

Daniel R. Wagner, Los Alamos Medical Center's Director of Registration, is this year's hospital Mercy Award Winner. Established in 2002 to honor the life of Scott Mercy, founding Chairman and CEO of LifePoint Hospitals, the annual Mercy Award is the highest honor an employee can receive, recognizing one hospital staff member who best represents the spirit and values on which the company was founded. Mercy, who was killed at the age of 38 in a plane crash, was well known for his charitable acts and was, at one time, the chairman of the Board of the Tennessee Special Olympics.

Wagner, who has been employed at LAMC for 1.5 years, is described by Interim Chief Executive Officer Ruth McDaniel as "a quiet, loyal, dedicated director." McDaniel added, "He routinely goes above and beyond in providing not only excellent customer service while the patients are in his department but also in helping to insure that the overall lasting patient perception is one of ultimate caring. He meets or exceeds all of my expectations for a committed employee and leader."

However, McDaniel said, it is Wagner's involvement in regional community activities, "his spirit of service," for which he was both nominated and selected for the Mercy Award. The list of organizations to which he contributes is lengthy but all involve helping those with special needs. Specifically, through the years, Wagner has worked for Habitat for Humanity and is now accompanying his 16-year-old daughter to the neighboring community of Santa Fe to participate in their Women's Build project.

Even more evidence of his Mercy attributes, McDaniel said, is his work with Special Olympics. He actually was touched by the need to help special children at the age of 18 when he joined the Knights of Columbus and participated in their Tootsie Roll Drive to benefit the handicapped. Later, he said, it would prove to be a pet project as his two older children were both born with special needs. He became a coach, mentor, and volunteer for SO, and says that after all his participation, he has learned that the greatest gift you can give a handicapped person is time.

"A lot of people don't give the handicapped the time of day, but if you talk and listen, they have stories," Wagner said. "They have feelings, desires, and a life, and time is the most precious gift you can give them. You can buy them all the presents in the world, but the best gift is time. It might take them 40 minutes to tell you a 4-minute story, but when they are through telling you, their faces really do light up." He adds that he raised his own two special children to be productive and not use their disabilities as an excuse for failing to do their very best. They are grown now, living independently, working and have each purchase their own car. He says he's "pretty proud of that."

But once the older two were launched, Wagner did not stop giving back to his community. While they raise their two younger daughters, in addition to continuing to volunteer for Special Olympics, he and his wife, Ginny Melvin, are licensed foster parents for New Mexico's Children, Youth and Family department. They provide respite care for other foster parents who need a break, and they also currently have an 18-month-

old foster child of their own. He has had in his short life, Dan says, “a pretty rough childhood” and will stay with the Melvin/Wagner family until another safe home can be found. Wagner says a certain amount of detachment is necessary to welcome, nurture and then give up a child, but, he says, “it doesn’t diminish the experience for me and my wife. That child that you are patting on the back at 2 in the morning may not be there next month, but he needs your love and attention now.”

Wagner is also a member of the Knights of Columbus and has been very active in Scouting for both boys and girls (and was an Eagle Scout himself). His eyes sparkle when he talks about the rewards gained by giving time to special people. “Sometimes all I do is listen to a child’s story,” he says. “Everyone has feelings and needs to be treated as if they do.”

When asked what accomplishment he is most proud of at LAMC Wagner replied immediately that he has reduced turnover in his department to “almost zero.” He says the staff he has now is “almost all of the staff I started with,” and when asked to what he attributes this success, his answer reflects his humanitarian spirit. “We think and operate as a team. If you don’t have that, you won’t get any other accomplishments. You have to earn the respect of your coworkers, peers and employees, and you have to lead by example. I wouldn’t ask one of my staff to do anything that I wouldn’t do or haven’t done. If an employee comes to me with a problem, I ask them, ‘what do you think?’ or ‘what would you do?’ Where most employers are interested in finding out how fast someone types, or how fast they can get customers through, I am interested in the whole person and what they think. My proudest accomplishment is the relationship I have with my employees and what we do together.”

Wagner is also a black belt in Lean Six Sigma, with a heavy emphasis on defining, improving and optimizing processes, although this is his first time working in health care. His professional background includes being a pilot, running manufacturing plants, and, in his words, “flipping burgers. I know,” he says, “what it means to scrub the floor for a living.”

McDaniel says Wagner is a very deserving recipient of the Mercy Award. “Please join us in congratulating Dan on this special honor,” she said.

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