

Volunteer & Guest Services Annual Report 2024-25

May 1, 2024-April 30, 2025



From the time you pull up to the front entrance of Columbus Community Hospital to the moment you pull away, you are likely interacting with multiple people in the volunteer and guest services department. Perhaps a valet driver parked your car, or a front desk volunteer helped you find your loved one's room. Maybe you stopped by The Gift Shop or shopped at one of the department's latest fundraisers.

This annual report tells you how CCH's volunteer and guest services team provides support to CCH patients, visitors and staff. It highlights the department's achievements during the 2024-25 fiscal year, from May 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025.

Mission:

Our mission is to improve the health of the communities we serve.

Vision:

Our vision is to compassionately deliver the state's highest quality patient care.

Values:

Integrity

Compassion

Accountability

Respect

Excellence



    columbushosp.org



Angie Ramaekers,
director of volunteer &
guest services

Notes from the director

In hospitals, we often focus on the technical: machines beeping, diagnoses made, procedures performed. But beneath all of that ... there's humanity. There's compassion.

Whether comforting someone who's scared, helping a lost visitor find their way or offering a warm smile at just the right moment, volunteers do more than assist. Volunteers are healing, in ways that can't be measured on charts or with scans. Volunteers turn a hospital from a place people have to be ... into a place where they feel seen, cared for, and not alone.

When I was a small child, I had my first memorable hospital experience. And while I do not remember much of the details of that situation, I do remember that the volunteer in the surgery waiting room never left us. That volunteer made a world of difference to me all those years ago and that experience is a big part of what I do today.

When we say the phrase "a world of difference," it isn't about geography. It's about depth. It's about the difference made in someone's world — at their most vulnerable moments. In a waiting room. In a hallway. In a quiet room where time feels frozen. Volunteers are there. And that matters — more than we can ever fully express.

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I truly believe our volunteers
make a world of difference.

~ Angie Ramaekers

Adult volunteer program

Everywhere you look at CCH, you will likely find a volunteer. Volunteers provide support in the following departments, clinics, projects and events:



In the 2024-25
fiscal year:

175

ADULT
VOLUNTEERS

DIFFERENT
POSITIONS

46

16,345

SERVICE
HOURS



VolunTEEN program blossoms at CCH

Since 2010, the VolunTEEN program at Columbus Community Hospital has given local teenagers an opportunity to give back to their community and learn more about health care. But over the last year, the program has more than doubled — from 38 in May 2024 to 73 in May 2025 — and that's all thanks to two women who are dedicated to spreading the word.

"We know there's a shortage of health care providers right now, and being able to bring these teens in seems like it's a good step to take," said Debbie Pillen, who is a volunteer coordinator at the hospital along with Susie Jirka.

Pillen worked in education and insurance, and was a small business owner before she started in the hospital's volunteer and guest services department six years ago. She began as a gift shop employee, and has been a volunteer coordinator for five years.

Jirka — whose son is now a doctor after serving as a VolunTEEN when he was in high school — came to the hospital about a year ago. She had previously been employed at the Nebraska Department of Labor and Central Community College (CCC) in Columbus.

The two women began working together to promote the VolunTEEN program in the local high schools, at CCC and for any other group that will host them. "We both tried to be aware of opportunities for engagement within the community," said Jirka. "We are getting in front of adults, who then tell their children and grandchildren."

During the 2024-25 fiscal year, it was particularly helpful having VolunTEENs in the Columbus Fieldhouse. The teenagers helped by checking equipment in and out, and they were very visible to their classmates. When the fieldhouse hosted a wrestling tournament in January 2025, VolunTEENs were a big part of the effort.

"The visibility of us being out in the community is great recruitment," said Pillen. "The shirts and name badges are eye-catching. You're wondering, Who are these people, and how do I get involved? That's opening doors."

The VolunTEENs themselves are great ambassadors for the program. Many of those who have come on board over the past year have done so because their friends gushed about the program. "They have said they used to be quiet, and now they're coming out of their shell," Jirka said. "To me, that's just watching a generation grow. We've kind of seen things come full circle."

Of course, much of the program's growth is because of Pillen and Jirka themselves. Each coordinator works with both teen and adult volunteers. "I think the kids enjoy knowing that they have two volunteer coordinators who they can talk to," Pillen said. "They have a support system with both of us working really hard to come up with a variety of different departments in which they can volunteer. Susie has been wonderful on checking up on the comfort level of the teens once they get into the department, and I try to lean back on the department directors to make sure they feel comfortable with that teen. Then, they go out into their schools and tell their friends."

As the program continues to grow, Pillen and Jirka say they have enjoyed watching the teens find their confidence and, in some cases, their future career path. "My son would never in a million years have found his path into medicine had it not been for the VolunTEEN program," said Jirka.

VolunTEEN program

CCH's VolunTEEN program — for youth ages 14-18 — nearly doubled over the past year, from 38 in May 2024 to 73 in May 2025. Volunteers provide support in the following departments, clinics, projects and events:



ACUTE CARE UNIT



BEVERAGE CART



CHILD CARE CENTER



COLUMBUS FIELDHOUSE



COLUMBUS GENERAL SURGERY



DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING



INFORMATION DESK



LITTLE FREE LIBRARY



PLANT OPERATIONS



PREMIER PHYSICAL THERAPY



REHABILITATIVE SERVICES



WIGGLES & GIGGLES THERAPY FOR KIDS

In the 2024-25 fiscal year:

73

VOLUNTEERS

DIFFERENT POSITIONS

12

1,716

SERVICE HOURS

Kissell receives Outstanding Volunteer of the Year award

For more than a year, Michelle Kissell has focused her volunteer energy on just one person — Patricia Person, a patient in Columbus Community Hospital's hospice program. But her dedication to and bond with Person was so strong that it won Kissell the prestigious 2025 Outstanding Volunteer of the Year award.



"This is such an honor, and so humbling," said Kissell, who first moved to Columbus from southeast Indiana five years ago during the COVID-19 pandemic to be closer to her boyfriend.

While Kissell was happy she made the move here, she missed her family members, who were still back in Indiana. She was listening to a podcast when she first heard the term "death doula." After Googling it, she learned a death doula is a professional who provides support to individuals as they navigate the dying process.

"I went down this rabbit hole learning about what a death doula does, and thought it was wonderful," she said. "I know I am far enough away from my family that when there's a death, I can't be with them within 10-15 minutes. So, I decided I wanted to help those who I am close to. I called the hospital and asked if they had a death doula program. They told me they didn't, but they did have a hospice volunteer program."

And that's how Kissell started as a hospice volunteer.

She started visiting with patients who were in hospice — sometimes for an hour or two, sometimes for half a day. "It is a sad situation, being with somebody when they are close to death," she said. "However, the energy and the honor of helping somebody to go through the passing experience is one of the most beautiful things I've ever been a part of. When they are ready to go, the energy around them is so light and free and airy."

She started visiting with Person nearly two years ago — which is a relatively long time for a patient to be in the hospice program.

"I absolutely love her," Kissell said of Person. "She is a lot like my grandmothers, and we can sit and talk and tell stories and giggle. We've cried together, and I've grown very attached to her. Her family is wonderful — they've all welcomed me with open arms, and she has met my kids and grandkids."

Person was one of several people who nominated Kissell for the Outstanding Volunteer of the Year award. "Her visits give me something to look forward to on Mondays," said Person. "She's always happy."

Kissell, too, gains a lot from her relationship with Person. "She's my extended family out here in Nebraska," she said.

Person's daughter and caretaker, Bobbee Gronenthal, said Kissell has become an important part of their weekly routine. "We have a lot in common with her," Gronenthal said. "She's a real character."

Patient care ambassadors

Patient care ambassador volunteers visit newly admitted patients to welcome them and help them feel at ease. They act as a caring ambassador, helping to humanize the hospital experience for patients and families and offering assurance about the care and support they can expect to receive during their stay.

Nurse Corps

The Columbus Community Hospital volunteer nurse corps was developed in response to an identified need in the community. It is a way to bring cost-effective blood pressure screenings to the workplace. Nurse corps volunteers are the best and brightest retired CCH nurses who are no longer working under Department of Health and Human Services licensure. Dr. Dale Zaruba serves as the medical director and provides the necessary program oversight.

In the 2024-25 fiscal year:

There were nine members of the volunteer nurse corps.

9

Vending services

Volunteer and guest services operates all the vending machines in Columbus Community Hospital, Healthcare Medical Office Building and the Columbus Fieldhouse. The advantages of servicing the machines in-house are that staff members and volunteers are able to make sure the items are fresh, and the hospital benefits from the vending machine proceeds.

In the 2024-25 fiscal year:

10

The volunteer and guest services department serviced 10 vending machines.

VENDING MACHINES
GROSS SALES

\$75,838

Pet therapy

Pet therapy is a specific volunteer assignment in which a volunteer and dog team come in to visit patients, visitors and staff. The volunteers are required to complete the same onboarding and annual training as all hospital volunteers. Additionally, the dog and team are certified through Lutheran Church Charities (LCC) K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry — a rigorous process involving more than 2,000 hours of training. The volunteers must also ensure strict adherence to the infection control and hygiene policies for the dog which includes bathing before hospital visits and proper hygiene before, between and after patient or visitor interactions.

Pet therapy is a benefit to patients, visitors and staff because it provides a positive interruption in a patient's hospital stay. Visits from the volunteers and dog often bring comfort and joy to those who receive a visit.



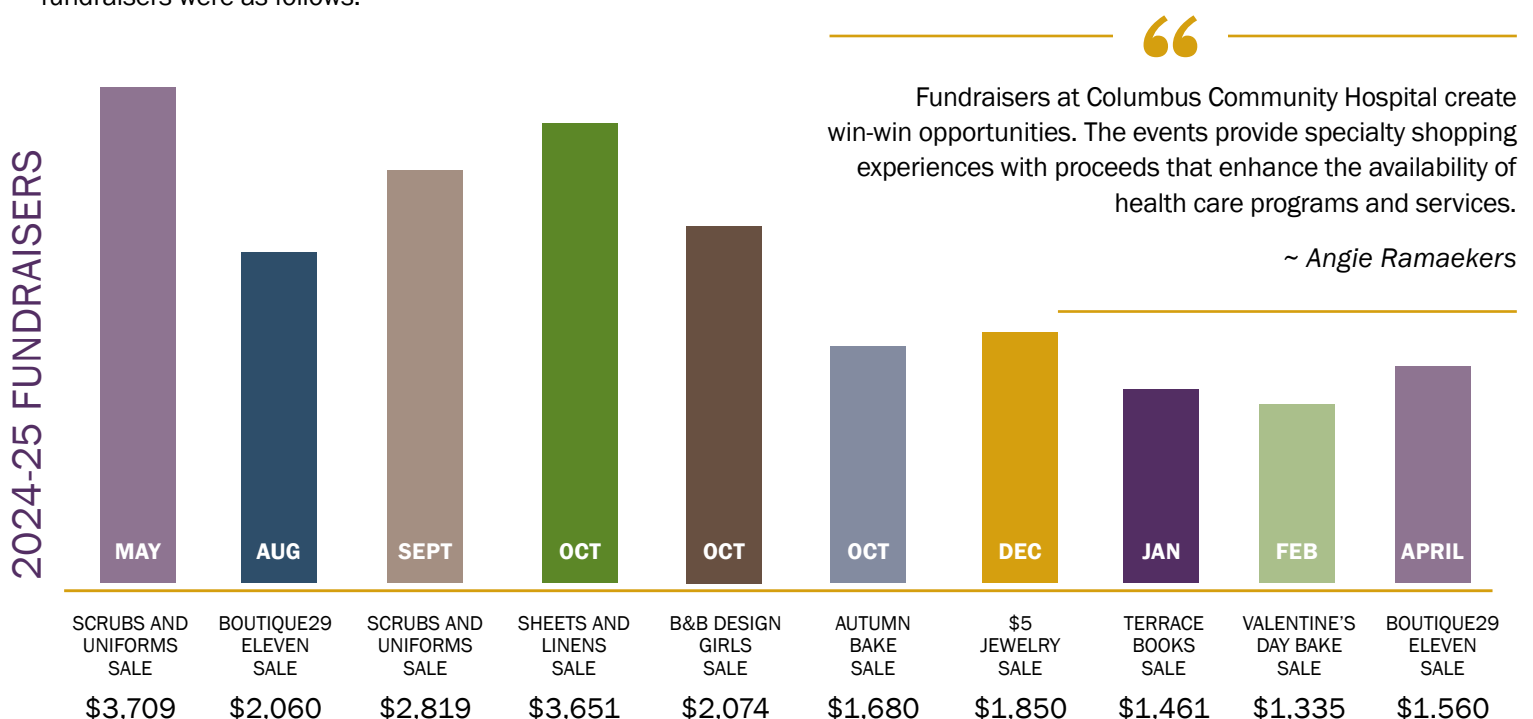
The Gift Shop

The Gift Shop is a place where patients, staff members, visitors and community members can find unique gifts. At the same time, they are also supporting the growth and advancement of medical services available right here, close to home.

Fundraisers

One big function of the volunteer and guest services department is fundraising. The department hosts a number of event-based fundraisers each year, all of which fund medical equipment and program advancements at the hospital.

The volunteer and guest services department hosted 10 fundraisers during the 2024-25 fiscal year. Proceeds from the fundraisers were as follows:



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Fundraisers at Columbus Community Hospital create win-win opportunities. The events provide specialty shopping experiences with proceeds that enhance the availability of health care programs and services.

~ Angie Ramaekers

VIP Transportation

CCH began offering free Very Important Patient (VIP) Transportation in September 2020 to assist patients who have no other means of traveling to their doctor appointments. Drivers can pick up and drop off patients within a 50-mile radius of the hospital.

In the 2024-25 fiscal year:

The VIP Transportation service assisted 2,947 patients.

2,947

16

There were 16 VIP Transportation drivers.



VIP Valet Parking

CCH has been offering free Very Important Patient (VIP) Valet Parking since 2018 to assist patients and their families who may have difficulty walking from the parking lot to the hospital.

In the 2024-25 fiscal year:

There were four VIP Valet Parking main drivers, with VIP Transportation drivers filling in as needed.

4

Blood drives

Every month, CCH hosts blood drives for staff members and the community.

In the 2024-25 fiscal year:

The volunteer and guest services department hosted 12 blood drives.

12

322

It collected 322 units of whole blood.

It collected 79 units of "power reds."

79

Meals on Wheels

The Meals on Wheels program is a collaboration between the volunteer and guest services department and nutrition services. Volunteer and guest services maintains all contact with the meals subscribers, volunteer coordinators and delivery volunteers and manages billing and payment. Nutrition services makes the meals.

In the 2024-25 fiscal year:

150

There were 150 Meals on Wheels subscribers.

The total number of meals served was 17,264.

17,264

Safe at Home

Safe at Home, formerly known as Lifeline, is a program offering personal emergency response systems for residents in Columbus and many of the surrounding communities. Having a Safe at Home device is a proactive step towards ensuring peace of mind for the subscriber and his or her loved ones.

In the 2024-25 fiscal year:

There were 152 active Safe at Home subscribers.

152