

Caring Partners

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Simulator puts distracted driving to the test

It only takes a few seconds to send a text message. But if you're behind the wheel when you do, those few seconds could change — or even end — your life. Or someone else's.



Ruthie Peterson, a senior at Fairmont Junior/Senior High School, uses the distracted driving simulator while Peggy Sue Garber watches Peterson through the simulation.

Mayo Clinic Health System is helping drive home the dangers of texting while driving (and other bad habits) with a new distracted driving simulator. The device, purchased with donations from Mayo Clinic Health System foundations in Southwestern Minnesota, looks like a video game console and mimics driving through the use of a steering wheel and foot pedals. “Drivers” can wear goggles designed to mimic intoxication to slow their response time, or use a cell phone to attempt to navigate the system while texting. The system keeps track of mistakes, letting users experience the consequences of distracted driving without putting themselves or anyone else at risk.

“In real life, there isn’t anyone keeping track of your mistakes and near misses so people think they are texting and driving safely,” says Peggy Sue Garber, trauma coordinator for Fairmont and injury prevention coordinator for the Southwestern Minnesota Region of Mayo Clinic Health System. “But the reality is, they aren’t. And the simulator makes that pretty clear.”

Garber has taken the simulator to businesses, community events, and — perhaps most importantly — area schools. The goal: to decrease the number of people who make bad choices behind the wheel.

“The simulator has improved our ability to get our message out,” she says. “Showing people a PowerPoint presentation outlining the risks of distracted driving just doesn’t have the same power as hands-on technology, especially for students. Kids learn

best through hands-on activities.

The simulator makes the learning process fun for them, while teaching a powerful lesson that sticks with them.”

Students are an important audience for another reason says Traci Lardy, dean of students at Fairmont Junior/Senior High School.

“Young people often believe they’re invincible,” says Lardy, also a member of the board of Mayo Clinic Health System in Fairmont. “They just don’t think something bad is going to happen to them.”

The simulator helps reveal the truth: Distracted driving can greatly increase anyone’s chance of getting in an accident. According to the Centers for Disease Control, distracted driving plays a part in more than eight deaths and 1,161 injuries in the United States each day.

By taking this message to the schools, Garber hopes to reach new drivers before they develop bad habits. She’s encouraged by what she’s experienced so far.

“Kids want to know how to be better drivers and stay safe behind the wheel,” she says. “We have a lot of really great kids out there who really want to do the right thing.”

And so do the grown-ups in their lives.

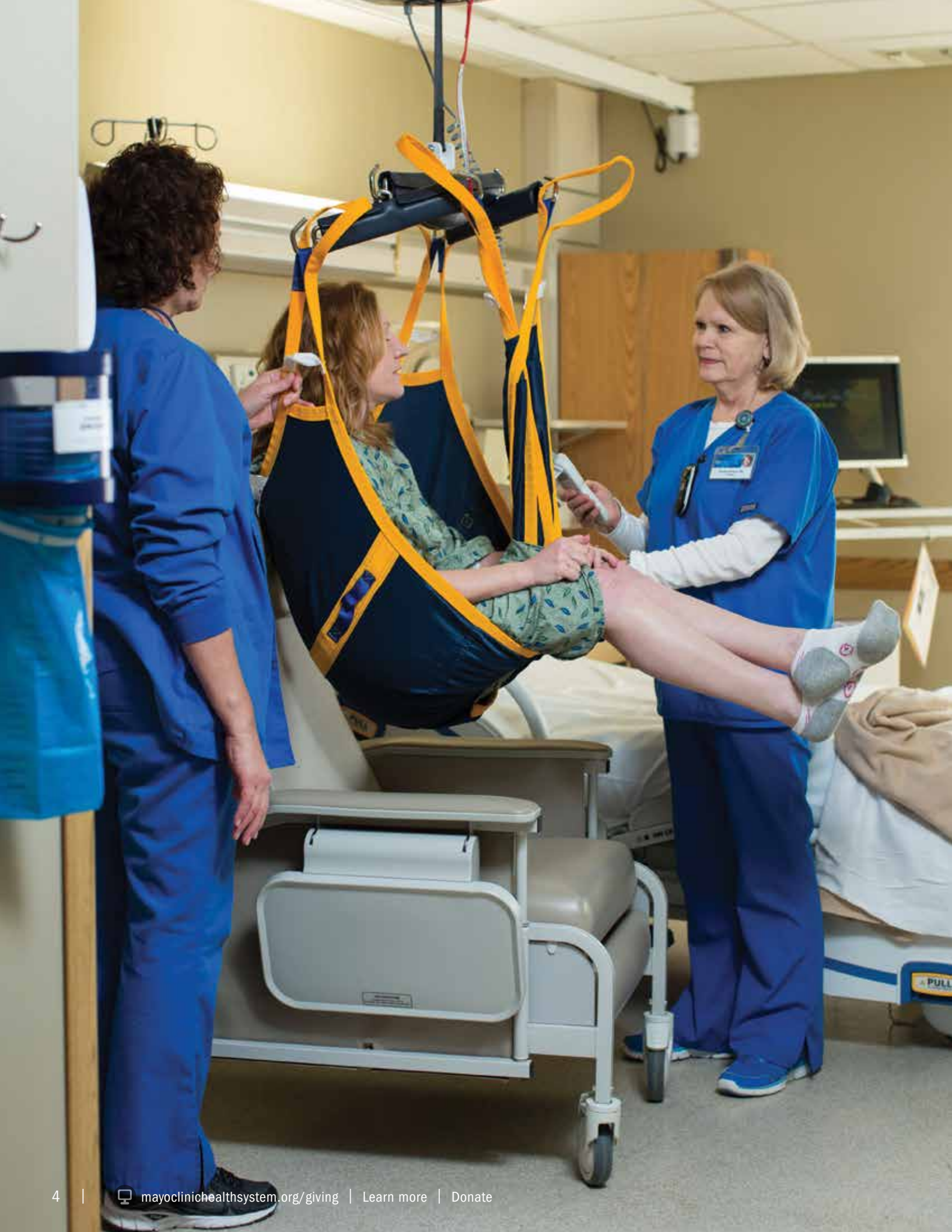
“Our kids’ safety is our utmost, No. 1 concern,” says Kim Niss, principal of Fairmont Junior/Senior High School. “We want to do anything we can to help them make healthy choices and good decisions. And we’re very lucky to have Mayo so close by to help us do that.” ●

“In real life, there isn’t anyone keeping track of your mistakes and near misses so people think they are texting and driving safely. But the reality is, they aren’t. And the simulator makes that pretty clear.”

Peggy Sue Garber (left), is the trauma coordinator for Fairmont and injury prevention coordinator for the Southwestern Minnesota Region of Mayo Clinic Health System.



Gail Norris (right), is a registered nurse and regional manager of Trauma Services at Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato.



Patient care and staff safety improve, thanks to ceiling lifts purchased with your donations

At first glance, nursing might not seem like a high risk profession. But as anyone who has worked in the field can tell you, the job can take a toll on the body — especially the back. And one of the main contributors to back injuries among nurses is also an essential part of the job: lifting and moving patients.

“Employee injuries due to patient transfers and positioning are commonplace in health care,” says Jan Ruhland, a registered nurse and patient care manager at Mayo Clinic Health System in New Prague. Moving patients can also create a risk for the patients themselves.

Fortunately, there’s a solution: ceiling lifts.

“Ceiling lifts help nursing staff and other direct care providers more safely care for patients who can’t move on their own,” says Ruhland. Although lifts are not needed for everyone, the addition of lifts for immobile patients has improved the safety and care for patients and staff. Last year, thanks to the generosity of benefactors, Mayo Clinic Health System in New Prague installed ceiling lifts in two patient rooms. Staff and patients are already seeing the results.

“We’ve seen an improvement related to patient handling in our inpatient settings,” says Ruhland. “The lifts have helped with the ease and accessibility of safe patient handling.”

Franny Tuma was among those who made a donation to help purchase the lifts. She saw the benefits of lifts when her husband, John, was hospitalized before his death in 2015.

“The lifts make it so much easier for nursing staff to move patients from the bed to a chair or into the bathroom,” says Tuma. “I don’t know how nurses move immobile patients without lifts.”

Ruhland says the lifts are easy to use and safe and comfortable for patients. Tuma saw that firsthand during her husband’s hospitalization.

“It was into the harness and away he’d go,” she says. “The lifts just improve comfort all around. It’s a marvelous way to transport people.”

Ruhland is grateful for donors like Tuma.

“I’m very thankful for the community’s support of this equipment,” she says. “I feel blessed to live and work in a community that supports fundraising events like Wonderland in the Park that help improve the care we provide to our patients.”

That appreciation goes both ways.

“We’re so fortunate in New Prague to have good medical care,” says Tuma, a longtime donor to the medical center. “I’m a lifelong resident, and it’s wonderful to be served by someone you know. There’s a history there. It’s like family. The care is fantastic.”

Your gifts help purchase much-needed medical equipment that helps improve patient care and safety. To donate to Mayo Clinic Health System — New Prague Foundation, please call the Development Office at 952-257-8123 or 1-800-584-6667, ext. 5460 (toll-free).

“I’m very thankful for the community’s support of this equipment.”

Jan Ruhland, registered nurse and patient care manager, Mayo Clinic Health System in New Prague

Welcome home: Waseca creates dedicated space for student nurses

For nursing students, a clinical rotation at a community hospital can also be an extended job interview. Staff have a chance to observe students to determine who would make the best employees.

“We like to recruit nurses we know have been well-trained,” says Abby Bartz, a registered nurse and patient care manager at Mayo Clinic Health System in Waseca. “We definitely want to recruit the best students we can, because they’re our future nursing staff. We want the best of the best taking care of our patients.”

At the same time, students are making evaluations of their own. Does the staff seem welcoming? Do I feel like I belong? Is there a place for me here?

Thanks to the generosity of the Waseca community, the answer to the last question is now an unqualified “yes.” Donations were used to create a student nurse clinical preparation room. Student nurses now have a private, dedicated space to prepare to care for patients.

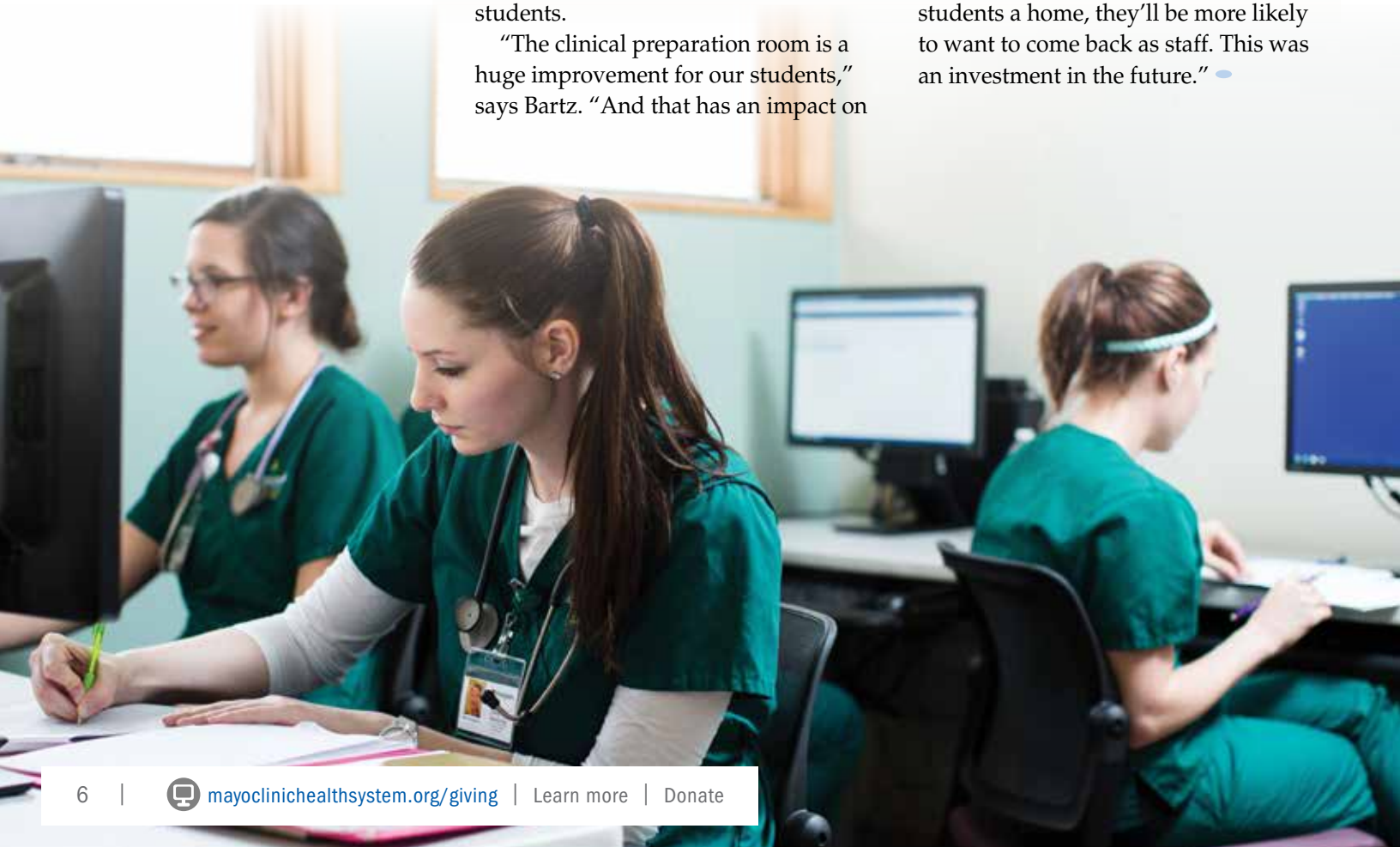
Having a place for students means Waseca’s education programs can grow. Currently, Waseca hosts 32 nursing students a year. That number is expected to double now that the hospital is better equipped to house students.

“The clinical preparation room is a huge improvement for our students,” says Bartz. “And that has an impact on

patient care. Our students now have the space and resources to research and learn about each patient before participating in that patient’s care.”

Funds supplied computers, desks, chairs and smaller miscellaneous items for the space, as well as the wiring and electrical work needed to secure the space. Students can now discuss patients privately with their nursing instructors, have access to computers to review patients’ medical records and have a safe place to store their personal belongings while on the job.

“Before we had this space, students would cluster in the hallway to review information and prepare to see patients,” says Sabrina Ehmke, a registered nurse, nursing education specialist and academic coordinator for the Southwest Minnesota Region of Mayo Clinic Health System. “There wasn’t a good place for their coats and boots. Now, it’s a calmer, more organized environment. This is a strong sign to students that the Waseca community values them. By giving students a home, they’ll be more likely to want to come back as staff. This was an investment in the future.” •





Ben Luense, Stephanie Jensen, Mike Reiner, Mike Rogotzke and Russell Rogotzke are part of the all-volunteer team of valets in Springfield.

Volunteer valets are at your service in Springfield

Not rain, nor sleet, nor snow will deter the post office — or the valet team at Mayo Clinic Health System in Springfield. The all-volunteer crew is available to greet patients, transport them to appointments, and park and retrieve cars, regardless of what Mother Nature throws at them.

“People love the service,” says Scott Thoreson, administrator at Mayo Clinic Health System in Springfield. “Some people even schedule their appointments around times the valets are available.”

Thoreson recruited Ben Luense to help launch the service back in 2012, after hearing patients comment on the difficulty of getting into the building during bad weather.

“I thought it was a great idea,” says Luense. “It’s a wonderful service to the community. And it feels good to be able to be of assistance to people.”

James Asmus also answered the call to service. He’s at his post every Monday morning, rain or shine.

“It’s enjoyable to help people out and chat with folks,” says Asmus. “I think it says a lot about the community that we offer this for free.”

Thoreson, who believes this is the state’s only medical center with an all-volunteer valet service, says the program has grown to include 18 volunteers. Luense says the team would like to recruit more.

“We’d like to be able to offer consistent scheduling every morning of the week,” he says. “Right now, the schedule

varies from week to week, depending on the volunteers’ availability.”

Luense and Asmus both say their roles are fun and flexible.

“It’s a lot of fun to visit with people as they’re coming and going,” says Asmus. “And you don’t have to make a huge commitment. We have farmers who only volunteer in the winter, and snowbirds who volunteer in the summer. It takes just a little bit of time and really makes a difference for patients.”

Thoreson agrees.

“When they’re on duty, the valets are the very first faces patients see at the medical center,” he says. “Most of the valets have lived in the community for years and can greet many patients by name. The day always goes better when we have a valet out front.”

To learn how you can make a difference by becoming a volunteer valet in Springfield, please call 507-723-7729. Other volunteer opportunities are also available.

Three of a kind: Longtime friends support each other through surgery, recovery in St. James

Like many longtime friends, Connie Belgard, Vanessa Kettner and Kim Wills have supported each other through life's ups and downs. But they took that support to a new — and unique — level in November 2015, when the Truman women each had double-knee replacement surgery. On the same day. Performed by the same surgeon. Or, as they wrote on a poster commemorating their experience: "3 great friends. 1 good surgeon. 6 really bad knees."

Each woman had been living with knee pain for years. And each had contemplated surgery. But it wasn't until Belgard decided to schedule the procedure that Kettner and Wills decided they were ready to take the plunge as well. Their plan earned them a few nicknames — the trio, the triplets, the threesome — and lots of smiles from their caregivers at Mayo Clinic Health System in St. James.

"We thought it was really neat that they saw themselves as their own support group," says Mike Kern, a physical therapist who was part of the group's rehabilitation team after surgery. "It's hard to imagine three people so close would all need two knees done at the same time. It was a pretty cool plan on their parts."

And also a pretty effective one. "We've been a great support system for each other," says Wills. "We'd text each other to compare notes right after surgery."

Once they were mobile, the friends would push their walkers through the halls of the medical center's Transitional Care Unit, which provides care to patients who are ready to leave the hospital, but not yet ready to return home.

"We'd take turns visiting each other's rooms," says Belgard.

The union of forces didn't end there. The women, friends since high school, coordinated their physical therapy appointments as well.

"At first we thought we'd be able to carpool," says Kettner. But they soon discovered that each would need a driver, and separate vehicles. They couldn't bend their legs enough to sit in the back seat, so they each had to ride up front.

But once they arrived at the Physical Therapy Department in St. James, they were able to visit and cheer each other on.

"They are all so upbeat, and so supportive of each other," says Kern. "Having an upbeat, positive attitude really helps during recovery."

Those attitudes are a plus in caregivers as well, and are among the reasons the trio chose to have therapy in St. James.

"We'd heard really good things about the care in St. James," says Kettner. "I felt like we were in really good hands there."

Kern says word of mouth is what brings a lot of patients through the doors.

"We have patients who drive a long way to see us," says Kern. "Many are not from the St. James area. Our team has a reputation of helping patients with complicated musculoskeletal issues — especially those who are living with chronic muscle and joint pain."

He believes the department's reputation is a direct reflection of his staff, many of whom have worked at the medical center since the 1990s.

"We have very low turnover," he says. "We work very well together, and all share the same commitment to our patients. We all want the best for them."

That includes the best equipment, something therapy patients value as well. Recently, a grateful patient donated money to purchase a second NuStep recumbent cross trainer





for the department. It's a machine all three women used during their recovery.

"Sometimes we'd have to wait to take our turn to use the NuStep," says Belgard. "It will be great for the department to have a second one."

Kern is grateful to the donors whose generosity helps enable the department to improve the care they provide. Many who give are past patients who know firsthand the difference their gifts can make.

"We can see our patients for many weeks, so we really get to know them well and they get to know us," says Kern. "They become friends of the department."

And as Belgard, Kettner and Wills know, friends take care of each other. •

Left to right: Mike Kern, Lyle Mortenson, Mike Tonsager and Dan Kern of the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation team in St. James helped a trio of friends recover after they each had double knee replacement surgery.

Below: Connie Belgard, Vanessa Kettner and Kim Wills (front) have been friends since high school. They drew on their shared history — and shared sense of humor — when supporting each other through knee replacement surgery and recovery.

Above: Kim Wills demonstrates the NuStep machine, which she and her friends used during their recovery.



Your donations help Mayo Clinic Health System in St. James continue to provide the kind of health care people are willing to travel for. To make a gift, please contact the Development Office at 507-385-2932 or 1-800-327-3721, ext. 2932 (toll-free).

Expert rehab team in Mankato helps put coach back in the game

May 7, 2015, started like many other days for Chris Willaert. “I woke up fine, ran a few miles, was feeling good,” says Willaert, director of the Mankato Sports Commission. But that afternoon, while chatting with coworkers, he suddenly felt a flash of pain in his chest.

“It felt like I’d been shot,” says Willaert, who sat down, feeling dizzy and lightheaded. His concerned coworkers asked if they should call an ambulance, but he waved them off. A few minutes later, he decided he’d go home and take a nap. But a quick conversation with his girlfriend changed his mind. “She told me to go to the hospital,” says Willaert. Fortunately, he listened and headed for the Emergency Department at Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato.

“I thought it would just turn out to be something I ate,” says Willaert. Instead, tests revealed he had an aortic aneurysm. When Willaert was told a Mayo One helicopter was on its way to take him to Mayo Clinic for treatment, he knew things were serious. “You don’t send

someone in a helicopter for a joyride,” he says.

At Mayo Clinic, Lyle Joyce, M.D., Ph.D., a cardiovascular surgeon, met with Willaert to explain the procedure he’d need to save his life. Though his girlfriend and parents peppered Dr. Joyce with questions, Willaert had just one: How long until I’m throwing a baseball again? “That’s when I’d know life was back to normal,” he says. The estimate: mid- to late-August.

Two days after surgery, Willaert got out of bed for the first time. “It felt like my chest fell out,” he says. “There was a 7 inch scar down the middle of my chest. My breast plate had been sawed in half.” Getting back on the baseball field by August seemed like a big goal.

“At the beginning they had to push me a little. I felt like I couldn’t do things. But then, further along, they did a really good job of knowing when to pull me back.”

Chris Willaert





But goals are something Willaert, a lifelong athlete and coach, knows all about. So when he got back home to Mankato and started cardiac rehabilitation at Mayo Clinic Health System, he was focused. “I approached therapy and recovery like an athlete,” he says. “What are my goals, and how do I get there?”

Chip Gay, a certified strength and conditioning specialist, helped Willaert develop a plan for recovery.

“Chris was motivated,” says Gay. “He’s a busy guy. He’s got work, kids, sports.”

That made Mankato’s cardiac rehabilitation program a great fit.

“We work as a team to develop time-efficient programs that get people results,” says Gay. For Willaert, that initially meant three weekly sessions that included cardiovascular activity as well as weight lifting. All of this was done under the watchful eye of Gay or one of his colleagues. “People in cardiac rehab need to start gradually and ease back into activity,” says Gay. “That can be tough for people like Chris who are used to working hard.”

Willaert says the team in Mankato knew when he needed to be encouraged — and when to slow down.

“At the beginning they had to push me a little,” he says. “I felt like I couldn’t do things. But then, further along, they did a really good job of knowing when to pull me back.”

The program worked. By the end of June, Willaert was pitching in the coach-pitch portion of his son’s baseball games. He credits the team in Mankato for getting him back on the field ahead of schedule.

“I can’t say enough about what they did for me,” he says. “I couldn’t have asked for recovery to go any better.”

Chris Willaert credits Chip Gay, left, with helping him regain strength and stamina after open chest surgery. “I owe what my life is like to the guys in cardiac rehab,” Willaert says.

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Community Charities of Minnesota presents \$4,000 check to the Mayo Clinic Health System - Mankato Health Care Foundation to support hospice

Hunt for Hospice is in its 10th year supporting hospice and palliative care at Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato. The event was founded by Mark and Peggy Fallenstein, who had a passion for hospice. Peggy continues the work on this unique fundraiser after losing Mark to cancer in 2015. The event is hosted each September at Traxler's Hunting Preserve in Le Center and provides area hunting enthusiasts a fun way to give back.



Left to right: Scott Michaletz, co-chair of the Hospice Family Fundraiser committee, Peggy Fallenstein, Laura Bowman, regional director of community relations and development for Mayo Clinic Health System, and Heather Tietz, community relations officer for the Southwestern Minnesota Region of Mayo Clinic Health System.

Caring Partners

Fairmont

Caring Partners is published twice yearly for the friends and benefactors of Mayo Clinic Health System.

Mankato

Information for *Caring Partners* stories is provided by Mayo Clinic Health System medical professionals. If you have medical questions about these stories and how they affect your health, please contact your physician.

New Prague

St. James

Springfield

Waseca

Mayo Clinic Health System in Fairmont has clinics in Armstrong, Iowa, and Blue Earth, Sherburn and Truman, Minn., Mayo Clinic Health System in New Prague has clinics in Belle Plaine, and Montgomery, Minn. Mayo Clinic Health System in Springfield has a clinic in Lamberton, Minn. Mayo Clinic Health System in St. James has a clinic in Trimont, Minn. Mayo Clinic Health System in Waseca has clinics in Waterville and Janesville, Minn.

To make a donation

Mail checks to: (Please note the medical center location you are supporting.)

Mayo Clinic Health System
1025 Marsh Street, Mankato, MN 56001-4752

To make a donation online:

mayoclinichealthsystem.org/giving

Call toll free:

Jamie Sammon at 800-327-3721 ext. 2932

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