

THE Importance of **Caring**

OCTOBER 2022

my journey into volunteering



Barbara Swedenburg
 PET THERAPY VOLUNTEER

When Columbus Community Hospital volunteer Barbara Swedenburg was hospitalized years ago, a surprise visit from a puppy helped make her feel much better.

“It truly brightened my day and made me realize what a difference a visit from a dog can make to a person staying in the hospital,” she said.

After that experience, Swedenburg decided to explore the possibility of becoming a pet therapy volunteer at the hospital.

First, she needed to become a hospital volunteer. She also had to register her dog, Lucy, a 3 ½-pound Pomeranian mix, with the Alliance for Therapy Dogs, Inc. During the registration process, Swedenburg and Lucy met with an observer who monitored Lucy’s interactions with patients. The observer watched Lucy’s manners, temperament, barking and more. They also advised and guided Swedenburg regarding her future pet therapy visits.

“The observation period is essential for any dog looking to become a therapy pet, because they want to make sure

the dog has the right personality and disposition,” she said.

Before each visit, Swedenburg inspects Lucy in adherence to the hospital’s infection control and hygiene policies, which includes bathing before hospital visits and proper hygiene before, between and after patient or visitor interactions.

The dynamic duo has been visiting patients at the hospital for more than a decade as part of the pet therapy program through volunteer services.

“On average, we see between eight and 10 patients each visit,” Swedenburg said. **“I visit with the patients while they hold and play with Lucy. I hope our visit brightens their day a bit.”**

Swedenburg is a native of Omaha, Nebraska, but moved to Columbus 22 years ago. After coming here, she accepted a position with the city of Columbus, working in its engineering and building department. She enjoyed her work with the city and remained in the department for 15 years before retiring in 2020.

“I thoroughly enjoyed my job,” she said. **“I had the privilege of working with**

some wonderful people — not just in the office, but also with the contractors and public.”

Now officially retired, Swedenburg enjoys her work at the hospital and the people she has met through the program. When she is not at the hospital volunteering, she enjoys spending her free time quilting.

“Angie Ramaekers, director of volunteer services, is wonderful to work with and is always willing to change my schedule if needed,” she said. **“I would tell anyone interested in volunteering at the hospital that it is very rewarding knowing that you made someone’s experience better.”**

To learn more about volunteer opportunities available at the hospital, visit columbushosp.org.