

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

Greetings Partners



Sharon Scott

Like all past presidents, drafting this article is bittersweet. It has been my honor to serve as Partners State President the past two years and be part of our organization's growth. It goes without saying that I have had the privilege to serve with an amazing group of individuals on the Partners Board of Directors who embraced challenges, changes, and seized opportunities to maintain the integrity of our

great organization.

I would like to share a brief overview of the past two years that focused on developing practical changes for our organization and paid attention to the requests and concerns of our membership.

- **Fiduciary duties:** making complex decisions to eliminate outdated expenses, developing credit card access as a payment option for convention purposes, and raising dues (on the overwhelming advice from membership) to allow a larger return to districts.
- **District merger:** successful discussions with the Northwestern, West Central and North Central districts to merge into the Northern District, thus allowing for better management of resources and allowing their volunteer base to remain valuable participants within our organization. Thank you to all the participants who had the vision and wherewithal to bring this to fruition.
- **Member-at-Large:** renewed this previous by-law, with new language, to welcome those Partners volunteers displaced by their organization's resignation from Partners of WHA. This will allow for continuation of their membership on an individual basis, receiving all benefits except for a different annual dues structure of \$10.00.
- **Conventions since the pandemic** have seen a major decline in attendance, and there has been difficulty identifying educational workshops and cost-effective venues. Necessary changes continue to be a work in progress. Thank you, Sheree Schaefer, for doing a spectacular job on the 2024 convention.

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A Message from the President-elect

Make Partners Your Passion

I am most honored and humbled to have been installed State President of the Partners of WHA at our 2024 convention. With the help and support of all of you, I will do my best to meet the challenge.



Julie Steiner

Partners is built on a strong leadership foundation. Despite experiencing a membership decline over the past few years, I feel fortunate that our current membership is fully committed to our state Partners organization. It's going to take all of us going that extra mile to build up our local organizations and invite additional healthcare volunteers into Partners so we can continue to carry out the many worthwhile projects that we undertake for the benefit of our communities. It was evident during our WAVE Awards recognition that our local member organizations continue to make outstanding contributions to our hospitals and communities. Congratulations as well to the 20 local organizations that received Honor Point Awards.

Your vote of support to allow members-at-large into our organization will allow volunteers who no longer have a local hospital in which to volunteer to continue to hold membership in Partners. In addition, our board of directors approved the merger of the Northwestern, North

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

- Partners reached out to the WADVS organization to renew and strengthen our relationship. Partners is very aware that new DVSS only have a vague understanding of Partners of WHA. We want to provide all the information possible to assist them as they move forward with their volunteers.
- Sadly, we have lost many volunteers—some through the closure of their hospitals, others due to inability to find volunteer leadership within their organizations, and still others that apparently lost interest in being members of Partners of WHA. We thank everyone for their valuable gifts of time and talent and perhaps a renewed interest may return them in the future.

Moving forward, with the assistance of our WHA Liaison, Leigh Ann Larson, a PowerPoint presentation is being developed to assist Partners in discussing the benefits of our organization with regional WHA Presidents/CEOs. Many hospitals have volunteers, but leadership is unaware how beneficial our organization would be for their respective organizations. Partners President Julie Steiner, Immediate Past President Sharon Scott, and valued Past President Peg Larson will be doing the presentations.

Again, thank you for your confidence in my abilities to lead Partners of WHA into a new chapter. I will admit to being aggressive, but also aware that challenges, changes, and opportunities need to be addressed. An extraordinary Board of Directors made all the accomplishments possible. I do believe awesome new executive officers have been installed and will continue working for the improvement and sustainability of Partners of WHA.

In closing, my health is improving daily. I have learned to have patience with the small setbacks and concentrate on the “baby steps” needed to heal. It is almost unimaginable what the past seven months have brought. Thank you, Julie Steiner, for being that formidable president-elect who stepped in for me, and to all our members who had patience and understanding during the past several months.

Sharon Scott

Partners of WHA President

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“Tell me something good!”



Leigh Ann Larson

I have recently returned from the annual Partners of WHA Convention in Stevens Point. As always, it was a wonderful opportunity to see old friends, to learn and to share the work WHA has been focused on this year. I left with many new ideas of how to partner with Partners of WHA to help fulfill the overall mission of WHA.

I also left this year's convention inspired. I'm inspired to share and tell the story of the magnificent work that Partners of WHA does for their hospitals, communities, patients and their families. This is where you come in and where I need your help.

Tell me something good! - I would like to know when your upcoming fundraising events are and when your upcoming community service projects are happening. Why? So I can come interview you, take some photos and learn more about your initiatives. I plan to take the information and photos and prepare articles and social media posts for all of the WHA member hospitals to read.

Wouldn't you love to share with the state hospitals what you are most proud of? We would love to help spread the word. Please contact me by email (llarson@wha.org) and let's figure out a time when I can visit.

I look forward to visiting and to inspire others the way you have inspired me.

Until next time,

Leigh Ann S. Larson

WHA Vice President of Education and Marketing;

Executive Director of the WHA Foundation;

Partners of WHA Liaison

Email: llarson@wha.org



A Message from the President-Elect...cont'd. from page 1

Central and West Central Districts into a strong seven-member Northern District.

Thank you Sheree Schaefer, our 2024 convention chair for your untiring work to make sure our convention met everyone's expectations. And thank you to the Merrill and Wausau volunteers for providing volunteer support.

Our state board is eager to promote the value that Partners brings to the table. Partners leadership is working to develop an educational presentation geared toward WHA hospital leaders and directors of volunteer services to inform them of our advocacy, education, leadership, and service efforts.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank President Sharon Scott and the entire Partners Board who I've had the pleasure of working with and of course, all of you! I will continue to depend on your support as we work together to spread the word about the value of Partners and focus our efforts on retaining, developing, and growing our membership. Make Partners your passion!

Julie Steiner, Partners President-elect

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Convention 2024 Highlights

Our convention was a success! Attendees enjoyed our keynote speaker, Tom Thibodeau, whose infectious enthusiasm, compassion and commitment to leadership and service inspired us once again. We also took away useful information from our six workshops on Pet Therapy, Dealing with Grief, Hospice Volunteering, Fraud, Gift Shops and Family House.

Eight vendors had their merchandise on display on Wednesday. I hope you purchased some great gifts as well as items for yourself. The Nutman was pleased with his sales.

We installed Julie Steiner as our President, Cindy Hermel as President-elect, Terri Donlin as Secretary and Peg Larson as Treasurer.

Our closing speaker, Yolanda Voigt, Director of Aspirus Volunteers, Guest Services gave us an educational history of Volunteerism in America and Volunteering in Healthcare.

Thank you to our 2024 convention sponsors:

GOLD

- Wisconsin Hospital Association
- Gundersen Moundview Hospital and Clinics, Friendship

SILVER

- Granite Hills Hospital, West Allis
- Aspirus Medford Hospital & Clinics
- Froedtert & The Medical College of Wisconsin
- Fort Memorial Hospital – Fort Atkinson

BRONZE

- Prairie Ridge Health – Columbus

SPONSOR

- Edgerton Hospital and Health Services

Due to our lower convention participation the past two-to-three years, a Partners sub-committee will look at ways to change the convention experience. There will be updates in future *Reaching Out* newsletters.

On a personal note, I want to acknowledge the many condolences and kind words expressed to Mark and I after the death of my son. I didn't know how I was going to handle it, but your friendship made it possible to enjoy the convention. Thank you all.

Sheree Schaefer
Convention chair



Convention 2024 Photos



Keynote speaker Tom Thibodeau delivered another motivational message on servant leadership.



The color guard team of VFW Post 10262 of Plover posted the colors at the start of Convention 2024.



Partners Past Presidents in attendance included Peg Larson, Ann Bergmann, Jan Molaska and Mark Schaefer.



Bonnie Koelsch and Linda Voelz of Merrill welcomed convention attendees at registration.



Past Partners President Mike Schaefer installing the newly elected officers.

Convention 2024 Photos (continued)



Board members seated at the dias included Bill McCullough, PPE Chair; Cindy Hermel, CHE Chair; John Tully, Treasurer; Iva Mulhern, Secretary; Robert Schuck, Parliamentarian; and standing, Julie Steiner, President-elect.



Volunteers Penny Miller Lewis and David Lewis and their therapy dog Colby.



Julie Steiner installed the officers of the newly merged Northern District: Sheree Schaefer, secretary-treasurer; Ann Bergmann, chair-elect; Co-chairs Donella Christianson and Ramona Hornischer.



Ramona Hornischer is busy with pre-convention preparations.



Convention 2024 in session.

Convention 2024 Photos (continued)



The Partners 2024 Board of Directors gathered for a group photo. Board members include Pat Freeders, Peg Larson, Cindy Hermel, John Tully, Julie Steiner, Ramona Hornischer, Iva Mulhern, Terri Donlin, Patricia Franks, Sheree Schaefer, Donna Nelson, Sue Schuelke, Ginny Bosse, Donella Christianson and Leigh Ann Larson.



The 2024 Convention Crew: Clark Loeffel, Mark Schaefer, Linda Holdorf, Teresa Baker, Sheree Schaefer, Jane Hanson, Ramona Hornischer, Vicki Hilfiger, Linda Voelz, Bonnie Koelsch.



CEO panelists were David Hartberg, Viroqua; Marc Augsburg, Edgerton; and John Russell, Columbus.

WAVE Awards Presented

Thank you to all who submitted programs for the WAVE awards. We read about wonderful things that were happening in hospitals across the state. It was difficult to choose only one winner in each category.

Thanks to Linda Holdorf, Pauline Lundgren, Linda Gillette and Leigh Ann Larson. They made the task of choosing the winners less difficult

On the Partners website you may review the WAVE award winners from the past several years. If you are looking for a new program to add to your local projects this listing is a great resource. Feel free to contact any of the award winners for assistance as they are always happy to share their winning programs.

Pat Freeders, 2024 WAVE chair

WAVE Awards Presented at Convention 2024

Community Service Program



Partners of Marshfield Medical Center - Ladysmith
"STOP THE BLEED"

Fundraising Program



Cumberland Healthcare Volunteer Partners
"TRAVELING GIFT SHOP"

In-service Hospital Program



Friends of Vernon Memorial Healthcare, Viroqua
"BUNDLES OF JOY"

Community Outreach and/or Collaboration



Partners of Marshfield Medical Center, SSM
Health St. Mary's Madison Volunteers
"BASKET OF HOPE FOOD INSECURITY
PROGRAM"

Congratulations to the Partners of WHA 2024 Honor Point Award Winners!



New Officers Elected



Peg Larson

Through a series of circumstances, the nominating committee was unable to prepare a 2024-2025 slate of officers for Partners. At the convention, eligible candidates stepped forward and were duly elected. Thank you to all who participated.

Cindy Hermel will serve two years as president-elect and will then become president. Terri Donlin will serve a two-year term as secretary. Peg Larson will serve a two-year term as treasurer.

We know there are very capable individuals in each local organization with amazing expertise in many areas. Please help us find them to help lead the great organization that Partners is.

Peg Larson, Immediate Past President

Email: pegvoluntr@hotmail.com

Meet Cindy Hermel, Partners President-elect

I have been a member of Partners since 2007. During that time, I have served as a local, district and state public policy education chair, North Central district chair, and state community health education chair. I have had the opportunity to work with many Partners members on a variety of committees including Best of the Best, bylaws, strategic planning, Committee of Three and WAVE. I volunteer at Aspirus Wausau Hospital and serve on the volunteer board as PPE Chair.

It has been a pleasure to participate in Partners and to have the opportunity to learn how to support and advocate for Wisconsin hospitals and the patients they serve. I have enjoyed the privilege to meet Partners members from across the state and consider them friends. I have great memories of Advocacy Day, convention themes and activities as well as district meetings on Spring Tour. One of the best parts of these events was hearing about all the creative and beneficial projects Partners volunteers were doing for hospitals and patients in their communities.

Meet Terri Donlin, Partners Secretary

I began as a volunteer with SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital, Madison in June of 2015. My connection to St. Mary's goes back to my birth there over 60 years ago. My grandfather was a doctor at St. Mary's and my mother was a volunteer at St. Mary's for 28 years. I volunteered for St. Mary's while still working full time. Now retired, I serve in many roles there.

I started going to Partners annual conventions in 2019 and was chair of the Partners Convention in 2021. In 2021 I was elected chair-elect in her local organization. In 2022, I took on the role of chair for St. Mary's Partners organization. In 2023 I was installed as the chair of the Southern District. At the Partners of WHA State Convention in early October, I was nominated for the state secretary role for Partners and accepted the challenge because I believe in the mission of Partners.

I have a bachelor's degree in business management from Cardinal Stritch University and a Professional Coaching Certificate from the University of Wisconsin - Madison. I believe in the Partners mission and will continue to work to promote the education and advocacy of health care to volunteers across the state and in our local communities.

Meet Peg Larson, Partners State Treasurer

I am a member of Ascension Mercy Hospital Volunteers, Oshkosh, and have been on the Partners board since 2009. Terms have included District Chair, Convention Chair, Parliamentarian, Treasurer, President-elect, President, and now Past President. Partners is an amazing organization of dedicated individuals with amazing skills. I am honored to have the opportunity to serve as Treasurer again.

I have my bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of Hartford (Connecticut). I spent three years as an external financial auditor and three years as an internal auditor. I then retired to raise children and do good things for our community. I stay in touch with the industry through various organizations that I volunteer with. John Tully has significantly upped our game over the last four years, so I hope I am up to the task. Thank you for your confidence. If you have a local member with financial expertise who is looking for more involvement in Partners, please let me know.

Community Health Education Report

The Impact of Loneliness on Physical and Mental Health



Cindy Hermel

Loneliness is a growing problem with substantial physical and mental health risks. Research shows loneliness and social isolation may be as detrimental to your health as obesity and smoking, and significantly impacts mental health.

Persistent loneliness is associated with higher rates of heart disease, depression, anxiety, and dementia. While it impacts people of all ages and backgrounds, some people are more at risk than others. Much of the research has focused on older adults; however, recent surveys show loneliness is especially high among teens and young adults. Loneliness is a common experience with 80% of the population below 18 years of age and 40% of the population above 65 years of age reporting loneliness at some time in their life.

People with poor physical health, those with pre-existing mental health concerns, and people who live alone are more likely to be lonely. Life transitions and disruptions, such as going away to college, moving, becoming a parent, retiring, or losing a partner can also increase the risk of loneliness and social isolation.

There are three types of loneliness: **Situational loneliness** is caused by environmental factors such as unpleasant experiences, inter-personal conflicts, accidents, and disasters. **Developmental loneliness** may be caused by perceived personal inadequacies, developmental deficits, significant separations, poverty, and physical or psychological deficits. **Internal loneliness** may be caused by personality factors such as low self-esteem, guilt feelings, and poor coping skills.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, a variety of approaches can be used to address loneliness, including increasing availability and access to community activities. Health promotion efforts can raise awareness about the importance of social connection and emphasize the health benefits of maintaining social relationships.

Australia and the United Kingdom have been active in addressing the problem of loneliness. In Australia, community volunteers visit isolated older adults as part of a National Community Visitors Program. The Campaign to End Loneliness in the United Kingdom provides public awareness and health promotions, supports individuals and sponsors with specific-themed social activities and provides transportation for participants. In the United States, the Connect2Affect Program is a collaborative effort between AARP, the Gerontological Society of America, Give an Hour, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and the UnitedHealth Group to address the issue of social isolation among older adults. It offers an online assessment and links to resources, information, and research.

The recognition of loneliness as a significant health risk factor is relatively new. In *“Loneliness: Science and Practice”* by Phaedra Bell, PhD and Brian Lawlor, MD, they suggest screening patients for loneliness and other aspects of social connection at each doctor visit is just as important as measuring their blood pressure and other vital signs.

Let’s make a concerted effort to reach out to friends, neighbors and co-workers with a smile, a visit, a phone call just to say “Hi” and see how they are doing. It might be the highlight of their day.

Cindy Hermel, Community Health Education Chair; 715-848-3322(H); 715-573-0720(C); Email: clhermel@hotmail.com



Cindy Hermel leads a workshop on Dealing with Grief at Partners Annual Convention 2024.

Public Policy Education Report

The Value of Healthcare Volunteers, The Healthcare Workforce and The Continuity of Care Dilemma Addressed by CEO Panelists

Partners was fortunate to have a panel of exceptional CEOs at our 2024 convention. They came to us from hospitals where “Healthy Volunteer Partners Programs” are at work. WHA Director of Federal and State Relations Jon Hoelter served as moderator, directing the conversation toward those questions provided by our membership in advance. The panel included the following hospital CEOs: David Hartberg, Vernon Memorial Healthcare, Viroqua; John Russell, Prairie Ridge Health, Columbus; and Marc Augsburger, Edgerton Hospital & Health Services, Edgerton. Topics presented for discussion included the healthcare workforce, the continuing impact on hospitals post-COVID; and the changing role of volunteer programs.



Bill McCullough

Encouraging Student Interest in Healthcare

Each of the participating hospitals is just above the critical access (25 beds) category and all are near or fully staffed. Each CEO shared efforts they have employed to create interest in young adults at area schools. The effort is to “showcase” healthcare professions to fill voids due to retirements or for those who have left the healthcare profession. Technology offers an area of interest for students considering healthcare. Scholarships are available for students to engage in healthcare studies. Each hospital participates in that effort. Staff retention is a critical component, particularly post-pandemic as some healthcare staff left for “greener pastures.” Hospitals offer a Healthcare Academy for high school students to learn more about speech therapy specialists and other hands-on lab technology-type experiences. School based “Career Days” are a further activity to engage students in earning scholarships provided for studies in healthcare.

Prior Authorizations

Prior authorizations are critical to timely and appropriate healthcare. There has been a growing resistance by healthcare plans and providers to grant those authorizations. Recent studies have shown that Medicare Advantage plans initially deny prior authorization by up to 90%. The result is time delays and denial of medications and/or procedures. Ultimately 80% are approved but delays interject significant medical risk to patients who are waiting for “appropriate medical care.” A study by UW Health found that over \$18 million payroll dollars have been devoted to this problem. Unfortunately, some healthcare organizations gain financially from this delayed practice, one up to \$82 million dollars in corporate income.

Post-Acute Care/Continuity of Care Dilemma

This topic is a result of the COVID pandemic and the closure of many nursing homes during that period, causing shortages in staff. To date, it appears little improvement has been made and as a result, many patients stay in the hospital longer. Hospitals continue to incur cost without reimbursement.

Changing Nature of Healthcare Providers

There is a growing contingent of hospitals created by outside investors who are in the game to earn returns of more than 20% on their investment. A normal return for not-for-profit hospitals (NFP) is from 1-3%, while new “Private Equity Hospitals” earn upwards of a 20-30% return. All of this is occurring in a climate where earnings in safety net hospitals like HSHS Sacred Heart-Eau Claire and HSHS St. Joseph’s-Chippewa Falls were negative 45%! How does this happen, you ask? Private equity hospitals do not serve Medicare, Medicaid, or indigent care patients. This practice creates significant financial stress on our “traditional” hospitals.

What do Healthcare Volunteers Bring to Their Community Hospitals?

Post-hospital patient questionnaires reveal the value of services and attention provided by hospital volunteers. As one CEO stated, volunteers do much to add value and allow staff professionals to “stay in their lane” to do their job. Former employees are great volunteers and carry forward the value brought by their prior efforts. One hospital makes special non-nurse awards to volunteers. The volunteers walk in through the hospital doors with a voice of advocacy. One hospital devotes volunteer efforts toward follow-up of patient discharge questionnaires. The result is an opportunity to improve initial patient contact.

The process to identify participants for the CEO panel, those who represent an active Partners volunteer group, requires considerable effort from the convention committee. Further, the panel moderator devotes time

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Strategic Planning Committee Report

Strategic planning goals for 2023/2024 included:

1. Reviewing districts for potential re-structuring/re-balancing. Creating a process for districts to merge if needed.
2. Reviewing the convention planning process and structure.
3. Reviewing membership structure and working with the by-laws committee to propose by-laws changes to accommodate individual members.

Goal #1

- Discussions involving district restructuring/rebalancing resulted in the merger of the Northwestern, West Central, and North Central districts into one district known as the **Northern District**.
- A procedure for district restructuring was developed and will be filed.

Goal #2

- The strategic planning committee put together a survey following the 2023 convention. The survey was posted on the partners website for two months and was sent to more than 100 members. Feedback was received from more than 100 respondents. The committee reviewed the feedback and made recommendations to the leadership board, which included:
 - Making convention easy to get to – keeping it centrally located.
 - Having a different length of convention every other year.
 - Keeping speakers focused on healthcare and what volunteers provide.
 - Using previous WAVE award winners to present workshops.

****Due to decreased Partners membership and decreased attendance at the Convention, further changes are likely.****

Goal #3

- The strategic planning committee, along with the by-laws committee wrote modifications to the by-laws allowing for individual memberships. These were published in two newsletters prior to the 2024 Fall Convention. The changes to allow individual memberships to the Partners of WHA were approved during the Partners' Annual Business Meeting on Wednesday, October 2nd, 2024.

Thank you to the committee members for your commitment to Partners, development of goals, and input – Sharon Scott, Julie Steiner, Leigh Ann Larson, Iva Mulhern, John Tully, Cindy Hermel, Bill McCullough, Peg Larson, Sue Schuelke, and Ann Bergmann.

Terri Donlin and Sherry Jelic, Co-chairs of Partners of WHA Strategic Planning Committee

Public Policy Education Report...continued from page 11

to identify topics that enhance our members knowledge and understanding of healthcare issues. And most importantly, these knowledgeable and extremely busy CEOs willingly commit their time for our benefit. For this committee to continue and encourage those stated collective efforts, it is our sincere hope that this portion of your convention experience will rank higher than just 5-6%, as revealed in the recent Survey Monkey, made available to our entire volunteer membership.

“Advocacy is knowledge made visible.”

Bill McCullough, PPE Chair
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Reaching Out Deadlines

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
February 2025	Friday, Jan. 10, 2025
May 2025	Friday, April 11, 2025
August 2025	Friday, July 11, 2025
November 2025	Friday, Nov. 14, 2025

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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