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If everyday activities are becoming difficult or painful, it’s time to turn to the trusted orthopedic team at Mercyhealth. Our dedicated team of highly trained orthopedic specialists, nurses, physical therapists and other professionals work together to provide the very best care for your joints, muscles and bones. We are experts in treating fractures, sprains, strains and arthritis to help you recover quickly. We also offer the latest techniques in advanced joint replacement.

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To learn more about Mercyhealth’s Orthopedic Center of Excellence, visit MercyHealthSystem.org/Ortho.
Dear Reader:

My neighbor Lisa has experienced multiple challenges over 22 years of parenthood. Two of her three children have special needs — her oldest son has autism and her daughter is deaf (she has a cochlear implant to help her hear). At times, she becomes discouraged as she worries about her children’s future. But then, a case worker, therapist or health care worker will show her an option she never thought about before. As some people might say, when God closes a door, he opens a window.

Our issue this winter focuses on two different programs that are “opening windows” for people with disabilities: Project SEARCH and Aptiv’s Community Supported Living (CSL). Project SEARCH is a nationwide internship program for young people with cognitive disabilities. A consortium of school districts in Rock County banded together with several other organizations to create the inaugural program this year at Mercyhealth Hospital and Trauma Center in Janesville. The interns are rotating through three different departments at the hospital, learning important skills that will help them land jobs at the end of the school year. Read more about the program in our story on page 26.

CSL is one of Aptiv’s newest offerings for adults with disabilities who want to live independently. It pairs clients with a program lead, who helps teach the client how to cook, clean, pay bills and accomplish other daily tasks. On page 12, we profile David Riley, who has thrived under this program. Because CSL offers 24/7 support for him, he can feel more comfortable knowing someone is always there for him — no matter what he needs. Thanks to CSL, David can stay independent, which is his top goal.

I am truly thankful for all the resources and opportunities Rock County has to offer for people with disabilities — and all the people who work every day to make these programs possible.

If you have any ideas for other programs and people worth highlighting, please drop me a line at editor@gpgsmagazine.com.

Beth Earnest
EDITOR, “GREAT PEOPLE. GREAT STORIES.”

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CANCER PATIENT BENEFITS FROM FASTER TREATMENT WITH NEW TECHNOLOGY

A mechanic by trade, Jeff Perkins has always been fascinated by the inner workings of everything he encounters. After being diagnosed with prostate cancer in March 2017, the Brodhead, Wisconsin resident was devastated and frightened at the prospect of undergoing grueling treatment. But when he learned he would be among the first patients at Mercyhealth’s Cancer Center in Janesville to undergo radiation therapy with a new, state-of-the-art machine, the Elekta Versa HD™, there was a part of him that was definitely intrigued. “At first, I didn’t want to go anywhere near it,” he says. “But then, after I watched it work a few times, I wanted to know how it operated.”

A FRIGHTENING DIAGNOSIS

The American Cancer Society recommends that men over the age of 50 discuss with their health care provider whether they should be screened for prostate cancer. Jeff, who is now 63, has undergone regular prostate-specific antigen (PSA) screenings. About three years ago, his PSA level began to rise. He and his doctor watched it closely, but every time it rose, it came back down again.
Eventually, he learned he had prostate cancer and would need to have his prostate removed. “I didn’t want to believe it,” he says. “I have always been a smoker and heavy drinker, and I figured it was lung cancer that was going to get me.”

Jeff, who is a veteran of the U.S. Army, received all his medical care at a VA hospital, and he underwent his surgery there. During the procedure, the surgeon removed his prostate and nine lymph nodes. But when his doctor recommended radiation therapy, he asked to be treated in Janesville because he does not like to drive to Madison. That’s how Jeff became a patient of Kevin R. Kozak, MD, PhD, Radiation Oncologist at Mercyhealth.

Dr. Kozak started seeing Jeff in the summer of 2018, and the veteran was impressed by how thorough the doctor was. Before making a plan of action, he ordered a bone scan, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan, computed tomography (CT) scan, and colonoscopy. “He wanted to know exactly what he was looking at before we started,” says Jeff. “If the cancer had moved to the bone, that would change my treatment significantly. But it hadn’t, which was a relief to me.”

Jeff began radiation therapy in October 2018, which was when Dr. Kozak introduced him to the Versa HD.

**FASTER TREATMENT**

The Versa HD is the latest, greatest tool in radiation therapy at the Mercyhealth Cancer Center. The technology conforms to the tumor’s size, shape and volume, allowing Mercyhealth physicians to administer higher, more effective doses. Those higher doses can improve treatment outcomes while protecting critical nearby normal tissues, like the bladder and bowel in Jeff’s case. Because the machine is able to deliver radiation at a higher dose rate, Versa HD treatments last just a few minutes — compared to the 30 or more minutes previously required. That is particularly convenient for patients, and it also minimizes the risk of movement by those who are receiving treatment near critical organs.
“This machine is exceptionally accurate, and gives us an opportunity to target tumors while still sparing normal tissues and organs,” says Dr. Kozak. “But what patients appreciate most is the shortened treatment time. Some cancer patients, such as those with chronic pain, may find it difficult to remain in one position over extended periods of time, and this allows them to complete their treatment remarkably quickly.”

Jeff was thrilled by how simple his treatment was: He left his home in Brodhead at 9:30 am, and he was back by 11 am. He never had to wait more than three or four minutes to be brought back into a treatment room, and the radiation therapy itself was a snap. During his treatment, he traveled to the Mercyhealth Cancer Center every day, and he saw Dr. Kozak every Thursday. “He’s a super guy,” he says. “Every time he saw me, he would throw his arm around me and shake my hand. He’s really a people person. He’ll tell you the fancy words when he’s explaining what’s going on with you, but then he’ll explain them right away.”

Jeff knows his cancer may not be cured, but he’s comfortable to know he has a stellar team behind him, should he experience recurrence in the future. “Dr. Kozak is the best doctor I’ve seen,” he says.

**MERCYHEALTH CANCER DOCTORS**

At the Mercyhealth Cancer Centers in Janesville, Wisconsin, and Rockford, Illinois, the physicians and support staff put their patients first in all that they do. Medical oncologists and radiation oncologists work together to create a seamless transition in patients’ care. The cancer physician specialist team includes:

Kevin R. Kozak, MD, PhD
Radiation Oncologist

Anshul B. Bamrolia, MD
Medical Oncologist/Hematologist

Gregory M. Richards, MD
Radiation Oncologist

Thomas McFarland, MD
Medical Oncologist/Hematologist

Carl L. Christie, DO
Gynecologic Oncologist

Emily G. Robinson, MD
Medical Oncologist/Hematologist

Shahid S. Shekhan, MD
Medical Oncologist/Hematologist
David Riley is an incredibly social guy. Whenever he meets someone new, he immediately strikes up a conversation — and if it’s a woman, he’s quick to kiss her hand and tell her how beautiful she is. While he has tried living at both a large facility and a group home, he has learned group living is not for him. He prefers living independently, with support available when he needs it.

Enter Aptiv’s Community Supported Living (CSL), a program that allows adults with disabilities to live in their own homes — with the support of a program lead, who checks in every day and helps them learn how to accomplish tasks such as cleaning, cooking, money management and running errands. David has been in the program a little more than a year, and during that time, he has become even more independent — cooking his own meals and doing much of his own cleaning. “I can do it all myself,” he says. “I’ve been with other groups that thought I was going to fail, but I didn’t.”

JANESVILLE MAN THRIVES WITH COMMUNITY SUPPORTED LIVING

David Riley regularly wheels himself from his apartment to downtown Janesville to window shop and greet store owners.
A NEW PROGRAM

People with disabilities work with the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Rock County to find the resources they need for their daily life. After they fill out paperwork and register, they can pick a managed care organization with which they will work. The managed care organization assigns a social worker to assess each individual’s needs. That social worker then matches the person with disabilities to an organization that can meet his or her needs.

David was already living on his own with the help of another organization before he became part of CSL. When that organization closed, his social worker connected him with Aptiv (formerly Riverfront), which had just started the CSL program. Aptiv offers a wide range of services for people with disabilities. They can:

• Participate in day programs that give them social interaction with peers and teach them daily living skills
• Receive help with their finances
• Work one-on-one with a staff member to undergo range-of-motion exercises as prescribed by a physical or occupational therapist
• Learn how to cook, clean and manage finances for themselves with the CSL program

The purpose of CSL is to empower adults with disabilities to do as many tasks for themselves as possible. “We try to fill the needs of the individuals we serve,” says Susan Powers, outcome specialist at Aptiv. “It wasn’t too long ago that the only option available for people with disabilities was to live in an institution. With the right support, however, many of them can be very successful living independently.”

SUCCESS STORY

David and Susan worked together to develop a list of goals he would work on with his program lead and the other staff members who support him. His personal goals include:

• Becoming more involved with community groups and socializing
• Reaching out to Aptiv staff to help him understand his mail (he has difficulty reading)
• Calling 911 less often (he used to call 911 whenever he was concerned about any problem, no matter how small it was)
• Performing many housekeeping chores independently
• Taking his medications on time
• Remembering to call his social worker after doctor appointments
• Keeping good track of his finances

Over the course of a little more than a year, David has made remarkable progress. With the help of his program lead, he has learned how to cook (his specialties are tuna noodle casserole and brats). He also has cut way down on 911 calls — choosing instead to contact Aptiv’s 24/7 on-call staff whenever he experiences challenges. He accomplishes much of his housekeeping on his own, and he uses his motorized wheelchair to travel from his apartment to downtown Janesville, where he converses with shoppers and shopkeepers. He even calls the pharmacy to order his own medication refills when he needs them. “David has a wonderful personality,” says Morgan Suhr, his program lead. “He has worked hard to stay independent, and it shows.” And for his part, David appreciates the extra attention Morgan gives him. “She makes me laugh, and she helps me,” he says. “She giggles a lot.”

Aptiv’s Community Supported Living program is continuing to expand. If you know someone who would like to learn more about it, please contact Aptiv at (608) 757-0909 or visit aptiv.org.
Logan Karstaedt isn’t the least bit reluctant to talk about his problems with constipation. While others delicately use euphemisms to describe the challenges he experienced for nearly two years, he cheerfully tells anyone who asks that he “couldn’t poop.” He’s also quick to explain why he had those problems: “I would be playing video games or doing something else, and I just didn’t want to take the time to go to the bathroom. That made it get worse and worse.”

The 11-year-old, who lives in Darien, Wisconsin, wasn’t always in such good spirits when talking about his elimination issues. When he first saw Pediatric Gastroenterologist Kim-Doan Katrina Nguyen, MD, at Mercyhealth East in Janesville in December 2017, he was miserable. He first began experiencing problems during the winter of 2016-17 — he had terrible gut aches and dry heaves during a sledding outing with some friends.
At first, his parents thought he was just hungry. But after he continued to have issues, his mother suspected constipation and took him to see his pediatrician. At the pediatrician’s suggestion, Logan started using Miralax, a laxative that softens stool and increases the frequency of bowel movements. After months of no progress — and a particularly harrowing experience when Logan was writhing in pain on the bathroom floor — his mom, Anna, made an appointment with Dr. Nguyen, who is based in Rockford but sees patients in Janesville once a month. That proved to be just the right step.

DEVELOPING A PLAN

While some parents might think constipation is just a minor issue, it can quickly become a major one if left untreated. About 30 to 40 percent of Dr. Nguyen’s patients are children who have problems passing stool. “Some of it is behavioral, and some of it is physical,” she says. “We work with the children so they don’t associate stooling with pain.”

At Logan’s first visit, Dr. Nguyen ordered an X-ray to make sure he wasn’t experiencing any other gastrointestinal issues, such as bowel obstruction. The X-ray showed her that he was, indeed, stopped up, but there weren’t serious problems other than that. Then the hard part began: They had to develop a plan to help Logan become regular again. It involved a combination of medications, an eating and drinking plan, and a certain amount of time that he had to sit on the toilet every day. “We had an official diagnosis and a plan,” says Anna. “We created a calendar on our refrigerator to keep track of what Logan had to do every day to meet his goals. When you’re working through an issue like this, you basically have to change your lifestyle.”

Those changes involved cutting back on bread, pasta and dairy, and stocking up...
on fruits and vegetables. He drank 32 ounces of water each day, and Miralax every morning. At school, he was supposed to sit in a private bathroom (which administrators readily supplied) for 20 minutes.

But the plan wasn’t a magic fix. It took months for Logan’s body to retrain itself, and as it did, he saw Dr. Nguyen every month. Each time she saw him, she asked probing questions and changed the plan based on what Logan and Anna were telling her. “I can’t say enough about how she listened,” says Anna. “She wanted to find the solution that worked best for Logan as an individual.”

During appointments, Dr. Nguyen spent most of her time speaking directly to Logan. “I can only make suggestions,” she says. “The success is dependent on the child. If he doesn’t cooperate with his care, he’s not going to become better. Eventually, the children I treat are going to become adults, and we have to prepare them to make their own choices that will be the best for their health.”

Dr. Nguyen’s words hit home for Logan. As he explains it, “The little sensors in my body were broken, and they weren’t telling my body, ‘Hey, you gotta go,’” he says. “I needed to retrain them. And even though it made me mad when it wasn’t always working, I knew I had to keep trying.”

SUCCESS!

In many ways, Logan became a different child after undergoing treatment with Dr. Nguyen. He used to eat lots of junk food and dairy, and now he prefers salads and many other types of fruits and vegetables. No matter what he’s doing, he always makes time to go to the bathroom. Even his 7-year-old sister, Kylie, has learned from his experiences and keeps her parents updated on whether she’s been having regular bowel movements.

“I feel a lot better about myself,” says Logan. “I don’t ever want to go back.”
Todd Roepke loves listening to audiobooks to keep his mind active.

Todd Roepke’s lack of sight does not stop him from living life to the fullest. The 81-year-old man — who has been blind since infancy — plays in a bowling league, teaches Sunday school at his church, and works at Industries for the Blind in Janesville assembling pens, paintbrushes and other items. When Todd needs to go somewhere, he takes the bus — listening carefully to traffic when he crosses Washington Avenue to make sure the way is clear.

But when it comes to picking out items from the library, Todd prefers to use Hedberg@Home — Hedberg Public Library’s free materials delivery service. The program, which has been active for more than 40 years, relies on volunteers to pick out materials and deliver them to Janesville residents who are unable to visit the library.
Whenever a new patron inquires about Hedberg@Home, I spend time talking with him about what kinds of books he likes, what kind of music she listens to, and what other items the patron would prefer,” says Maureen Birchfield, the library’s Hedberg@Home coordinator. “Then, I pass along that information to the volunteer, who then uses it to make selections.”

The volunteer who delivers Todd’s materials is Rosemary Kautz of Janesville. Rosemary began volunteering with the program about five years ago, and she has stuck with it because it’s an easy way to make an impact in her community. “Todd’s a nice guy,” she says. “Usually, when I deliver the materials, I stay and chat for a few minutes.”

**MANY INTERESTS**

Todd was born 11 weeks premature, and the oxygen levels in the incubator that was keeping him alive damaged his eyesight. From age 5 through high school, he attended boarding school at the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Janesville, where he learned Braille and life skills in addition to the full curriculum required for school-age children at the time. After graduating, he took a piano tuning course at Blackhawk Technical College and spent several decades tuning and repairing pianos for a living. He had to stop about five years ago, however, because jobs were scarce and it was becoming too difficult to find transportation to gigs. Now, he lives in an apartment just west of the Rock River in Janesville, and takes a bus to his job at Industries for the Blind.

While Todd is out and about often, he likes to stay busy when he’s at home, too. His favorite pastime is listening to music — he prefers jazz and music from the 1950s and 1960s, but he’s open to suggestions for off-the-beaten-path music, as well. He also enjoys listening to books on CD, particularly mysteries, science fiction books, and World War II histories. “A lot of times, if I see that the library has a series of books on CD from the same author, I’ll try to find the first one and bring that,” says Rosemary. “When I come the following month, I ask if he liked it and if he’d like to hear more. Todd is very easy to please. He’s never said he didn’t like anything I brought.”

Hedberg Library does not charge any overdue fees for people who use the Hedberg@Home program. While other patrons borrow their items for three weeks, Hedberg@Home patrons have theirs for four weeks. “We want to respect our volunteers’ time,” says Maureen. “We ask them to visit their patron once every four weeks, and that’s when they can exchange the materials and bring them back to the library.”

If you are interested in volunteering for or participating in the Hedberg@Home program, please call (608) 758-6502.
Barrett Buehl doesn’t say much, but he absorbs everything that is said to him. So, as the 18-year-old tackles new jobs through Project SEARCH, a special program that gives internship experiences to people with special needs, he is gaining invaluable experience that will help him the rest of his life. "Barrett has come so far,” says Tracy Elger, executive director of programs and services at Cooperative Educational Service Agency 2 (CESA 2), one of the entities that is administering Project SEARCH. "Our hope is that by the end of this year, he will have the skills he needs to find a job.”

Project SEARCH began more than 20 years ago at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, where a manager wanted to train people with developmental disabilities to fill some of the high-turnover, entry-level positions in her department. Her idea took off and has since expanded to more than 400 sites across the world.
In southern Wisconsin, a consortium of school districts in Rock and Green counties came together two years ago to explore the possibility of creating their own site. They engaged CESA 2 as their fiscal agent and began searching for a host site where the interns could work. As it turned out, Mercyhealth has already been involved in a Project SEARCH program — the health care system teamed up with a local nonprofit to offer internships at its Rockford, Illinois hospital location last school year, and the program has flourished. “For us, it was a no-brainer to team up with Mercyhealth,” says Tracy.

Together with partners Aptiv (an agency that supports people with disabilities — for more information, see story on page 12), the Wisconsin Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), and the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Rock County, Mercyhealth worked with CESA 2 and the school districts to recruit students to participate in its pilot program this year.

HANDS-ON LEARNING
The students spent their first three weeks of the program in a classroom on the Mercyhealth Hospital and Trauma Center campus with Amy Kniffin, a special education teacher who was hired to lead the students in their internships. They received hospital and job-specific orientation and spent time with an Aptiv skills trainer to determine what kind of internship would best suit them. Then, that skills trainer met with departments throughout the hospital to find the right fits. During the school year, each student will spend 10 weeks at three different rotations before graduating from the program. There are many different departments in which interns are placed, including pharmacy, dietary services and human resources.

For Barrett’s first rotation, he was placed in dietary services and paired with Dietary Aid Melissa Conner, who served as his mentor for the 10-week internship. She showed him how to sort out trash, recyclables and dishes; load dishes into the dishwasher; and deliver meals and snacks to patients. “I like deliveries the best,” says Barrett, “because I get to see the patients in the rooms.”

Melissa, who has a son Barrett’s age, became quite protective of her protégé during their time together. “When I’m off and he has to work with other staff members, I get all concerned about him,” she says. “He’s so easy to work with. He caught on fast, and he’s really sweet.”

As Melissa took Barrett around to the patient floors, she taught him all the basics of delivering food — first knocking to make sure it’s OK to come in, then asking the patient’s name and birth date, arranging the patient’s tray so it’s easy to access, and finally sanitizing his hands before and after leaving every room. “It’s easier than I thought it would be,” says Barrett, who is very compliant with every task he is asked to do.

Barrett spent 10 weeks learning from Dietary Aid Melissa Conner.

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Tracy Elger of CESA 2, left, and special education teacher Amy Kniffin have spent months creating the Project SEARCH program at Mercyhealth.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE
The purpose of having the students complete three different rotations is to give them a wide variety of experiences, says Christine Moss, Senior Director of Human Resources Operations at Mercyhealth Hospital and Trauma Center in Janesville. While some of the students and their parents have high hopes they might be able to land a job at the hospital by the end of the program, that won’t happen for everyone. “Our goal is to show them that they are very employable by the end of the internship, and to find them a job somewhere in the community,” says Christine.

Barrett spent 10 weeks learning from Dietary Aid Melissa Conner.
Still, some of the interns appear to have already found their niche. One young woman working in pharmacy found herself in the position of training new pharmacy techs because she had caught on to the job so quickly. “When our students master something, we push them just a bit more so they can learn something more,” says Tracy.

Amy has marveled at how far her students have come in just a few months. “From the very beginning, I knew I had to be a part of something special,” she says.

The leaders of Project SEARCH are already well in the midst of evaluating candidates for next year’s program. They hope it will continue to grow so they offer opportunities to more and more young people in the community. “When they come into our departments, they’re very hesitant and shy,” says Christine. “A lot of what we teach them is the social side of their skillset — being part of a work environment. This program has meant so much to the students, their families and Mercyhealth. It’s been a fantastic experience.”

Barrett spent time every day delivering food to patients in the hospital.

Each of the interns in Project SEARCH has his or her own locker.
When June King first learned her Mercyhealth electrophysiologist would be implanting a device directly into her heart to regulate it, she was dubious. The thought of having any foreign object inside the most important organ in her body was unsettling, to say the least. But her doctor told her it would keep her from experiencing the uncomfortable shortness of breath from which she has suffered for the past three years, so she agreed.

Now, five months after becoming the first person to receive the Micra Leadless Pacemaker at Mercyhealth Hospital and Trauma Center in Janesville, June, 78, is feeling much better. "I used to sleep in my recliner because I couldn't breathe when I laid down in bed," she says. "But now I can sleep in my bed again."

June King, pictured here with her Shih Tzu, Charlie, is doing well after being the first patient at Mercyhealth to receive the world’s smallest pacemaker.
THE BEGINNING OF HEART FAILURE

June, who grew up in Richland County, Wisconsin, married her husband, Jerry, in 1959 at age 19. Jerry served in the U.S. Air Force for four years and was stationed first in Alaska, then New Mexico. After he was discharged, he and June and their two children moved to Janesville, where he got a job driving a forklift at General Motors and they had two more children. The family moved to Milton in 1975 and has been there ever since.

June first started experiencing heart problems about three years ago when she was in Richland County for a family reunion. She could barely breathe, so Jerry brought her to the local hospital, where she was admitted for a week. Doctors there told her she had pneumonia, and from that point on, she was in and out of the hospital. She suffered from atrial fibrillation, an irregular heartbeat that can lead to blood clots, stroke and other heart problems. She began seeing Imdad Ahmed, MD, FACP, Electrophysiologist at Mercyhealth Hospital and Trauma Center, who diagnosed her with congestive heart failure last year. Dr. Ahmed tried using medications to regulate June’s heart, but nothing worked.

“We all are born with a natural pacemaker that sits in the right upper chamber of the heart,” says Dr. Ahmed. “In patients with atrial fibrillation (irregular heart beat), sometimes that pacemaker does not function properly. It causes the upper chambers to beat too quickly, which then causes the lower chambers to speed up, as well. We can...
June needed a pacemaker — an artificial device placed in the chest that stimulates the heart muscle and regulates its contractions. With a traditional pacemaker, a doctor installs a small metal box that contains a battery and generator just under the skin in the chest and connects it to wires that lead to the heart. Electrodes at the tips of the wires detect the heart’s electrical activity and send data to the generator, which in turn sends electrical pulses back to the heart to regulate its rhythm. It’s a device that has worked for thousands of people across the world — but Dr. Ahmed was hesitant to use it for June. “She is very frail, and we were worried about infection,” he says. Fortunately, he had another option.

MINIMALLY INVASIVE PACEMAKER

Dubbed the “world’s smallest pacemaker,” the Micra Leadless Pacemaker is about one-tenth the size of a conventional pacemaker and delivers electrical pulses to the heart directly without traditional leads. Four tiny tines anchor the Micra in place, and its battery lasts for up to 12 years. The Micra is minimally invasive — it is inserted into the heart’s right ventricle through a vein in the patient’s groin, which means it doesn’t require a large surgical incision.

Dr. Ahmed placed the Micra in June’s heart in August 2018. Part of the procedure includes disconnecting the electrical connection between the upper and lower chambers of her heart. The Micra regulates the rhythm of the lower chambers, and because they are no longer connected to the upper chambers, they will not fall into a dangerous rhythm. “This is a very good way to manage congestive heart failure for patients who cannot tolerate medications,” says Dr. Ahmed. “June was the perfect candidate for the Micra.”

June is now able to spend time with her 11 grandchildren, six great-grandchildren and dog without worrying about being short of breath all the time. She is grateful to Dr. Ahmed for helping her maintain her quality of life. “He’s a very good doctor,” she says. “He’s thorough, and he doesn’t miss anything.”
PHOTO ESSAY: THE GRAND UNVEILING AT MERCYHEALTH’S JAVON BEA HOSPITAL AND PHYSICIAN CLINIC-RIVERSIDE

At the beginning of December, business leaders, the general public and Mercyhealth employee partners had the pleasure of touring the new Javon Bea Hospital and Physician Clinic-Riverside in Rockford at many events. More than 15,000 people saw the beautiful, 563,000-square-foot facility up close and personal.

Mercyhealth President and CEO Javon R. Bea spoke during the blessing and dedication of the new hospital, which is named after him.

The health and wellness expo at the Public Open House featured dozens of services Mercyhealth offers at both its Riverside and Rockton campuses.

Dogs from the Loving Tails Pet Therapy volunteer program and their handlers were at many of the open house events. The program will celebrate its sixth year at Mercyhealth in 2019.

The new hospital has the region’s only Small Baby Unit, which houses babies who are born at less than 27 weeks’ gestation. It allows for the highly-specialized neonatal intensive care team to work in much dimmer lighting, all in a very quiet separate wing of the NICU.
The Women and Children’s lobby entrance features floor-to-ceiling windows, stone wall, and many fanciful elements.

Mercyhealth Bariatric Surgery staff ran one of the tables during the Public Open House.

Employee partners and guests gathered during the Partner Open House.

The Women and Children’s lobby provides a direct connection to the clinic for women and children visiting the campus for clinical services. It features a stunning two-story mosaic wall.

This pediatric outpatient room showcases the whimsical ceiling art designed to calm young patients.

The new hospital's Level III (highest level) Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, pictured here with Neonatal Nurse Practitioner Margie Lenox at the open house for employee partners, is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The beautiful gift shop, Boutique Merci, is located in the Adult entrance next to a coffee shop.

Great People. Great Stories.

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The living wall in the 1st floor Adult lobby depicts key elements of Rockford, including the Rock River.

More than 200 business and community leaders gathered for the dedication and blessing.

Joanna Benning, Mercyhealth’s Vice President of Facilities and Construction, and others look on at the dedication and blessing.

Guests at the Public Open House learned about all the high-tech options available to treat patients at the new hospital.

The CAPA choir from Auburn High School in Rockford was one of many musical groups that performed at the Public Open House.

Thousands of people came to see the new hospital at the Public Open House.
A DREAM COME TRUE

SCHOLARSHIP FUND HELPS BLACKHAWK NURSING STUDENTS STAY IN SCHOOL

It’s hard work to be a nursing student, no matter what the circumstances are. But it’s especially difficult when you are working to support a family of three while also attending school full time. Anna Swanson, 39, entered Blackhawk Technical College’s registered nursing program last year. While she knows it will be worth it in the end, she acknowledges she and her family have had to make sacrifices. “A lot of us at Blackhawk have had to walk away from a steady income, live on a very tight budget and try to make things work,” she says.

Scholarships help. A lot. So, when Anna learned in October 2018 that she is one of the recipients of a newly established endowed scholarship, the Nancy B. Parker Scholars Program, she was relieved. “I feel grateful there are people who are donating to something like this,” she says.

Anna Swanson hopes to earn her RN degree in the spring of 2020.
The scholarship was created by George Parker III, whose great-grandfather founded the Parker Pen Company in Janesville in 1888. George’s mother received hospice care at the end of her life, and he was touched by the high level of care she received from her nurses. In the coming years, the U.S. is projected to experience a shortage of registered nurses, and George wanted to invest in his hometown’s ability to train new nurses. So, he made a $500,000 donation to the college, with the understanding that the college would raise $500,000 more for a $1 million endowed fund that would continue to award scholarships to nurses.

The first major contribution to the fund came from Mercyhealth, which donated $100,000. To show its appreciation for the gift, Blackhawk is naming its simulation lab the Mercyhealth Simulation Lab. The facility, which opened in the fall of 2016, allows nurses-in-training to practice their skills in a setting that feels like real life. “We use high-fidelity mannequins that breathe, blink and have a pulse,” says Deb Possoa, MN, RN, nursing program chair at Blackhawk. “They’re as close to life-like as you get with a mechanical doll. The sim lab is a safe environment for them to practice on, because if they make mistakes, they can see what it would be like in real life without actually experiencing the consequences.”

A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM
Blackhawk’s registered nursing program began in 1975, and enrollment has remained steady over the past four decades. Usually, students have already completed their general education requirements by the time they apply for the nursing program. The school has a points-based petition process based on the students’ completion of these prerequisites, an entrance examination, experience in health care, and county of residence. Blackhawk admits 32 students every semester, and they attend classes for four semesters before graduating. The school also admits up to 16 part-time students every fall.

While there are plenty of students who are eager to start their nursing education, finishing it is a different story. “A lot of times, students aren’t successful in their coursework because they don’t have the resources,” says Deb. “Receiving additional scholarship money can enable them to reduce the amount of time they have to work, which can help them be successful.”

Deb remembers being with a student during her clinical experience at Mercyhealth Hospital and Trauma Center, when the woman learned from a security guard that she had a flat tire. She was crestfallen because she didn’t have the money to pay for a new tire. “A scholarship gift could make a huge difference to a student, allowing him or her to continue with school,” she says.

Anna spent years working as a hairstylist before moving from Rockford, Illinois, to Clinton, Wisconsin. She had trouble finding clients, so she started working in a nursing home kitchen and discovered a love for helping others. She earned
her certified nursing assistant (CNA) diploma at Blackhawk and began working at Riverside Terrace assisted living facility in Beloit. She started pursuing a nursing degree at Blackhawk in the fall of 2018, and she hopes to graduate in spring 2020 — the same year her son graduates from high school. “Nursing was always something I wanted to do — I was just afraid to do it,” she says. “I love my job, and I’m looking forward to being a nurse.”

**STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH MERCYHEALTH**

Since the beginning of Blackhawk’s nursing program, Mercyhealth has been a strong supporter. Many of Blackhawk’s students receive their clinical experience at Mercyhealth, and representatives from the health system sit on Blackhawk’s CNA and Nursing Advisory Council. “It’s really important for us that Blackhawk be a sound, high-quality academic institution, because we hire the majority of its graduates,” says Deb Potempa, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, Vice President for Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Officer at Mercyhealth.

Mercyhealth Hospital and Trauma Center is a Magnet hospital, which means its nurses have met the highest possible standards of care created by the American Nurses’ Credentialing Center (ANCC). The ANCC requires that all Magnet hospitals have a plan to help at least 80 percent of their nurses earn their bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) within six years of being hired. While Blackhawk is an associate degree program, the technical school and Mercyhealth are working together to expose Blackhawk students to BSN programs.

For now, however, Anna is just focused on the next step: graduation in a year and a half. “I work as many hours as I can during school breaks and the summer,” she says. “It’s not easy, but it’s worth it.”

Mercyhealth donated $100,000 to the scholarship fund for nurses at Blackhawk.

**MERCYHEALTH’S JOURNEY TO MAGNET STATUS**

Mercyhealth first achieved Magnet status in 2014 after years of hard work. In 2020, it is up for redesignation — this time with the addition of the health system’s hospitals in Rockford, as well. Less than 15 percent of hospitals in the United States have Magnet status, mainly because it is so difficult to achieve. Hospitals earn Magnet status when the American Nurses’ Credentialing Center feels they have achieved a high level of quality patient care and innovations in professional nursing practice.
MARCH 3 MILTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY PIONEER DINNER Noon Milton House Museum 18 S. Janesville St., Milton Miltonhouse.org

7 SPRING EVENING BRIDAL SHOW, SPONSORED BY KANDU INDUSTRIES 6 pm Pontiac Convention Center 2809 N. Pontiac Dr., Janesville Kanduindustries.com

21 BELoit JANESVILLE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: FANTASY FAVORITES (CONCERT FOR CHILDREN) 7:30 pm Janesville Performing Arts Center 408 S. Main St., Janesville Janesvillepac.org

APRIL 19-21, 26-28 “THE DIXIE SWIM CLUB,” PRESENTED BY JANESVILLE LITTLE THEATRE 7:30 pm Janesville Performing Arts Center 408 S. Main St., Janesville Janesvillepac.org

27 HOUSE OF MERCY HOMELESS CENTER CHARITY BALL Janesville Country Club 2615 W. Memorial Dr., Janesville Mercyhealthsystem.org/Foundation

28 CROP HUNGER WALK 1 pm Cargill United Methodist Church 2000 Wesley Ave., Janesville Crophungerwalk.org/janesvillewi

MAY 10-19 JANESVILLE RENAISSANCE FAIRE 10 am-6 pm Traxler Park 600 N. Main St., Janesville Montrenaissance.com

FARMERS MARKETS JANESVILLE May 25-October Saturdays, 8 am-1 pm 100 N. Main St., Janesville Janesvillefarmersmarket.com

JUNE 8 PLAYPALOOZA (PLAY LIFE-SIZED BOARD GAMES) Downtown Janesville Downtownjanesville.com
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