

# THE Importance of . Caring

JUNE 2023

my journey into volunteering



## Vikki Mihulka

PATIENT CARE AMBASSADOR/MEALS ON WHEELS

Vikki Mihulka is a retired licensed practical nurse who started in health care in 1973. She started her career as a nurse's aide in Schuyler, Nebraska, and never imagined she would be a nurse. She fell in love with the profession and never looked back. Mihulka worked at Columbus Community Hospital for 38 years before retiring.

She has been an active volunteer outside the hospital, including participating with her church care ministry team and Meals on Wheels before the hospital took on the program. At that point, she never thought she would volunteer at the hospital.

Then something changed. Angie Ramaekers, volunteer and guest services director, approached Mihulka about a new volunteer program called patient care ambassadors. The ambassadors would advocate for patients, provide direction to patients and families and be there for them. Initially, she was hesitant but realized this was her true calling and favorite part of nursing — spending time with patients, getting to know them and finding ways to help.

Considerable training was needed before December 2022 to get the program off the ground. The training included patient interaction, HIPPA rules, nurse interaction and role-playing. The role-playing included how you enter the room and how to

introduce yourself by not being overpowering. She also learned to communicate with the patient by listening, supporting and not dictating.

**“My typical day begins with checking our cart,”** Mihulka said. **“It holds personal care items, puzzle books, coloring items, stress balls — anything that may come up — even nail files and hearing aid batteries. Then I start seeing patients. I interview the patient and make sure they don't need anything.”**

Her role is to try to see every patient and advocate on their behalf. She checks if everything is going well, ensures they are involved in their care, checks their room, and ensures the patient is comfortable. The ambassadors strive to take away some of the fear patients may experience. She takes the time to sit, visit and get to know patients. She also interacts with the nurses and aims to help them where possible.

Mihulka is humble and speaks highly of her fellow ambassadors, Angie Ramaekers and Chelsea Kasik, volunteer and guest services coordinator.

**“I firmly believe you never do anything alone; it's always a team,”** said Mihulka. **“I feel the ambassador team is just amazing. Angie couldn't have picked**

**better people with Peg Meyers, Kathy Leischner, Sue Mares, and now Paulette Paprocki. Their hearts are as big as can be, and they only want the best for the patients. I feel so blessed to work with them, Angie and Chelsea.”**

Mihulka said she receives amazing support from the hospital. There was a lot of planning and changes to get the program off the ground, but the team figured it out. According to Mihulka, the program has come so far and will continue to grow. She indicated that it had been well received and appreciated by patients.

**“Retiring was hard as it was like leaving my family, and now I am back with my family again,”** said Mihulka.

In her free time, Mihulka is very busy. She sews dresses for little girls and is learning to crochet blankets for the Samaritan's Purse. She loves to garden and go antiquing, but her No. 1 passion is spending time with her grandkids. Being retired, she now has her holidays and weekends free to spend with them. She is the proud grandma to five grandkids, with another on the way.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities available at the hospital, visit [columbushosp.org](http://columbushosp.org).