

# The Gift of Time

## Providence volunteers play key role in the patient experience

**F**or the hundreds of volunteers at Providence Park Hospital in Novi, one guiding principle stands above the rest: “I have the time.”

Kathy Zaguroli, manager of volunteer services for the Providence campuses in Novi and Southfield, will always remind her volunteers that quality over quantity is what matters most when it comes to patient care.

“A lot of times, patients and families will say how they know everyone is so busy at the hospital ... and they’re almost reluctant to approach you,” Zaguroli said. “But volunteers are taught to find that extra time, because all of us want to provide an exceptional patient experience. It’s not how many patients our volunteers can visit during a shift, but rather the experience and connection they can make with each one that really counts.”

They serve as greeters when someone comes through the front door. They work at the gift shop, where they’re always willing to help with a purchase or lend an ear. They stroll the hallways with Doc and Parker, the two hospital therapy dogs who are always on the lookout to comfort someone.

“Most people think of hospitals as doctors and nurses,” said Zaguroli. “But our volunteers help out in so many areas.”

Novi resident Lou Grieshaber first became involved with Providence Park as a patient, when he was admitted to the hospital at the age of 59 for a debilitating lung disease. Today, he’s a 14-year volunteer at Providence Park, having logged more than 18,000 hours of service.

“A Providence doctor saved my life, and I wanted to give back,” he said. “I’ve made a lot of friends here and it’s just a big part of my life.”

One day each week, he volunteers as a therapy dog handler. He gets to walk around and visit patients with Doc, a four-year-old Labrador Retriever who loves attention.

“You take off his working vest and he’s a big puppy,” said Grieshaber, 74.

“And he’s always the star – if I have a day where I visit 50 patients, two will remember my name and the rest will remember his name.”

### Five-star service

The volunteer greeters at the front entrances are referred to as concierges. And like a hotel concierge, these volunteers will approach the “guests” to make sure all their needs are met.

“They’re truly looking ahead to anticipate someone’s needs and how they can help out,” Zaguroli said. “They’ll often walk people to their destinations rather than give directions.”

They help in the office with filing paperwork and answering phones. They assist with the inventory, help transport patients and make sure the supply closets are always well-stocked.

Diane Rosone volunteers at the hospital gift shop. Her daughter Marisa, 18, a senior at Northville High School, volunteered at Providence over the summer and is now doing an internship there with the goal of becoming a nurse anesthetist.

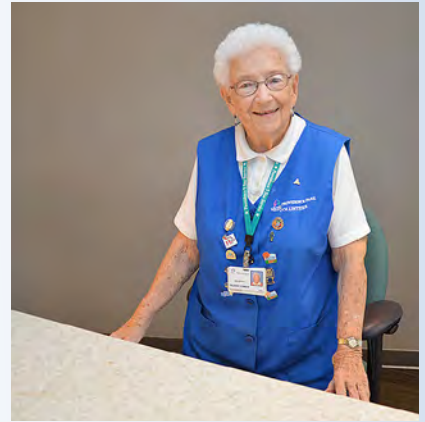
“I love volunteering at the hospital – it’s very rewarding in so many ways,” Diane Rosone said. “Everyone has their own story ... some of them are really joyful, others very sad, but they all seem to have a way of making you appreciate life and what it has to offer.”

Providence Park also offers a summer volunteer program for teenagers. Students must be at least 16 to apply, and they typically need to be available all summer for a four-hour shift each week. Last summer, over 100 students applied.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity for them to explore careers,” Zaguroli said. “We just ask that you make sure you’re applying because this is something you want to pursue, and not because you’re filling a school requirement.”

During the school year, the hospital partners with Novi and other schools, where students get the opportunity to roll up their sleeves and assist the Providence Park staff. As with all the volunteer positions, the work involves minimal risk and does not allow any hands-on interaction with the patients.

At the other end of the spectrum the hospital has an army of senior volunteers like Grieshaber, who provide a lifetime of valuable skills and experience.



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### Finding comfort

Along with being a hospital volunteer, Grieshaber serves as a board member with the Providence Park League, an independent nonprofit that has pledged \$1.5 million to the Novi campus. So far, the group has raised over \$1 million toward that pledge.

And the oldest volunteer? That would be 93-year-old Eileen Cowen, a South Lyon resident who serves as a concierge at the hospital's northeast entrance.

There are volunteer groups that knit blankets for patients at Providence Park, bringing a dose of comfort and a splash of color into the hospital room. There are also groups like the Teen Advisory Board at the Novi Public Library that make inspirational greeting cards for patient meal trays.

There are volunteers who support hospice patients. They'll stay in the room with the patient even if the person is not alert to provide a spiritual presence and comfort to the family.

"The one thing I've heard from patients who are dying is the fear of pain and being alone," Zaguroli said. "We can't do a lot for pain, but being alone literally takes someone being there."

What does it take to become a volunteer? It's easy – just fill out an application on the hospital website at [stjohnprovidence.org](http://stjohnprovidence.org). A background check is required for every volunteer, along with an orientation process and a minimum commitment of six months for a total of about 100 hours.

Applicants can share a preference for where they'd like to volunteer, or they can move around the hospital to try out new areas. Zaguroli said she likes to keep volunteers in one position for at least three months, especially if it's a good fit.

Rosone said her daughter first started community volunteer work at the age of 15, after a middle school teacher taught the class about the personal benefits of giving to the greater good. It's a message that resonated with the whole family.

"I always tell my friends there is something for everyone at the hospital," Rosone said. "At the gift shop, you're in there for more than retail – you're there to support people. We get a lot of people

who come in and have a story, and they need that distraction. We're there to help them feel better and to comfort them. If that's not for you, the hospital has lots of other areas where you can use your talents and skills."

