

Patricia Asherman and Sheila Royster



Five-Star Service

Employees of the Year 2008

June, 2009

A successful team beats with one heart. Just ask Pat Asherman and Sheila Royster, the first-ever team to win the *Employee of the Year Award* at University Hospital.

Thirty years ago, Pat and Sheila didn't even know each other, but they did share one thing in common. They both dreamed of having a profession where they could do *exactly* what they wanted to do – help people!

Fortunately for us, the two held true to their dreams and since 1979, have dedicated themselves to serving the patients of University Hospital.

Well before Pat and Sheila worked at UH, they were already helping others. "I was a socially conscious child of the 70's and was involved in doing volunteer work," says Sheila. "I thought it was my responsibility to pitch in where ever I could." Pat felt similarly. "Serving people was a mission for me. There's nothing better than seeing someone's face light up because you've helped them and treated them kindly."

IN THE BEGINNING...

While Sheila worked in the Outpatient Department her entire career, Pat started out in Pediatrics, working in the former Martland Hospital, now the Stanley S. Bergen Building. "I was responsible for going out into the homes of young mothers and connecting them with the resources they needed just to survive, like food, clothing and medical care. Most of



Sheila Royster, CSW and Patricia Asherman, LCSW

these mothers were young and alone, so I also tried to provide them with emotional support. Soon thereafter, I moved into the newly built University Hospital where, for the next 15 years, I worked in almost every service including Pediatrics, Trauma and the Emergency Department. Following that, I was assigned to the Outpatient Department, where I have worked ever since," Pat concludes.

HIGH POINTS

Sheila has received several awards throughout her career, but if you asked her for the one special moment which truly touched her heart, she'll say it was all about an eleven year-old boy. The case was complex. The child was from a poor family who had no insurance. He was born with one leg and had outgrown his prosthesis, leaving him with orthopaedic problems. "I made lots of phone calls and finally connected with a California-based organization that promised to give the boy a new prosthesis, until he was twenty-five-years of age. The Newark Municipal Council rewarded Sheila for her work on this case, although she didn't understand why. "What I did was not out of the ordinary. It's just what we do."

Pat too, has had many memorable moments. One involved a young mother with a one-year-old child who approached her for help. At first, the woman was reluctant to speak. But finally, she slowly admitted to Pat that she was involved in a verbally abusive relation-

ship and felt like a prisoner in her own home. "I realized what the woman *really* needed was childcare, so that she could be free to go to school and get a job. I contacted several child care agencies and was able to get her an appointment for the next day. She left my office with a renewed sense of hope." About six months later, the woman reported that her son was flourishing and she had landed a great job. "You can't beat how great an outcome like this makes you feel," said Pat. Working with the elderly is another rewarding aspect of Pat's job. "The elderly share their wisdom and opinions with no hesitation," reports Pat. "We connect them with equipment and in-home services to increase their independence and help them thrive in the community. The adult day care centers are also a blessing to our seniors," she concludes.

TEAMWORK

Pat and Sheila have worked together for eight years. For both women, this arrangement is a blessing. "Sheila is like a sister to me," says Pat. "Our spirits connect. It's like working with your best friend."

Sheila concurs. "Pat and I are of like mind. We have the ability to empathize and make people feel comfortable when asking for help. There are no arguments – no disagreements. It's just a really nice bond," she reports.

And speaking of teamwork, what about the rest of the social work team? Pat and Sheila can't say enough about the contributions of their fellow co-workers and the extraordinary things they do everyday. "I proudly accept this honor on behalf of all the social workers at UH", reports Sheila. "They work very hard and under difficult and stressful circumstances. They have a wealth of talent, education and experience."

HOT TIPS

Pat and Sheila agree that one of the most important aspects of caring for patients, is to treat everyone as an individual. "I try to remember - this could be me or a member of my family," says Pat. "How would I like them to be treated? How would I feel if someone were unkind to them? My philosophy is simple. Treat others the way you would like to be treated. Focus on giving compassion and empathy and you can't go wrong. And remember, your body language says a lot!"

Sheila agrees. "Put yourself in your patient's shoes. Everyone wants to be treated with dignity and respect." Sheila is particularly sensitive to the needs of the deaf, and because of this, is proficient in sign language. "Deaf patients are entitled to access the same services as other patients. They, like others, need an advocate."

REMAINING POSITIVE

How does this special duo remain positive? "Through prayer," says Pat. "It keeps me grounded. Everyday I pray that whomever walks in my office, feels better when they walk out."

Sheila adds, "I'm just happy and proud to work at UH. People come from far and wide because we have some of the best doctors, services and sub-specialties available. And we provide these services regardless of anyone's ability to pay. That's a wonderful testament!"

FINAL NOTES

Nancy Bedell, Director of Care Coordination was thrilled that her staff members won the *Employee of the Year Award*. "Pat and Sheila are dedicated social workers who, through their work in the outpatient areas, make a difference in peoples' lives everyday. Because of them, patients coming to University Hospital receive not only concrete services but also the caring and support that mean so much to those dealing with illness."