

# Heartbeat

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

## Giving Hearts Day donors provide funds for UMC surgical table

In its ninth year of participating in Giving Hearts Day, the Unity Medical Center Foundation raised over \$30,000 from over 200 donors, including 12 generous matching gift donors. The regional fundraising event took place Feb. 8 and included an Open House at the Foundation office near Unity Medical Center in Grafton.

All proceeds will go toward a new surgical table (pictured right) that pairs with UMC's new daVinci surgical robot, which is now nicknamed JARVIS after a recent UMC staff nomination and voting process. Jarvis (Just a Rather Very Intelligent System) is the name of Tony Stark's computer-generated assistant in the Iron Man movies. Other suggested nicknames included Leonardo, Vinnie and Dr. Bittlesbot, to name a few. The robot has already been used by general surgeon Dr. Michael Bittles a handful of times, primarily for abdominal procedures.

Matching gift donors included Bremer Bank, Choice Bank, Dakota Medical Foundation, First United Bank, Grafton Drug, Jean Kieley, Kieley Electric, Legacy CPA Services, NAPA Auto & Truck Parts, North Star Community Credit Union, Simmons Multimedia, Tollefson Funeral Home



and one donor who wished to remain anonymous. In addition, The Silo Boutique, which opened in late January in the old Squire Shop location, offered to donate a portion of their proceeds to UMCF, which resulted in \$120.

UMC staff also enjoyed shooting a video for a contest held by Bell Bank, themed Who Is Your Heart For? Scan the QR code to the right to see your favorite staff members.

Grafton High School students also contributed to the cause by hosting a



Grafton High School students facilitate a Pop a Shot contest to benefit Giving Hearts Day.

Pop a Shot competition that benefited Giving Hearts Day. Students from North Valley Career & Technology Center also contributed when they attended UMCF's Open House.

Overall, more than 600 charities in the Red River Valley raised over \$29 million on Giving Hearts Day 2024, which is facilitated by Dakota Medical Foundation in Fargo.



SEE GIVING HEARTS on page 3

### THIS ISSUE:

p.2 CEO Update

p.3 Giving Hearts Day Continued  
First Pulmonary Rehab Patient  
Vocera now live

p.4 Message from the Executive Director

p.5 Provider Spotlight: Pam Nelson  
CHARTIS award  
Mammography Conference

p.6 Clinic/cafeteria expansion project begins

p.7 Grateful Patient: Sandra Burns  
Staff complete interpreter classes

p.8 Memorials

As we head into March or the end of winter, I find myself saying, “Winter? What winter?” As many of you know, it has been a mild winter overall. I know it has created a lot of challenges for the sugar beet industry with the storage needs prior to processing. Hopefully there wasn’t a significant loss of crop.



Regardless of the weather, Unity Medical Center continues to grow. The clinic and dietary expansion project on the south side of the hospital is really taking shape. As more patients are treated here, especially surgical patients, more family members are looking for a dining option that allows them to stay in the building. Also, as our employee numbers continue to grow, it will create an opportunity for staff to have lunch or dinner with their coworkers, as opposed to returning to their workspaces to eat.

We anticipate completing the project this summer. For more information and a few schematics of the project, see Page 6.

UMC was also excited to learn that we were selected as a Top 100 Critical Access Hospital by the Chartis Center for Rural Health (see Page 5). We are honored to receive this award, and it is a credit to everyone who works at UMC. It truly takes a team to be acknowledged for this type of thing. I want to give a sincere thank you to everyone who works and supports UMC!

Lastly, I’m perhaps stepping outside my typical role here to reach out to those of you who are considering or are eligible for Medicare coverage. Please be cautious about your choices. There are a multitude of Medicare “replacement” options available on the market, and most of them title themselves “Medicare Advantage.” However, some of the “perks” promised in the plans may not be available when needed or may not provide any actual cost savings and in fact may

diminish the overall benefits. In other words, the “Advantage” label they are affixing to their product turns out to be a “disadvantage” to patients in terms of benefits, such as coverage options, deductibles and true out-of-pocket costs.

Our recommendation to anyone new to Medicare is to stick with “traditional” Medicare, along with a supplemental insurance plan, and not sign up for one of the Medicare Advantage plans. If you are unhappy with your current plan, check with your insurance plan provider about open enrollment dates.

Ultimately you need to make the best decision for you based on your health care needs. Please consider reaching out to Medicare directly, or contact your health care provider. At UMC, Licensed Social Worker Heather Narloch and Patient Financial Representative Karen Salwei are available to help patients navigate this and offer their opinions. You can reach them at (701) 352-1620.

Alan O’Neil  
Chief Executive Officer  
Unity Medical Center

## MEDICARE

- Pays 100% of your Welcome to Medicare Visit
- Pays 100% of your Annual Exams



# Giving Hearts Day:

Continued from page 1



The Silo Boutique, which opened in Grafton in January, agreed to donate a portion of sales from Feb. 8 to the Unity Medical Center Foundation.



The UMC Auxiliary made heart-themed items for this year's Giving Hearts Day. Left to right: Delaine Russum, Jan Ensrude, Cyrilla Demers and Bonnie Suda.

## UMC graduates first Pulmonary Rehab patient

Unity Medical Center started its Pulmonary Rehab program in May 2023. Patients attend two classes a week for 18 weeks, or 36 total sessions.

"I was the first person to sign up," said Grafton resident Paul Aaser. "Dr. Shaw thought I should do it. I would go back to it if I could."

Medicare covers Pulmonary Rehab once in a patient's lifetime, unless a physician provides information that proves that patient should continue. In addition to Aaser, two other patients have graduated from the UMC program. Five others are still in progress.

"[Pulmonary Rehab] taught me a lot of things about what I needed to do to keep my lungs where they are," Aaser said. "I'm not going to get any better, but it helps you maintain so you're around for a little bit longer. It did help. I had more energy."

"If it was in Grand Forks, I probably wouldn't have gotten that done," he continued. "I was in rehab during a rough time because of smoke (from Canadian wildfires). It just closes me up. Rehab gave me a reason to do my exercise. Otherwise I would have just sat at home and had a tough time. I was watching TV instead of getting on the treadmill."



## Vocera officially live at UMC

Enabling the new Vocera Communication System at Unity Medical Center took a lot of teamwork among UMC staff, Vocera and Polar Communications, but after months of work that ensured complete wifi coverage throughout the growing UMC facility, the system was finally implemented in September 2023.

Even after that date, a lot of troubleshooting occurred, but that seems to have leveled off as staff have used the badges more. The badges primarily work through voice command, so similar to Siri or Alexa, Vocera sometimes misunderstands the commands, but when asked if staff miss the previously used walkie talkies, the quick answer from at least two staff members was "no."

"Before Vocera, our walkies were going off all the time, and patients were hearing all sorts of sidebar conversations," said Assistant Director of Nursing Julie Sundby.

In addition to accepting a one-on-one call on a Vocera badge, a user can dismiss calls if they are with a patient or in a meeting, and the caller can leave a message to be returned later.

Users can also set reminders for themselves. "So if I have a patient task coming at 2:00, I can set a reminder at 1:45 so it's not forgotten," Sundby said.

Emergency Room Manager Lindsey Gellner said she can call provider cell phones using the Vocera badge as well. "So if we have a patient in the ER who is really sick and we don't have time to go grab a phone, I can just tell it that I need to call the provider by name," she said.

Vocera can also call a group of people, such as IT or Nurses if the caller didn't know specifically who was working that shift. "I also like the Do Not Disturb button," Sundby said. "So if I don't want to hear any messages coming in while I'm with a patient or in a meeting, I can push that button and then return messages when I'm done."

Donors provided funding for the Vocera during the Harvest Auction in 2021 and Giving Hearts Day 2022.



Leading up to Giving Hearts Day, we visited with a lot of people regarding this year's fundraising purpose: a surgical table for Unity Medical Center's new daVinci surgical robot, which is the first surgical robot at a rural North Dakota health care facility.



I was somewhat familiar with this type of robot from my days working at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine & Health Sciences,

where Sanford Health once brought its daVinci robot so that medical students--perhaps interested in a surgery specialization--could practice with the equipment. It was exciting new technology for the students, offering a steady hand and better images than any human. In the operating room, robots can also make smaller incisions that heal faster and are less likely to get infected.

Leading up to Giving Hearts Day, we understood that prospective patients might view this new technology differently than the medical students did. We emphasized that the robot is not replacing the surgeon, but that general surgeon Dr. Michael Bittles is controlling the robot for a better patient outcome. But even the North Valley Career & Technology Center students who visited our Open House had some good questions about how patients might feel about that technology. Understandably there are times when innovation can—and probably should--make us wary. But in this case, the new surgical technology is truly beneficial to patients. Still, these were good conversations to have with the community.

This leads me to another innovation being debated across the world right now: artificial intelligence (AI). While I can't speak about how that is being considered in direct patient care in the future, I did see a demonstration last summer in which ChatGPT wrote a page-long donor ap-

peal--at the push of a button--incorporating behavioral theories Nudge Theory (what makes people want to do something) and cognitive bias (what makes people not want to do something). While the finished product still needed some human editing and customization, I was surprised at how well the appeal was written and in such a short amount of time. I thought to myself how long it would have taken me (a professional writer) to research and write something similar. It would have taken days for sure. What an eye-opener, to say the least!

There will be a lot of ethical and legal debates about AI in the future, and I'm certainly not saying we'll be incorporating AI in anything we do at the UMCF anytime soon. We will continue to value human interaction and utilize personal correspondence as much as we can. But it is interesting to see how the technology could be used positively, similar to the surgical robot.

Jessica Sobolik  
Executive Director  
Unity Medical Center Foundation



34th Annual  
Unity Medical Center Foundation

# GOLF TOURNAMENT

July 11, 2024  
Fair Oaks Golf Course,  
Grafton, ND



## Friends of the Foundation Luncheon

April 3 or 4, 2024  
Noon-1:30 PM  
Tickets: \$25/person

Unity Medical Center  
164 W 13th St, Grafton  
Third Floor

UNITY MEDICAL CENTER  
foundation

## UMC staff attend mammography conference

In late 2023, Unity Medical Center mammography technologists Jessica Tanke and Natalie Anderson attended a mammography workshop in the Florida Keys. The educational material focused on 1) New Mammographic Imaging of Challenging Patients, 2) the Mammography Position Guidebook, and 3) Image Quality and Positioning Problem-Solving for Breast Imagers.

They received a comprehensive overview of the evolution of mammography and recent advances in breast imaging. They learned unique approaches to education, as well as personal and emotional aspects of mammography, and more about the data-driven position technique known as The Miller Method. This method focuses on proficient mammography positioning to improve accuracy, reduce position errors and improve diagnostic quality. It also enhances the care the technologist offers.

The Unity Medical Center Foundation paid for a portion of the conference expenses from its Providers/Staff Endowment, which periodically receives gifts from donors throughout the year.



## Provider Spotlight: Pam Nelson

Unity Medical Center welcomed Pam Nelson to its growing Radiology Department in November. Pam is an ultrasound technologist who recently relocated to Crystal, N.D., from Arizona. She brings 11 years of outpatient imaging experience to UMC and thoroughly enjoys interacting with patients.



“Pam has been a breath of fresh air,” said Radiology Director Sara Risky. “She brings a light heart with a smile to the department every time she works. She has been a great help to me since she started, and having her has allowed me to get paperwork done and attend managerial meetings that I otherwise would have had to miss due to the ultrasound patient load.”

Prior to continuing her education to become an ultrasound tech, Pam was a stay-at-home mom to her two daughters until they were in elementary school. They all still reside in Arizona, along with her young grandson.

If you would like to make an appointment for an ultrasound with Pam, please call (701) 379-3050.



## UMC earns Top 100 Critical Access Hospital Award

Unity Medical Center has been recognized as a 2024 Top 100 Critical Access Hospital by The Chartis Center for Rural Health. Chartis’ annual Top 100 award program recognizes outstanding performance among the nation’s rural hospitals based on the results of the Chartis Rural Hospital Performance Index.

“Unity Medical Center is honored to be recognized by the Chartis Group as a top 100 critical access hospital,” said UMC CEO Alan O’Neil. “It is a testament to everyone who works at UMC for their dedication and passionate care they provide to our patients. We are committed to providing high-quality care in a team environment utilizing the best technology and practice methods available.”

Now in its 14th year, the Index is the industry’s most comprehensive and objective assessment of rural hospital performance.

Featuring a methodology utilizing publicly available data, the Index is leveraged nationwide by rural hospitals, health systems with rural affiliates, hospital associations, and state offices of rural health to measure and monitor performance across a variety of areas impacting hospital operations and finance.

“During an era of profound uncertainty for rural health care, the Top 100 rural hospitals continue to provide a unique lens through which we can identify innovation and inspiration for how to deliver high-quality care to increasingly vulnerable populations,” said Michael Topchik, national leader of The Chartis Center for Rural Health. “We’re delighted to be able to recognize all this year’s Top 100 but especially the more than 40 first-time recipients across both categories. It’s wonderful to see so many new facilities join the ranks of our Top 100 alumni.”

# Grafton Family Clinic, UMC cafeteria expansion project begins

The Grafton Family Clinic expansion project is well under way as the footings have been poured and the framing has started. The 6,000-square-foot, two-story expansion at the west end of the clinic will include seven additional treatment rooms for Unity Medical Center providers, while the second floor will be dedicated to outreach providers such as Drs. Lessard-Anderson and Potti.

Many of the outreach providers see upwards of 40 patients each day, so having their own dedicated space with treatment rooms, a nurses station and waiting room will make it more efficient for everyone, and allow for continued growth.

The Dietary Department run by registered dietician Rondee Feltman is another area that needs expansion at UMC. Patient volumes and staffing have increased significantly over the past few years, making space in the dining center limited. The expansion will allow for expanded meal options including breakfast and a sandwich bar. The new dining space will have high ceilings and large windows on the south side, as well as an outdoor patio to the east.

TL Stroh Architects & Interiors designed the addition, and TF Powers of Fargo, N.D., is the general contractor. The project is estimated to be completed mid- to late summer 2024.



This schematic view is captured from the existing dining area looking toward a dining expansion to the south with large windows. The columns between the two spaces show where the existing wall is today. There is also a patio space out the windows on the left.



Clinic exam room rendering. All renderings were produced by TL Stroh Architects and Interiors.



This picture taken Feb. 15 shows the actual clinic expansion construction.



This schematic shows the dining expansion with large windows on the left and the two-story clinic expansion on the right.

## Grateful Patient: Sandra Burns

In April 2022, Sandra Burns of Grafton, N.D., was about to have a total knee replacement surgery at Unity Medical Center, and she admitted she was nervous about it.

"I had never had a surgery like that," she said. "The day of the surgery, they were wheeling me down the hallway, and I hadn't been [at UMC] since they remodeled." Burns looked up and noticed the sign for the Lynn D. Ebert Surgery Center and instantly felt calm as they turned into the operating suite. "Somehow I knew I was going to be alright," she said.

It turns out that Burns knew Ebert and was friends with his longtime partner June Erlendson before they passed away in 2014 and 2019, respectively. With her friends on her mind, the surgery completed by Dr. David Schall went well. Burns was actually the first patient to receive a total knee replacement at UMC. She stayed overnight for observation, and she was walking without a walker in a matter of days.

"The facility is beyond beautiful and state-of-the-art," she said. "The total care was great. The nurses were awesome. It was nice to just stay there and have good food, and the nurses were checking on me. I wanted to stay longer! Hospitals aren't the best experience all the time, but this was a great experience for me."

After the surgery, Burns received physical therapy from UMC as well. "I would go back to physical therapy today if I could," she laughed. "I loved going there. It was like a social outing for me. It was fun!" She primarily worked with Bill Atwood, PT, and MacKenzie Paulson, PTA. She also works with UMC Respiratory Therapy, which helps her with her CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine.



## UMC staff complete interpreter classes to better patient care



In January, Unity Medical Center staff members Yolanda Balderas and Nora Martinez completed a series of online interpreter classes in order to become medically certified to facilitate communication between health care staff and Spanish-speaking patients at UMC.

The 40-hour program consisted of 10 certificates that each focused on different health care departments such as psychiatry, orthopedics and more.

Health care can be stressful to begin with, and more so when staff and patients can't effectively communicate what's happening. In the past, when a non-English-speaking patient arrived at UMC, staff utilized options such as CyraCom or Avel, which are computer- or phone-based translators. "Some of the patients did not like that approach," said Balderas, who primarily works at the Emergency Department registration desk. "It is more convenient and personable with us. We agreed to do it to make it better for Unity Medical Center. We are here to help."

Martinez primarily works at Grafton Family Clinic, where she said 40 percent of patients are Spanish-speaking. "I believe it's important that they feel comfortable when being treated," she said. "Having someone who can speak their language helps them a lot. They are just trying to get the medical help they need."

UMC registered nurse Lisangela Garza is also in the process of completing the program.

The Unity Medical Center Foundation provided funds for the classes through its Provider/Staff Endowment, which periodically receives gifts from donors throughout the year.

## Memorials and Thank You To Donors (Nov. 19, 2023- Feb. 13 2024)

The Unity Medical Center Foundation would like to take the opportunity to thank all of the donors who have donated to UMCF over the past years. It is because of donors like you that UMCF can continue to focus on their mission of supporting Unity Medical Center and improving patient experiences. Every effort is made to include all names accurately. Please notify UMCF if you discover any errors or omissions.

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To financially support  
Unity Medical Center, ensuring  
quality health care close to home.

## Philanthropic Priorities

1. Patients
2. Providers/staff
3. Programs
4. Facilities
5. Priority needs (unrestricted)



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