

# Heartbeat

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

## Harvest Auction grosses highest-ever proceeds

Although ticket sales were down slightly from last year, the 26th Annual Harvest Auction ended up being the largest-ever event in terms of fundraising dollars, raising \$125,000 for the Grafton Family Clinic expansion scheduled to open in January 2025.

The event held Nov. 8 at the Minto Community Center started with the Lucky Charm drawing, in which Chris & Ann West were the lucky winners. They selected the \$3,000 Travel Voucher donated by Unity Medical Center from the 20 live auction items available.

The event continued with the reverse auction, which Bill and Jody Tibert kicked off with a generous \$10,000 bid. That bid was quickly matched by Dr. Mike and Pattie Bittles, sitting at the Tiberts' table. Bidding continued with four \$5,000 bidders until 31 individuals or businesses had donated a total of \$63,600 in a matter of minutes.

The silent auction opened the week prior to the live event and at closing that night raised just over \$20,000 through 84 donated items. The largest amounts raised came from the Yard Power Package donated by Choice Bank and the Dinner & daVinci package donated by UMC surgery staff. That package includes an evening of hands-on learning with UMC's daVinci surgical robot, instructed by Dr. Bittles, followed by a meal for six prepared and served by the UMC surgical nurses.

The highest number of bids went toward the Widman's Chocolate Tray donated by Julia Bjornstad, UMC CEO Alan O'Neil's mother-in-law, followed by the autographed Belfour Bourbon Whiskey.

Resource Auction's David Gorder was back as auctioneer, and he ran through the 20 live auction items that raised just over \$39,000 total, including a European river cruise. The live auction



Dale Holand collects reverse auction bids from Bill and Jody Tibert, as well as Dr. Mike and Pattie Bittles. Photos: Eric Hyliden



Dr. Bittles greets John Gudajtes at the Harvest Auction.

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We are excited here at Unity Medical Center, as the clinic and dining room additions are just a few weeks away from completion. The two-story clinic addition will add 13 additional treatment rooms. They are all large with high ceilings, an elevator, a waiting room on the 2nd floor, and we utilized the same building components as the new hospital with the self-closing doors and the most up-to-date HVAC systems for controlling heat and air conditioning.



The Dining Room addition is fantastic. We more than doubled the space available, and the south side now has an elevated ceiling with large windows to capture the natural light. Also, there is a deck area on the east side of the addition. With our ever-increasing volumes in the clinic and hospital, it will give our patients and their families, along with our employees, a much larger space to enjoy their meals or have a cup of coffee.

On Veteran's Day this year, UMC dedicated Phase 1 of its Veterans Wall (see page 7). The wall is located on the 3rd floor of the hospital and extends the full length of the hallway. It is a wonderful memorial and tribute to

the many veterans who have served in the military. The wall honors recent enlistees and goes back in time through the Middle East conflicts, the Vietnam War, the Korean War, World War II and World War I. We have had a wonderful response from veterans and their family members who have brought pictures, along with other information on what branch they served in and what the time frame was. I would encourage all of you to find a time to come and visit the wall. I think you will be very humbled and honored at the display of all the soldiers. We cannot thank them enough for their sacrifice and dedication.

UMC was awarded the National Health System Award by the American Cancer Society for our remarkable accomplishments in the area colorectal screenings. The award was presented recently in Fort Worth, Texas. Three UMC employees attended: Kari Novak, clinic manager; Kristen Pastorek, surgery manager; and Dr. Jared Marquardt. Dr. Marquardt was one of the key speakers at the event. This is a wonderful accomplishment as the Health System Award was for all the hospitals in the U.S.—large or small! Congratulations to everyone who worked so hard in this area, which is a key component in early identification of this specific cancer.

The next legislative session will

be starting in a few weeks. Health care is a frequent topic of discussion as the state budget is being assembled. I may be biased, but I am very proud of North Dakota's rural hospitals. Thanks to common sense approaches, like adopting Medicaid Expansion several years ago, North Dakota has not had any rural hospitals close since then. Many other states who did not adopt Medicaid Expansion cannot make this claim. We certainly hope this year's Legislature will continue to place a high value on rural hospitals and will lend their support to us. North Dakota is a rural state, and we need our rural hospitals to continue to flourish. Not only do North Dakota's rural hospitals create thousands of jobs across the state, but when health care is needed, especially emergency care, miles and minutes matter. I can't tell you how many times during my time at UMC when I have had a patient or a family member tell me that "UMC saved their life." And I know this is a commonly repeated message among all rural hospitals. We are honored to play such a vital role in the quality of life of rural residents. But it doesn't happen without legislative support!

Thank you for your support of UMC, and enjoy the upcoming holiday season!

Alan O'Neil  
Chief Executive Officer  
Unity Medical Center

## Unity Medical Center is an Accredited Sleep Lab



Unity Medical Center has achieved sleep lab accreditation through Accreditation Commission for Health Care (ACHC). This is achieved by demonstrating compliance with national standards. Accreditation by ACHC reflects an organization's dedication and commitment to meeting standards that facilitate a higher level of performance and patient care.



164 West 13th Street | Grafton | 701-352-1620 | [unitymedcenter.com](http://unitymedcenter.com)

## Harvest Auction: Continued from page 1



Alan O'Neil jokingly helps Bonnie Yantes with her live auction bidding.  
Photos: Eric Hylden

ended with two necktie auctions that each went for \$1,050 to lucky bidders Wally DeSautel and Morna Gorder.

UMC CEO Alan O'Neil introduced Mark Bertilrud as UMC's new chief operating officer and future chief executive officer, effective January 2026. He also thanked Jo Petersen for her 17

years of service on the UMC governing board.

Cash prizes were awarded to Mark Bertilrud, Mary Morgan, Jeff Williams, Tom LaHaise and Dr. Matthew Viscito. Pam Bertilrud won the first round of Last One Standing, while Aaron Meyer won the second round.



Mark Bertilrud quickly swaps ties before the tie auction.

After the live auction concluded, attendees stuck around for the first-ever After Party with music from DJ Brett Omdahl, and games including corn hole and golf chipping for prizes. Joseph Bruce won the golf chipping contest, while Andrew Petersen won the corn hole game.

## Expansion Update: Nearing the Finish Line

The anticipated opening date for the new two-story Grafton Family Clinic expansion is early January 2025. As of mid-November, the walls are painted, and the flooring has been installed. Cabinets have been installed in the exam rooms. The main floor will be used by Grafton Family Clinic providers and nursing staff. It includes seven large exam

rooms, a nurses station and office space for Dr. Jennifer Shaw.

The second floor will be used by visiting providers and General Surgeon Dr. Michael Bittles. It includes a waiting room right off the elevator, six exam rooms, a nurses station, a work room for providers and staff, and an office for Mental Health Counselor Tanner Grimsley.

The new space has large windows in each exam room along the west-facing wall to take advantage of natural light. The exam rooms will all have modern sliding doors with frosted glass, similar to the exam rooms in the Rehabilitation Services space. A public open house will be planned closer to the grand opening date.



Left: Dining room expansion.

Middle: Exam rooms down hallway.

Top: Inside exam rooms.

We are still in awe from the generosity shown at our 26th Annual Harvest Auction in November. It was fun to see everyone who attended the event and how the auction played out at the direction of David Gorder of Resource Auction. Deb and I are probably the only ones who truly know the number of people who couldn't attend the event, but who still participated



by either bidding on silent auction items or making cash or reverse auction donations in advance of the event. I hadn't mentioned the donors who are making major gift commitments outside of the event, but still to benefit the Grafton Family Clinic expansion. When we have signage finalized, we'll be publicizing more of those gifts with donor permission. No matter which way you choose to support UMC, you are all amazing and we appreciate you!

When planning the Harvest Auction, our goal is always to hold the event after a majority of farm harvest is complete, but admittedly that unseasonably warm fall had us scratching our heads for a bit. Nevertheless, it seemed like the labor-intensive beets and potatoes wrapped up just in time.

This reminded me of a note that Kim Droog, owner of Legacy CPA in Grafton, had shared with me earlier this spring regarding gifts of commodities, which could be another way to support UMC. She said it's a great tax-savings opportunity for charitable farmers, so I wanted to mention it in this column.

One way to do this would be for the farmer to fill out a form that directs his or her co-op or elevator to have a specified number of bushels or even livestock gifted to the North Dakota Community Foundation. The farmer can also designate which NDCF fund that the sale of these commodities would go toward, including the Lynn D Ebert Memorial Fund for Unity Medical Center Grafton. Then the farmer is eligible for tax reductions greater than if he or she donates cash since they can still deduct the expenses for growing and harvesting the commodities, reducing federal and state taxes without having to itemize. Self-employed farmers would have an even greater savings due to the Medicare and Social Security taxes paid on farm income.

You can read more about this at [www.ndcf.net/give/gifting-agricultural-commodities.html](http://www.ndcf.net/give/gifting-agricultural-commodities.html), and I would also encourage you to talk to your tax advisor if you have questions about this.

You might think that things slow down in the UMC Foundation office when the Harvest Auction is over, but truthfully our office gets quite busy at the end of the calendar year. By the time this newsletter is printed, we will have passed Giving Tuesday on Dec. 4, primarily a national online fundraising campaign, when we see an uptick in donations. We also receive memorials on behalf of UMC leading up to its Tree of Lights Community Remembrance Ceremony, this year held on Dec. 11.

In addition to these events, we send out a year-end direct mail piece, which has an impressive response rate, proving that direct mail fundraising is still impactful. We are also enrolling staff in our second year of the UMC Staff Giving Program, which in its inaugural year in 2024, raised over \$4,000 that went toward patient needs outside of health care (e.g., clothing, shoes, transportation or services). As many of our staff know, a patient's health care often continues after they leave UMC and sometimes involves more than direct patient care. Sometimes it's just the feeling of knowing someone cares about their well-being.

Merry Christmas and happy New Year to our community of supporters!

Jessica Sobolick  
Executive Director  
Unity Medical Center Foundation

Save  
the  
Date!



**GIVING  
HEARTS  
DAY**

Interested in being a matching gift donor to encourage others to participate?  
Contact us before Jan. 27.

[GivingHeartsDay.org](http://GivingHeartsDay.org)  
#givingheartsday

### Open House

February 13, 2025  
8:30 a.m.-7 p.m.

Unity Medical Center Foundation  
147 W 13th St, Grafton

Visit with UMC staff about the new daVinci surgical table purchased with last year's proceeds.

Refreshments will be served.

## Service Spotlight: Footcare Clinic

The Unity Medical Center Footcare Clinic sees patients on the second and fourth Thursday of each month. The service includes an Epsom salt foot soak and nail trim by a nurse or CNA. The footcare team also cleans up calluses, treats hang nails and provides education on corns, a hardening and thickening of the epidermis on toes.

The clinic recently expanded to two rooms and added a fourth chair, which will allow for 30-34 patients each day the clinic is held.

Footcare nurses Kristy Swedberg and Robyn Sangrait are working on their certifications to be footcare specialists. This includes training from a podiatrist who teaches them to look for and be able to treat lymphedema, circulatory issues and wounds. These patients may also be referred to a podiatrist for further treatment.

The Footcare Clinic is a great program for the surrounding community as it is for anyone who is not able to or should not trim their own nails, including those with diabetes, neuropathy or any circulatory issues.

The cost of the footcare service will increase to \$25, effective Jan. 1, 2025. If you would like to schedule an appointment, please call (701) 352-2000.



Robyn Sangrait, left, and Kristy Swedberg will soon be certified to offer podiatry referrals.

## UMC announces new board member



J.R. Steele is an attorney in Grafton and is in his 8th year as the Assistant State's Attorney for Walsh County. He is originally from Central Illinois, but moved to North Dakota in 2011 to attend the University of North Dakota School of Law. J.R. lives in Grafton with his wife Stephanie and their five daughters.

## Provider Spotlight: Kayla Elke, DPT

Unity Medical Center welcomed its newest physical therapist Kayla Elke at the end of October. She attended the University of North Dakota for her undergraduate studies and Cleveland State University for her Doctorate in Physical Therapy degree. She has over 10 years of experience in a variety of settings. Prior to coming to UMC, she had been doing school therapy through Altru Regional Services for the Griggs-Steele-Trail school district and outpatient services Altru Clinic in Larimore.

UMC Rehabilitation Services Manager Lon Kratochvil had been seeking applicants for a physical therapist with a pediatric background for a while due to the growth the department has seen. Kayla's mom JoLynn Dickson joined UMC as certified occupational therapy assistant (COTA) in August and encouraged her to apply. "I was super impressed with the facility and the sense of community among the therapists, so I knew it would be a good fit," Kayla said.

Kayla will be treating patients of all ages including children, allowing UMC to offer comprehensive Pediatric Therapy services, including PT, OT and speech. Pediatric PT can treat gross motor delays, sensory integration, balance/strength coordination and global delays.



Unity has added a Pediatric Therapy gym located in the former PT space on the second floor of the original hospital building. The Pediatric Therapy team includes Kayla; MacKenzie Paulson, PTA; Amy Groves, OT; Kelsey Sherry, OT; JoLynn Dickson, COTA; and Hannah Laxdal, speech therapist. This space continues to evolve, and when it is complete, the team will be able to see three to four patients at a time.

The Pediatric Therapy team will be hosting a free pediatric screening event in the spring for ages 0-5. This will include screening for speech sound errors and/or language difficulties, as well as fine and gross motor, visual perceptual, cognitive, emotional and sensory processing skills. If you would like to make an appointment with Kayla or any of the other Rehabilitation Services team members, please call (701) 352-9398.



## Investing for good: How to make an impact today

### with qualified charitable distributions

Helping others is a noble aspiration, and it doesn't need to be confined to your estate plan for after you pass away.

Giving during your lifetime can take many forms, one of which is using qualified charitable distributions (QCDs). This option can reduce your tax liability, as it involves donating pre-tax dollars before they become taxable income as a required minimum distribution (RMD).

Let's explore how you can make QCDs work for you.

#### Maximize your tax benefits through QCDs

Philanthropy is often reward enough, but charity and tax deductions seemingly go hand in hand. As the standard deduction has risen to \$13,850 for individuals in 2023 (double for those married filing jointly), you may want to consider giving strategies that don't require itemizing on your tax return. A QCD is a great way to carry out your charitable intent without itemizing while also reducing your taxable income.

The age at which you must begin taking distributions from your IRA has increased over the past few years from 70 1/2 to 73. These distributions are generally treated as taxable income once they start. However, IRA owners are allowed to make qualified charitable distributions of up to \$100,000 directly from their IRAs to a charity without getting taxed on the distribution, thanks to the Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes (PATH) Act of 2015. Basically, you can satisfy your RMD amount without reporting additional income.

There is another important benefit: When a QCD is used to satisfy an RMD, that amount is also excluded from tax formulas that could impact multiple categories such as Social Security taxation, Medicare Part B and D premiums, and the Medicare tax on investment income.

#### Rules to follow

**You must be eligible.** You must be age 70 1/2 or older at the time of the QCD (but remember, RMDs now begin at age 73). QCDs from ongoing simplified employee pensions (SEPs) and SIMPLE IRAs are not permitted.

**There is an annual limit.** Your QCD cannot exceed \$100,000 per tax year, even if your RMD is greater than \$100,000. New legislation, the SECURE Act 2.0, now indexes this \$100,000 limit for inflation in 2024.

**Only qualified organizations count.** The IRA trustee or custodian must make the distribution directly to a qualifying charity (private foundations and donor-advised funds are not eligible). For instance, you cannot take the distribution yourself and then write a check to the charity.

#### Give today to leave a real-time legacy

By donating an RMD to a qualified charity, you can enjoy the satisfaction of knowing you are helping a worthy cause while simultaneously reducing your taxable income. This strategy also helps you live out your values in real time, effectively leaving your legacy in the here and now.

To learn more and to develop a giving plan that also supports your long-term goals, talk with your financial and tax advisors.



Let's see what we can do together.

**Aaron Meyer** | Financial Advisor  
701-795-4594 | [acmeyer@bremer.com](mailto:acmeyer@bremer.com)  
[bremer.com/aaronmeyer](http://bremer.com/aaronmeyer)

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## Veterans Memorial Wall installed at UMC

Unity Medical Center held an open house on Veteran's Day (Nov. 11) to reveal Phase I of its new Veterans Memorial Wall. More than 160 photos of area veterans are displayed across nearly 100 feet of wall space located on the 3rd floor of the hospital outside of the classrooms.

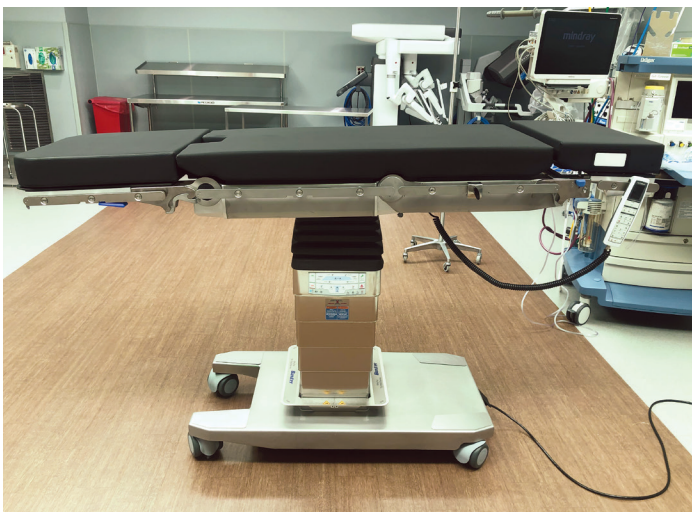
CEO Alan O'Neil wanted a way to honor our area veterans, so he worked closely with Marketing Director Maggie Suda to come up with a unique display. "We are honored to display the pictures of our American Heroes," O'Neil said. "We cannot begin to thank the men and women who served enough for their sacrifice so we can maintain our freedom."

Photos were sourced through newspaper ads and social media. The Unity Medical Center Auxiliary provided a generous donation of \$2,000 to help fund the project.

UMC is currently working on Phase II of the project and will keep adding photos indefinitely. If you would like to display a photo, original photos can be scanned at the UMC Foundation office at 147 W 13th St., Grafton or a .jpg file can be emailed to Maggie Suda at [msuda@unitymedcenter.com](mailto:msuda@unitymedcenter.com). Please include name, rank, military branch, years of service (19xx-19xx) and hometown.



## New OR table arrives at UMC



This new OR table pairs with the da Vinci surgical robot at UMC and was recently purchased with funds donated during Giving Hearts Day 2024 and the Golf Tournament in July.

## UMCF provides new ultrasound table



A second ultrasound table was recently purchased with funds from the UMCF Patient Endowment Fund. Any donor who checks Patient Care & Equipment on their gift envelopes has contributed to this fund.

## Memorials and Thank You To Donors (August 7-November 20, 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.

### Dennis Anderson

Richard Davis

### Bertha Campbell

Douglas & Eileen Demers

Ken Halliday

### Sandra Kay Carlson

Rita Amiot

### Chad Demers

Rock & Patty Desautel

JoAnn Gorder

Wayne & Avis Lessard

Kelly & Shirley Lundquist

Bill & Colleen Lykken

Sonia Midgarden

Pauline Osowski

Ryan & Jessica Sobolik

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Rosalee Wendelbo

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### Jack Desautel

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Rita Amiot

Rock & Patty Desautel

Wally Desautel

Thomas & Avis Dolan

Gloria Halliday

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Jerome Suda

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### Carolyn Stordahl

Marilyn Bryan

### Arvid Swendseid

LeaAnn Dolan

### Lorraine Tibert

Rita Amiot

Judith Boone

LeaAnn Dolan

Elizabeth Suda

Mark & Mary Tweten

Marilyn Zimny

### Dagne Tweten

Rita Amiot

## Foundation Mission

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)



Donate Now

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