

Charity ties employees to hospital contributions: in seven years, staff of 850 has made \$1.3 million in donations at Long Beach Community Hospital.

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With modest pride, Diane DeWalsche entered the pastel hallway, glanced at the nurses' station and stopped. Looking around, she smiled.

"This is our heart center," she said, sounding more like a new homeowner than the administrative director of outpatient services at a community hospital. "It's really a dream."

DeWalsche, who has worked at Long Beach Community Hospital since 1966, is a valued employee-in more ways than one. During the last decade, she has donated nearly \$11,000 from her paycheck for capital projects at the nonprofit, 320-bed hospital.

DeWalsche is not alone. Since 1985, the hospital's 850 employees have made \$1.3 million in tax-deductible contributions to hospital improvement projects.

The money has helped finance construction of a heart center and a neonatal intensive care unit and funded renovation of the hospital auditorium and cafeteria.

By contrast, employees at 998-bed Long Beach Memorial Medical Center have provided minimal financial support for capital projects in the last 10 years, said Donna Reckseen, president of that hospital's foundation. Long Beach Memorial, one of the largest nonprofit private hospitals in the West, has 3,300 full-time employees, but they donate so little to the hospital that its foundation does not keep track of the amount.

Many American workers make charitable contributions-a Gallup survey showed that 72% of U.S. households contributed an average of \$899 to charitable concerns in 1991-but they generally do not donate to their employers.

"My perception is that our employees understand that their survival depends upon the hospital's survival," said Janet Parodi, president of Long Beach Community Hospital. "At the same time, they're tied to the hospital like a family member. And it's always been that way."

In 1924, former Long Beach Mayor Fillmore Condit founded the hospital with a \$150,000 donation. Condit's granddaughter was the first baby born at Long Beach Community Hospital.

Despite that legacy, Parodi—who has given about \$50,000 to support capital projects at the hospital—is delighted by the continuing financial support of her employees, one of whom regularly donates her vacation pay.

"When I first came here in 1986 I thought, 'I've never heard of such a thing,'" she said. "I wanted to give to the neonatal intensive care unit, but our volunteers and employees had it funded before I could get my checkbook out."

Despite the recession, which is choking hospitals from Long Island to Long Beach, Long Beach Community Hospital employees are again showing their generosity: The Employees Foundation Committee, an arm of the Long Beach Community Hospital Foundation, recently pledged some \$200,000 toward a \$1-million open-heart surgery suite. The pledge was offered during a period of fiscal belt-tightening that has resulted in a hiring freeze, a yearlong moratorium on pay increases and forced employee days off without pay when the hospital occupancy is low.

DeWalsche, chairwoman of the Employees Foundation Committee, said employee pride and an interest in preserving their own jobs are largely responsible.

"I think our employees recognize the need for improvements," she said. "Our campus is old, and . . . they understand the importance of upgrading the plant."

She added that with the growth of cost-conscious health maintenance organizations and shrinking insurance reimbursement, profits at many hospitals are down. As a result, less money is available for physical improvements, particularly at nonprofit hospitals.

"I'm proud of our hospital," DeWalsche said. "I realize we have to assist with fund-raising because the capital that had been available for improvements in previous years just isn't there."

The prime mover in projects since 1985 has been the Employees Foundation Committee, a 25-member organization that raises money through payroll deductions as well as bake sales, wine tasting socials, an annual employee golf tournament and other events.

Annette Kashiwabara, administrative director of professional services at the hospital, has pledged about \$10,000 during her 10 years as a hospital employee.

Why does she do it?

"I feel like this hospital is part of me," said Kashiwabara, who was one of 402 employees who contributed to the neonatal intensive care unit. She also was one of 268 employees who gave money toward construction of the heart center.

"It's like living in a home that you own. You put money into fixing a crack or a leak, and you're protecting your investment."

One of the largest contributors through the years has been Stewart M. (Bus) Bachtelle, president of the hospital foundation. Bachtelle has contributed about \$45,000 to capital projects since joining the hospital in 1979.

"Today, nonprofit hospitals need a lot of help," Bachtelle said. "Employees give because they have pride in the hospital."

Bachtelle said employees are not pressured or expected to contribute.

"When there is a need, we include them in the planning and hope they'll want to participate," he said. "But I can't say we expect them to participate. We encourage them to."

Parodi agreed. "I believe our vice presidents need to support the agenda of the hospital," she said. "But that's only five people."

Bachtelle said employees also contribute to less visible fund-raising efforts. Through the years, they have given:

- * \$115,000 to help buy a nuclear medicine scanner.
- * \$150,000 to buy six emergency life packs used for treating heart arrhythmia.
- * \$7,500 to help remodel a four-bed ward.

"It's pride of ownership in the hospital," Bachtelle said.

Next year, employees may get another chance to participate. The hospital is considering developing a transitional care unit to accommodate patients who are discharged from the hospital but who still require care.

"We allow our employees to be very involved," Parodi said. "They create their own destiny here."

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