



'You Get To Know You Made Someone Feel Good'

Volunteers
Robert Allen,
Doris Gardenhire,
Bill Turner and
Jack McCall.

Hospital auxiliary members send out a call for more volunteers

By Toni Garrard Clay

During her years of volunteer service as a member of the ETMC Athens Auxiliary, Doris Gardenhire has accumulated many experiences — not all of them what you might expect.

"I had a proposal once," she laughed. "I was visiting with a patient for a while, and when I started to leave he told me he was so happy to talk with me and would I marry him. He wasn't serious, but it was nice anyway. Then in the ICU I ran into the first boy I ever dated. That was a surprise. We dated in the '50s."

You may not run into an old sweetheart (or want to) as an auxiliary member, but you will have plenty of your own stories to tell, along with new friends and a sense of accomplishment and service. There are currently 72 active members of the ETMC Athens Auxiliary. That may sound like a lot, but it's about 50 shy of the number needed to completely staff the various duty stations every day.

"This is not just an auxiliary for retired people," said Jack McCall, a volunteer who also serves as the auxiliary's first vice president. "We have teen

volunteers, and we feel like it would be great for stay-at-home moms who want to do something just a few hours a week outside the home. We need and want all ages of people."

Volunteers are asked to serve a minimum of four hours a week, though many choose to work more. There are six primary duty stations staffed by volunteers.

1) Front desk and floor. "You interact with the public coming into the hospital, help them find their friends or family members. You assist in admitting patients or helping them leave when they're discharged and deliver newspapers in the morning," said Bill Turner, an auxiliary member.

2) Menu. "We visit patient rooms and help them fill out their menus for the day," explained Gardenhire. "They appreciate seeing us walk in with a smiling face, and I really like having interaction with the patients. And not only are we helping patients, but nurses and the dietary department as well."

3) Emergency Department. Volunteers in the ER help keep patients comfortable, such as providing nourishment and warm blankets. Auxiliary members don't provide direct patient care, of course, but do assist the staff in taking care of patient needs and the needs of the family when possible.

4) Surgery waiting. Volunteers act as a go-between with patient families and the doctors and nurses. "Some people get anxious when they don't understand why it's taking as long as it is, and we try to allay their fears," said auxiliary member Robert Allen.

5) Day surgery. When patients are in recovery, volunteers help nurses keep an eye on the patients, provide drinks if needed and also restock linens, make beds and help patients leave when they're discharged. "This is a big help to the nurses," said McCall.

6) Gift shop. The gift shop is stocked and staffed entirely by auxiliary members. All proceeds from the gift shop are used to purchase items for the hospital.

Along with helping patients, family members, friends and the staff at the hospital, the auxiliary also contributes monetarily on two different fronts. As mentioned, proceeds from the gift shop are used for the purchase of equipment and other items for the hospital. In recent years, the auxiliary's purchases have included new flatscreen TVs for the ER, ICU and OB; 16 glider rockers for OB; 30 reclining chairs; a microprocessor ventilator for the ICU; and a monitoring system for the IMC. TVs are scheduled for purchase this summer to be placed in patient rooms.

In addition, several fundraisers are held throughout the year (bake sales, jewelry sales, book sales) in order to provide nursing scholarships. Over the past eight years, the auxiliary has awarded 67 scholarships. "That's near and dear to my heart," said Allen. "My daughter is receiving a scholarship right now, and she wouldn't be able to go to nursing school without it."

"I can't imagine working as an administrator for a hospital and not having the presence of the auxiliary," said ETMC Athens Administrator Pat Wallace.

The good that auxiliary members provide is indisputable, but volunteers are quick to speak of the good they receive from their service. "People who enjoy appreciation will enjoy this work," said Allen. "I was handing out newspapers one day, and a man told me, 'I don't know if you appreciate how big it is to me that you show up in here with a smile and a good word.'"

Gardenhire said volunteers also receive the benefit of new friendships and, in cases where it may be needed, "a reason to get up and go."

"When you leave here at the end of your shift," said McCall, "you get to know you made some people feel good that day, feel safe."

If you would like to know more about becoming an ETMC Athens Auxiliary member, visit the gift shop at the hospital and request an application. If the gift shop is closed, ask the front desk. The gift shop phone number is 903-676-1137.

