as:
 - Empowered Mind – Elevate Your Brain Health
 - Falls: What We Know and How to Prevent Them
 - Form a Women’s Support Group
 - Gentle Nutrition – The Bistro Bus
 - Gift Shop Panel – Big and Small
 - Healthy Living with Diabetes
 - Self-Care Strategies for Caregivers
 - Stop the Bleed
 - Trusts, Wills, Probate. All You Should Know and More
- **Insightful CEO Panel** featuring hospital leaders who will offer insights into ongoing healthcare challenges, current trends and innovations in healthcare.
- Our **general membership meeting** will bring everyone together culminating with the presentation of the **WAVE Awards** to celebrate exceptional volunteer contributions.

Our mission remains clear: to empower you with meaningful education and tools so you can make a positive impact in your communities. The true *Power of Unity* shines when passionate individuals gather with a shared purpose. We look forward to seeing you at the conference. Please register and be part of something special. Additional conference and registration details will be available soon on the PartnerofWHA.org website

ATTENTION GIFT SHOPS: MANAGERS, VOLUNTEERS, LEADERS

Accept the challenge to become a **Traveling Gift Shop**. All that is needed is to choose items from your shop that you would like to sell at the upcoming Partners Conference. Load them in totes and bring them to Onalaska. Sell your merchandise and make money!! Two 8-ft tables will be available for only \$25. Notify Ann Bergmann at abergmann@centurytel.net or at 715-822-3290 to reserve your space to become a Traveling Gift Shop!

VENDORS NEEDED

Do you attend craft shows? Are you a crafter? Maybe you know an expert crafter. This year I'm hoping to open our vendor area to our homemade crafters who work with wood, jewels, fabrics and more. If you know of someone, please invite them to spend a day in Onalaska to enjoy a built-in audience of shoppers. Contact Ann Bergmann abergmann@centurytel.net or at 715-822-3290 for details.

October 7-8, 2025

Stoney Creek Inn, 3060 S. Kinney Road, Onalaska, WI 54650

We look forward to seeing you there!

Jan Molaska, Conference Chair

WAVE Award Update

Thanks to all local leaders of Partners of WHA who submitted applications for the 2025 WAVE (Wisconsin Awards for Volunteer Excellence) awards. The July application deadline has passed, and the committee members and I hope we have a large number of applications from which to select our winners. Each member of the committee will score the submissions individually and then come together in August to select the winners. As a member of last year's committee, I can share that it was delightful to learn about all the innovative ways volunteers are supporting their hospitals and communities.

The committee members this year are: Ginger Arms - Western District, Patricia Brabazon - Southern District, Julie Stellmacher - Lakes District, Leigh Ann Larson - Wisconsin Hospital Association, and Linda Holdorf, Chair - Northern District. We look forward to our August meeting and hope to meet many of you at the Fall Conference and Annual Meeting October 7-8 when winners in each category will be celebrated.

Linda Holdorf, WAVE Chair
E-mail: meldorf@charter.net

You're Invited: Virtual Panel Discussion – Partners of WHA October Conference Preview for Members

Join us for an exclusive virtual panel discussion designed just for our members! Get a behind-the-scenes look at what's in store for the upcoming October Conference. This is your chance to hear directly from the planning team, ask questions, and get a head start on making the most of this exciting event.

What we'll cover:

- **Conference Registration Plan** – Important dates, how to register, and what's new this year.
- **Workshop Highlights** – Sneak peeks at key sessions, speakers, and opportunities for hands-on learning.
- **Travel & Logistics** – Tips for getting there, accommodations, and what to expect on-site.
- **Traveling Gift Shop Setup** – Learn about the hospitals traveling gift shops.

Date: Wednesday, August 13, 2025

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Location: Online (link will be sent and available at Partnersofwha.org.)

A Little Self-Help

Wayne Dyer, an American self-help author and motivational speaker, offered this advice to his audience. He said, "Give yourself a gift of five minutes of contemplation in awe of everything you see around you. Go outside and turn your attention to the many miracles around you. This five-minute-a-day regimen of appreciation and gratitude will help you to focus your life in awe."

It's amazing what you'll notice—what you'll feel—when you just stop. Just for a moment—and let the world speak to you again.



Community Health Education Report



Donna Nelson

We continue to work on our goals of sharing ways to address our own mental health by developing healthy habits and routines. With summer in full swing, summer might be a good time to work on our sleep quality.

Sleep quality refers to how well you sleep, not just how long you sleep. It's about how easily you fall asleep, how long you sleep without interruption, and how refreshed you feel upon waking. Good sleep quality is essential for physical and mental well-being, while poor sleep can lead to various health issues.

Components of good sleep quality:

- Adequate duration - getting the right amount for your age and needs. For adults, this is typically 7-8 hours.
- Restorative sleep - sleeping deeply enough to feel refreshed and energized in the morning.
- Consolidated sleep - having few awakenings during the night and not spending excessive time awake after falling asleep.
- Timely sleep - following a consistent sleep schedule by going to bed and waking up at the same time each day.

Signs of poor sleep quality:

- Difficulty falling asleep (taking more than 30 minutes to fall asleep).
- Waking up frequently during the night.
- Lying awake for extended periods after waking up in the middle of the night.
- Feeling tired or sleepy during the day despite getting enough sleep.
- Difficulty concentrating.

Importance of good sleep quality:

- Physical health - good sleep supports the immune system, lowers risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes, and helps regulate hormones
- Mental health - adequate sleep improves mood, reduces stress and anxiety, and enhances cognitive function.
- Overall well-being - quality sleep contributes to a better quality of life by improving energy levels, focus, and productivity.

Tips for improving sleep quality:

- Establish a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends.
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine. Wind down before bed with activities such as reading or taking a warm bath or shower.
- Optimize your sleep environment. Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet, and cool.
- Limit screen time before bed. The blue light emitted from electronic devices can interfere with sleep.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol before bed. These substances can disrupt sleep patterns.
- Get regular exercise. However, avoid strenuous workouts close to bedtime.
- Manage stress. Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or meditation.
- Consult a healthcare professional. If you are experiencing persistent sleep problems, seek advice from a doctor.



Happy sleeping! Stay well,

Donna Nelson, CHE chair

Public Policy Education Report



Bill McCullough

"Vertical integration" A model for corporate profitability but...not at all good for healthcare consumers.

The vertical integration concept makes good business sense, as it occurs when a company takes ownership of suppliers, distributors, or retail locations to obtain greater control of its supply chain.

This concept, however, has taken on considerable interest in the healthcare field. An article appeared in the April 12, 2018, publication; HealthcareDive, with a deep dive into the frenzy occurring at that time. While the article referenced three companies including Aetna, Cigna and Humana, it specifically addressed a fourth—UnitedHealth and its formation of Optum. That formation combined existing pharmacy (Optum Rx) and care delivery services within the company in 2011. In the first quarter of 2024, OptumRx, a subsidiary of UnitedHealth Group, generated \$35 billion in revenue.

The relevance of Optum's (and two other pharmacy benefit manager's) ever-increasing financial gain was recognized by an FTC complaint issued in September 2024. The FTC Act prohibits "unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce" and "unfair methods of competition." A brief summary of that issue was addressed the February edition of Reaching Out. Unfortunately, the above case involves a large number of requests from 24 third parties and up to 17 expert witnesses. As a result, the hearing at FTC was rescheduled from August, 2025 to January, 2026. Our hope is for that hearing to fully recognize, confirm and apply the law to those "vertical marketing" efforts conducted by those three and other like-minded pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs).

One might ask if there are alternatives to the marketing strategies used by companies as those stated above? Fortunately, yes, right in our own back yard!!

In 2003, NAVITUS, a Madison-based organization, was formed and today has over 18 million members from 800 clients. The company is jointly owned by SSM Health and Costco Wholesale Corporation, and operates as a division of SSM Health. Their mission is "to provide transparent cost-effective solutions that prioritize affordability and improve care." Their Business Model is totally dissimilar to the above-mentioned PBMs.

NAVITUS neither receives rebates nor participates in "spread chasing," operating on just a set fee, and returns 100% of all negotiated drug rebates, discounts, and fees. NAVITUS is participating in federal PBM reform bills signed to reshape PBM operations to include:

- Expanded reporting requirements, mandating detailed disclosures
- Medicaid changes; prohibiting "spread pricing"
- PBM Act; Prohibit pharmacy ownership by PBM's
- Bona Fide fees; definition of acceptable compensation
- Inflation Reduction Act – pharmacy reimbursement provisions: specific reimbursement provisions on negotiated drugs.

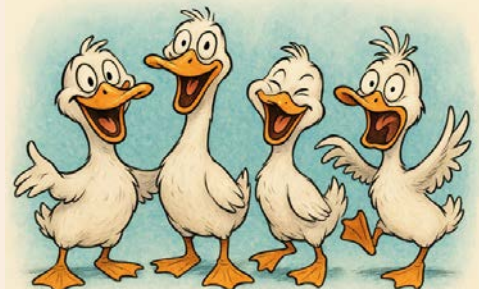
This is a topic in which we all have interest, and we will continue to follow its evolution.

Bill McCullough, PPE Chair

Email: webirish5all@gmail.com

Life is not a dress rehearsal. Laugh with friends. Splash in puddles. Dance in the rain. Have fun.
There is no "DO OVER" to your life.
Don't worry - choose to be HAPPY!
Be thankful for today. You only see it once.

"Together, ordinary people can achieve extraordinary results." - Becka Schoettle



Around the State

SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital has donated \$3,900 to the City of Ripon Parks and Recreation Department to support the Community Yoga - Chair Yoga and Yoga in the Park. The city Community Yoga program, which includes Chair Yoga and Yoga in the Park, aims to improve physical and mental health for individuals of all ages and abilities, particularly those who may face barriers to traditional fitness programs. *(From SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital Auxiliary Newsletter May/June 2025)*

Aspirus Wausau Hospice program is collecting military uniforms to create meaningful keepsakes for veterans admitted into the program. These keepsakes will serve as a heartfelt tribute to their service and sacrifice. Together, we can show our gratitude to those who served. Your donation will help create a lasting, meaningful memento for veterans in hospice care. Donate any military uniform – all branches welcome (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard).



Marilyn McElligott

Gundersen Partners celebrates 75 years of service to Emplify Health by Gundersen. In honor of this milestone, Gundersen Partners has pledged \$75,000 to support the new EmPATH (Emergency Psychiatric Assessment, Treatment and Health) Unit at Emplify Health by Gundersen, the first in Wisconsin. This unit will deliver acute intervention for patients in a behavioral health crisis ensuring they receive immediate access to mental health professionals. EmPATH will provide each person space and time to calm themselves as their care team begins meeting their treatment needs. Clinical Operations Director for Behavioral Health Josh Court shared a heartfelt message of what the care offered in this new unit will mean to the community and patients. EmPATH is expected to open in early 2026. Another highlight of the event was honoring Marilyn McElligott, Partners Member of Distinction, past president, and historian for her gracious and quietly extensive dedication to Gundersen Partners as Ambassador and Advocate for the organization.

The Friends of Vernon Memorial Healthcare has funded a Nustep for therapies, a respiratory support device, and funds for the “Bundles of Joy” project.

Partners of The Richland Hospital & Clinics, Richland Center

The Partners organization had a very busy spring and a well-attended quarterly meeting in April. After receiving an update on renovations at the hospital by CEO Bruce Roesler, members learned about the new Community Pharmacy at The Richland Hospital. The traditional Spring Bloom sale was replaced by a Bake Sale and Lobby Shoppe Open House for Mother’s Day. They are piloting a change of hours in the Lobby Shoppe for the summer.

Partners nominated Volunteer Coordinator Sarah Stibbe for the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative Ambassador Award and she was selected by the hospital committee to receive the award. Sarah has done an excellent job promoting the hospital in the community, as well as promoting health care careers, most notably through re-vitalizing the Club Scrub Program. Richland Center Partners awarded six scholarships on July 16.



Sarah Stibbe Receives
2025 Rural Health Ambassador Award



CELEBRATING 100 YEARS
THE RICHLAND HOSPITAL
and Clinics

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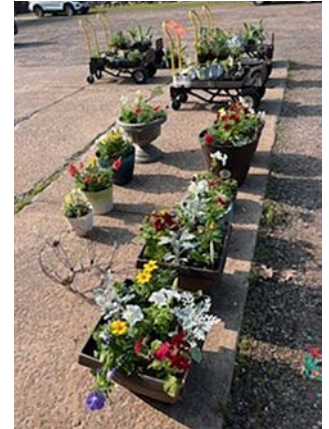
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Cumberland Healthcare Volunteer Partners

On June 6 and 7, the Cumberland Healthcare Volunteer Partners held their bi-annual garage sale. Donations were accepted from volunteers as well as items from the gift shop from the past two years that hadn't sold. The volunteers priced their items and dropped them off at the home of two volunteers who graciously allowed us to use their pole shed. The volunteers organized the items and got everything all set up. The garage sale ran from 8 am to 5 pm on Friday and 8 am to 12 pm on Saturday. Their efforts raised over \$1,100!



Cumberland Healthcare Volunteer Partners bi-annual garage sale



Apply for the Mary Licht Memorial Scholarship



Mary Licht

Mary Licht, state president of Partners in 2017, lost a courageous battle with breast cancer in September 2017. 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 and members of the Partners organization wished to continue Mary's legacy by establishing The Mary Licht Memorial Scholarship. This scholarship awards a first-time convention attendee their registration fee of \$150. Two (2) scholarships are available in 2025. The application can be found on the [Partners website](#) on the 2025 Conference webpage. Please consider and encourage a member of your organization to apply. **The application deadline is Sept. 1.**

**This little guys is here to help you
REMEMBER**

Go to Partnersofwha.org

**To register for the Partners Conference and
Membership Meeting**



Reaching Out Deadlines

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
November 2025	Friday, Oct. 17, 2025
February 2026	Friday, Jan. 16, 2026
May 2026	Friday, April 17, 2026
August 2026	Friday, July 10, 2026

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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