

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness show where we feature news and information that you can use to live a healthier life. I'm Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest this morning is Laura Gervais. She is our foundation and volunteer coordinator and someone I'm fortunate to get to work with on a daily basis. Thanks for taking time to visit with me today, Laura.

Laura Gervais: Always a pleasure, Katie.

Katie Johnson: We want to talk about the volunteer program today in particular and give a shout out to our volunteers, thank them for what they do and maybe let people know what kind of opportunities there might be out there for them as volunteers as well. To start out with, I thought it might be fun to talk about the history of the volunteer program a little bit. Do you know how long volunteers have been part of our organization and about the history of the volunteer program?

Laura Gervais: Yeah, Katie. I'm so glad you asked the question because it really made me dig deep and see where we started. It's very fascinating actually. The records we have show that our auxiliary and volunteer programs started in the '50s when Lake Region Healthcare... there was two former hospitals merged. They had what's called the Cherry Blossoms and the Candy Strippers. Those were our adult volunteers and junior volunteers.

Katie Johnson: Oh, cute. I've heard the Candy Striper term before but never Cherry Blossoms. I wonder where that name comes from.

Laura Gervais: I think it's because they wore pink striped uniforms and that's kind of the name came from there. But the names are so different now where just the volunteer program, but we do a lot of similar things. It's cool to see it evolve, but certain our core will stay the same.

Katie Johnson: Stay the same. Absolutely. Let's talk about some of those areas in the organization where volunteers are utilized and what kinds of things volunteers do for us.

Laura Gervais: Sure. I can highlight a few of our programs for you. We have volunteer staff, our information desk. That's in our hospital lobby. They take newly admitted patients to the rooms. They may deliver documents back and forth through department, deliver mail, flowers, greet patients, give direction. They're that friendly face when you first come into the hospital.

Katie Johnson: Sure. Probably the most recognizable to most of us.

Laura Gervais: Right. You'll see them in their blue smocks with the friendly face. Yeah. We also assist in the Auxiliary Gift Shop. We do call Auxiliary now friends of Lake Region Healthcare. We do use that new term, but the role is still the same, Auxiliary

supports mission of Lake Region by giving out medical scholarships and supporting departments. So volunteers will run the cash register, they'll help with inventory, they'll mark merchandise, they'll do an occasional gift wrapping, which is always their highlight. They have a really important role. We really appreciate what they do there.

Katie Johnson: They do a really nice job with making good recommendations too. I think they are great at helping. They'll ask what you're looking for and help you find the perfect gift and really unique stuff in that store. It's so fun to shop.

Laura Gervais: It's truly, it's just awesome all around. They really enjoy helping people find what they're looking for, give recommendations. They love looking for a new baby.

Katie Johnson: Oh, of course.

Laura Gervais: Things like that. So no, it's a lot of fun. Another thing I want to highlight is the role of the cancer center volunteer. They do such important work there. They greet patients, help families get comfortable. They'll bring comfort items, take food orders. Just overall helping the cancer center do the awesome work that they do. That's just another really important one.

Katie Johnson: It takes a special kind of person too. I think the volunteers do. Not that the whole staff does it, but do such a nice job of just being a calming presence in a really chaotic time for people at the cancer center.

Laura Gervais: A lot of them have come from experiences in their own families and lives of cancer and so they really understand the patient journey and are there just to hear, a listening ear support. It's a unique group of people there. The other thing, takes us outside of the hospital, but our Lake Region Takes Root Garden is a huge volunteer run project. We have one staff member who coordinates that, but really it's solely run by volunteers from the planting, the pruning, the watering, to harvesting, to getting it to our community and people who need it. That's a really other special program we have, helping those in need through the food program.

Katie Johnson: For our listeners who maybe haven't heard us talk about the community garden before, it is run by volunteers and all of the food goes to the Women, Infants and Children program and Food Shelves. So serves a great need for food insecurity in our county. It's a great way for volunteers who have that green thumb or even if they don't, maybe just want to learn a little bit more about gardening and be outdoors. Fun opportunity to do that as well. I know volunteers are used in a lot of other places throughout the organization too.

Laura Gervais: Oh, there's probably 10 different programs we have going on. Even if there's a specific interest for someone coming in saying, "I want to help in this way," we make it work, and so it's unlimited what we can do through volunteering.

Katie Johnson: Exactly. Everything from van drivers for the Red Cross to same day surgery to like you said, I know there've been times when someone said, "This was my career. This is where my specialty is. Can I use this skill to help you?" We love to put those kinds of special things to work as well. We recently recognized our volunteers through our annual recognition luncheon. I know that when you do that you take time to total up how many volunteers we have, how many hours did they give. What were the results from the past year?

Laura Gervais: Yeah, we had an awesome year. We have about 120 adults in junior volunteers currently and so this... last year we had well over 8,000 volunteer hours here at Lake Region in many different ways and capacities.

Katie Johnson: That is so cool and really a reflection of this community and how giving and supporting they are of healthcare in the vision and mission of Lake Region Healthcare. We also featured one special volunteer in a story that we wrote around that recognition lunch in time. I think it would be fun to share that with our listeners if they didn't get to hear about Jean Walwick and what she set as her volunteer goal. Can you tell us that story?

Laura Gervais: I would. She would be chuckling right now if she heard we were doing this because she's still getting recognition from that newsletter.

Katie Johnson: Oh, it's awesome.

Laura Gervais: But yeah, she is so awesome. She's been a steady volunteer with us. Average is about 100 hours a year at our information desk. She had surgery a few years ago and had cut back for her recovery. Last year she thought she could get back to her normal hours. When doing that, she thought, for turning 90, why don't I double my hours? She started working. She found that doubling her hours was relatively easy for her and so she thought, why not go for more? She ended up working 400 hours for us last year and she just loved every minute of it. You could just tell she really enjoyed what she was doing all while turning 90.

Katie Johnson: What a way to celebrate your 90th birthday, and what a testimony of a giving person. Like Jean, so many of our volunteers have been with us for a really long time. So I know that recruiting a new generation of volunteers is also part of your job. Are there some areas where you're in specific need of volunteers right now where you're doing some recruitment?

Laura Gervais: Yes. Actually, I just want to speak to that. A few generations ago there were so many people who were working inside the home and had more flexibility to help in the world of volunteering. Now the times are changing and people are working longer, outside the home, and people when they want to retire, they just want to do just that, relax and take it easy which we completely understand and I can't blame them. But our needs of the organization haven't changed. So I just want to say that as we grow as an organization, our needs only grow as a volunteer program. So yes, we have lots of needs right now, specifically at our

cancer center throughout the week. We have afternoon openings in the gift shop. We also have help Mondays and Thursdays, the summer at the garden. Last week we have a new fitness program, CrossFit kids. We're looking for help supervising the kids during the workout. A lot of different kind of opportunities that can fit a lot of different interests and abilities, skills.

Katie Johnson: Right. Those sound like all great opportunities. if people are listening think, gosh I can do that, we'll definitely tell you how to get in touch with Laura to volunteer at the end of the program. Get your pen and paper ready now perhaps. But I wanted to talk a little bit about the benefits of volunteering before we wrap up too. We talk a lot about the seven components of wellness and the importance of... it's so much more than just being physically healthy and eating the right things. Volunteerism, there is a lot of research that actually shows it contributes to your actual health. You have some statistics you can point to about that.

Laura Gervais: Sure. Well, you don't have to look hard to find a ton of research that shows the benefits of volunteering. Actually, there are lots of great quotes from leaders, philosophers that understand the importance of giving back and helping others. Things I can think of just right off the top is, volunteering time, that makes you feel like you have more time. Actually when giving back you realize that you're enjoying what you're doing and you just feel like, gosh, time slows down, you're just enjoying what you're doing. That's just one thing I can think of. When you're volunteering, you actually develop new skills. You're using the skills you have, but then there's just lots of opportunity to learn new things. Volunteering your experience helps to build your experience. That's kind of simple, but it just gives you a lot more opportunity to be involved in the community and learn about things you hadn't before.

Katie Johnson: I think that's probably why so many youth organizations now incorporate... I mean, even sports teams incorporate volunteerism into their programs because they know that it helps kids in so many ways. It's a great point.

Laura Gervais: Right. Lastly, volunteering your love actually makes you feel more love. A lot of people say that the measure between volunteering and happiness shows that the more you volunteer, the happier you are. Volunteering builds empathy, happiness. They found more people that volunteered, they just truly enjoyed what they do. It built empathy, strengthen their social bonds. All the things.

Katie Johnson: Oh, really good things. We can certainly see that in the volunteers that we have and we're so grateful for them. I think to wrap up, that's probably what we want to drive home as a message, is appreciation to our volunteers and then the opportunity for anyone who might be listening or someone that you know who might be a good fit for volunteering some of their time here to tell them how to connect with us to do that.

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Laura Gervais: Well, just two simple ways that you can connect. Just feel free to give me a call. My name's Laura Gervais in the foundation volunteer office 218-736-8498 or feel free to send me an email. My email, L-K-G-E-R-V-A-I-S@lrhc.org.

Katie Johnson: We do have a volunteer tab on our website too. You can always find out more about our volunteer program and Laura's contact information on our website as well. Laura, thanks for all you do to coordinate the volunteer work, the great people who give their time to us and thanks for being my guest today as we talk about the importance of volunteers to Lake Region's mission and the benefits of volunteering to those who do. We appreciate you and all of your volunteers.

Laura Gervais: Thanks so much, Katie.

Katie Johnson: Laura Gervais, volunteering foundation coordinator at Lake Region Healthcare, my guest today on Apple a Day. Laura and Katie remind you there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.