

# Premium Partners

Hospitals are at the heart of Mended Hearts. Pushing that metaphor a little further, they provide the life blood — access to patients — for this organization. Without their cooperation, it would be impossible for accredited visitors to bring hope to people facing the uncertainty that often comes with heart disease and related procedures.

by Jon Caswell



**C**ooperation with Mended Hearts varies from hospital to hospital, and it changes over time, as many chapters discovered when HIPAA was instituted. That event was challenging for Mended Hearts to negotiate, but one unintended positive consequence was better relations between many chapters and their partner hospitals.

“The relationship between Mended Hearts chapters and local hospitals is a win-win for both parties, with the ultimate winners being the patients, their families and caregivers who are served,” says MHI President Margaret Elbert. “The hospitals see how much they need us to speak to the patients and calm them down. It is a wonderful gift to us that most of the hospitals treat us like pure gold and appreciate the help we give. In most cases it is a strong working relationship where they really feel we are part of the team.”

Last year Mended Hearts presented its first-ever Hospital Award to recognize the importance of this relationship. Roper/St. Francis Healthcare of Charleston, S.C., nominated by Chapter 266, received that inaugural award. In acknowledging the award, Tim Kafer, the director of Roper’s Heart and Vascular Center, made clear the importance of MHI to their hospital: “Mended Hearts is an integral component of our Heart and Vascular Center, and we are proud to have them as partners in the care process.”

The four finalists for this year’s Hospital Award have similar opinions about their relationships with their nominating chapters. The Executive Committee selected these four finalists by evaluating eight categories — from providing access to patients to providing a consistent contact person to recognizing MHI’s contributions. Judging by the reports of the nominated hospitals, many chapters have very generous and helpful partners. Some 33 hospitals were nominated, and each RD then selected two from each region. This list of nominees was then narrowed to four, from which the winner was selected.

This year’s finalists:

- **BAKERSFIELD MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**  
*nominated by Chapter 77, Bakersfield, Calif.*
- **ST. JOSEPH MERCY OAKLAND**  
*nominated by Chapter 230, Pontiac, Mich.*
- **NORTHEAST GEORGIA MEDICAL CENTER**  
*nominated by Chapter 302, Gainesville, Ga.*
- **LANDMARK MEDICAL CENTER**  
*nominated by Chapter 338, Woonsocket, R.I.*



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#### BAKERSFIELD MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

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Chapter 77 and Bakersfield Memorial Hospital go back a long way. Chapter 77 has been visiting there since the chapter was founded 34 years ago. And like many partners in relationships that have lasted that long, they have developed somewhat of a mutual admiration society.

The cooperation starts right away. The hospital makes it easy for the Chapter 77 accredited visiting coordinator to get the room numbers on a weekly basis. The names are harvested from the four heart surgeons who work in Bakersfield, which is a Central Valley town about 110 miles north of Los Angeles. “All the nurses are very happy for us to visit,” says chapter President Don Hollingsworth. “Often when they see our badges and logo shirts, they escort us to the room. They’ve even okayed us to visit in the CCU on occasion.”

Bakersfield Memorial makes a big meeting room available for the monthly chapter meetings and provides a continental breakfast buffet. In 2002 they dedicated a bench in remembrance of past chapter President Ken Milligan to honor his 2000 patient visits. Each February

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## ST. JOSEPH MERCY OAKLAND

What was said earlier about mutual admiration societies seems really apropos for the relationship of Chapter 230 with their partner hospital, St. Joseph Mercy Oakland. They do all the right stuff — access to patients, meeting room, awards luncheon, space to store materials and to fill out paperwork, speakers for meetings, etc.

Here’s an example of how they go above and beyond: At one time the hospital charged for parking, and the public safety department was adamant that they would not give free parking to MHI members coming to the monthly meetings. “The heart surgeons went to bat for us,” says Shirley Kell, Chapter 230’s secretary and membership chairperson. “They got us that fringe benefit.”

When HIPAA came into effect, it had a huge impact on visiting for

the hospital fetes MHI members with an anniversary and awards luncheon. It’s a great party, with a full buffet and red linen tablecloths and napkins. There were 55 attendees at last year’s event. And it’s not all just fun; they invite Chapter 77 to participate in health fairs and the cardiology update every October. They also print their monthly newsletter.

Asked why Bakersfield Memorial seems to go above and beyond in supporting MHI, vice president and COO Bruce Peters says, “We don’t feel we’re going above and beyond. We are grateful that the Mended Hearts organization and its volunteers are the ones who go above and beyond. We just feel it’s important to support MHI as best we can.

“We benefit directly because our patients benefit directly,” he continues. “The services the volunteers provide are comforting and educational to the patients. The more information and the more of a human touch our patients receive, the better they do. We have received many positive comments about the work of Mended Hearts from patients, some of whom became volunteers!

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“I hear about other chapters and the costs of meetings, and I think, ‘We have all this at no charge,’” says Don Hollingsworth. “I am very thankful and honored that they care so much about us.”

many hospitals. “We were in contact with their legal staff and the head of nursing on the cardiac floor and made a smooth transition,” says Kell. “After a couple of months when we could only visit patients who had signed consent forms, we agreed to a business associate arrangement, which allow us to continue our accredited visiting program. They worked very hard to make that happen because they saw during that short time how beneficial it is for patients to receive our support.”

In addition to this support, for the past two years St. Joseph Mercy Oakland has also provided money to send two chapter officers to the annual convention. This helps the chapter to grow leaders, which ensures that it continues to thrive.

“Our doctors and nurses tell the patients that MHI will help them emotionally and support them in their recovery,” says Kell. “Having the surgeons and cardiologists build us up gives our visits an even greater impact.”

“This group of dedicated people is the heart and soul of our organization and the mission that so firmly leads us,” says Rob Fisher, business manager and MHI contact person. “They are the epitome of volunteering, serving others who are experiencing turbulent times. Patients are afraid, feeling alone, experiencing discomfort, not knowing what to do, and their families feel helpless. MHI provides the comfort, education and support, and reaches out and touches patients and their families in a way that we as staff and as an organization cannot. Without them and their dedicated service, we wouldn’t have the

mission-driven cardiology service that we do. MHI is an integral component of the holistic care that is our mission. They complete the care program for the patients and the families. They are truly part of our team, working closely with our staff and physicians at all levels. Their service has made many of us better people and taught us how to provide better care.”

### NORTHEAST GEORGIA MEDICAL CENTER

Gainesville, Ga. Chapter 302 has only been around six years, but they have been busy: last calendar year they made 3,477 visits at the Ronnie Green Heart Center, which opened in 2002. According to administrators at the Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC), the MHI chapter has given almost 16,000 hours of service since the center was established. “Their dedicated service has positively affected the overall success of our heart program,” says Lynne Allen, the hospital’s director of volunteer services. “They must be doing something right because NGMC is rated in the top five percent of heart centers nationally and is the No. 1 heart hospital in the state.”

Chapter 302’s service to NGMC is matched by the hospital’s support to them. As with the other finalists, NGMC provides meeting rooms and refreshments and newsletter printing — and free valet parking. They even provide lunch for the volunteers, and there are a lot of them because MHI provides coverage every day of the week — three volunteers every weekday, one on Saturday and two on Sunday. And the food doesn’t stop there: “Once a year, the hospital puts on an appreciation dinner

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## Improving the Relationship

“Obviously, the chapters cannot operate without a hospital’s help, and that becomes an integral part of their success or failure,” says Raul Fernandes, national vice president. “If you have a good relationship, you will have a good chapter there. If it’s just so-so, you won’t have as good a chapter there. So it’s important to work at creating a good relationship.”

If your chapter has a less-than-stellar relationship with its partner hospital, there are ways to improve it. Fernandes shared his thoughts on that subject with *Heartbeat*.

First, meet people, especially the directors of cardiac rehab and volunteer services. “Those positions are likely to change a lot, so let these people get to know you. It’s important to become part of the volunteer programs so that the visitors can be covered by the hospital’s insurance.”

Second, the chapter might consider donating items that are useful to their departments. “Hospitals are good at following the big numbers, but the little things may fall through.” If a fax machine, DVD player or exercise bike breaks in the middle of the year, they may not have money to replace those things till a new budget cycle rolls around. It’s a good opportunity to use some volunteer money to help them replace those items. “Heart rate monitors are a good deal because they don’t cost much and they’re always useful.”

Third, help the cardiac unit set up and maintain a small library. Because of the rapid development of information in this field, pamphlets, DVDs, videotapes and books become obsolete fairly quickly.

Fourth, help out in other areas, like handing out information at health fairs or supplying volunteers to guide people at an open house.



“Chapter 338 benefits our hospital at many levels. First, they provide our heart patients with the opportunity to take an active role in managing their own heart disease. Their monthly meetings give our patients and, just as important, their caregivers, a forum where they can learn about their condition and interact with others who have had similar experiences.”

for the volunteers,” says Judy Dube, visiting co-chair, and in an interesting twist on the expected, she adds, “The servers include top administrators and physicians.”

“They also pay for two officers and their spouses to attend the national convention, all expenses paid,” says Victor Dube, Judy’s husband and co-chair. NGMC also helps them with outreach to local churches and civic organizations, helping with the design, printing and mailing of letters and newsletters. “They even helped us make magnets for heart patients to post on their refrigerators so they have easy access to our office number.”

“At our recertification meeting this September they’re providing a room and catering lunch for us,” adds Judy. “We are truly considered a critical part of the Heart Center by administrators, doctors and nurses. They support our visits by giving patients information about us and our purpose before we even visit the patients ourselves.”

“One of the administrators told a surgeon that we were more important to the post-surgery patients for hope and peace of mind than the doctors were,” says Victor. “Physicians make a point of approaching us when they see us, shaking our hands and giving us personal thanks for all we do.”

“It is obvious that the Mended Hearts volunteers have true empathy and compassion for the patients and their families,” says Lynne Allen, “and this makes a lasting impression. Mended Hearts volunteers truly make a difference in relieving anxiety and offering hope and

encouragement. They are such positive examples of how well heart patients can do following procedures. They are an integral part of the care we offer.”

#### LANDMARK MEDICAL CENTER

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At 15 months, Chapter 338 of Woonsocket, R.I. is one of MHI’s newest chapters, but they already have 75 members. Their relationship with their partner hospital, Landmark Medical Center, is also thriving.

Like the other finalists, Landmark provides meeting rooms and food vouchers for visitors. Not only do they print the newsletter, but when the chapter lost its newsletter editor, the director of volunteer services joined MHI and took on the editor’s role. Several nurses, including the head nurse in cardiac rehab, have joined. “She’s instrumental in recruiting members from the rehab center,” says chapter President Bob Scott. “We work closely with her and with the head of cardiology. They don’t hesitate to call me at home if they feel there’s someone who could benefit. One young man was so scared he passed out when they told him he might have to have a triple bypass. They called me at home and I went up and helped calm him down.”

“That patient had the surgery the next day,” says Gary Gaube, Landmark’s CEO, “and credited Bob with easing his fears.

“Chapter 338 benefits our hospital at many levels,” Gaube continues. “First, they provide our heart patients

with the opportunity to take an active role in managing their own heart disease. Their monthly meetings give our patients and, just as important, their caregivers, a forum where they can learn about their condition and interact with others who have had similar experiences.

“We have a core group of volunteers who visit all our cardiac patients and help them through the process,” says Gaube. “The program even goes so far as to match patients with volunteers who have undergone the same procedure. Several of our doctors and nurses have become members themselves.”

“We’re a part of the cardiac team,” says Bob Scott. “We’re there every day in our red smocks and pins, which we didn’t have to pay for, and I know we’re well respected. It makes our job easier. We visit every day, plus we’re in the cath lab Monday through Friday, 6 to 11 a.m.. They even call us to do pre-op visits when it’s appropriate. Every time they call us for something, it makes our people feel needed. Even though we’re volunteers, we all feel like we’re part of Landmark.”

“Picking the hospitals was very difficult because many of them do so much for our chapters,” says national Vice President Raul Fernandes. “It really came down to the more unusual considerations, because all the nominated hospitals do the big stuff — meeting rooms, parking, chapter newsletter support and meals. They really take care of everything. When it comes right down to it, most of the hospitals on our list were winners.” ❤️

## And the Winner Is...

Just as *Heartbeat* went to press, the winner of the Hospital Award was announced:

### St. Joseph Mercy Oakland of Pontiac, Michigan.

Look for more on this and other Mended Hearts award winners in our Winter 2007 issue of *Heartbeat*.

# Historical Hearts

## Chapters Celebrating Anniversaries from January–March 2008

### 35 Years

Bakersfield, CA  
Chapter 77  
Western Region

Central Wyoming, WY  
Chapter 242  
Central Region  
Santa Maria Valley, CA  
Chapter 243  
Western Region

### 30 Years

Ft. Lauderdale, FL  
Chapter 60  
Southern Region

### 10 Years

Greater Fort Hood Area, TX  
Chapter 64  
Southwest Region

### 25 Years

Bergen/Passaic, NJ  
Chapter 140  
Northeast Region

MH of Central Shenandoah, VA  
Chapter 135  
Mid-Atlantic Region

Plain‘O Hearts, Plano, TX  
Chapter 142  
Southwest Region

Los Angeles-Inglewood, CA  
Chapter 187  
Western Region

Roanoke Valley, VA  
Chapter 144  
Mid-Atlantic Region

Port St. Lucie/Ft. Pierce, FL  
Chapter 190  
Southern Region

Cedar Valley-Waterloo, IA  
Chapter 145  
Midwest Region

MH of Lake County, IL  
Chapter 239  
Midwest Region

Four States MH of Joplin, MO  
Chapter 146  
Midwest Region

MH of Frederick, MD  
Chapter 285  
Mid-Atlantic Region

### 15 Years

Kaiser-Oakland, CA  
Chapter 188  
Western Region

### 5 Years

South Fort Myers, FL  
Chapter 312  
Southern Region

South Oakland, MI  
Chapter 230  
Central Region

Sutters Buttes, CA  
Chapter 313  
Western Region

Paris Lamar County, TX  
Chapter 237  
Southwest Region

St. Francis Hospital’s Heart Center, Wilmington DE  
Chapter 314  
Mid-Atlantic Region

Ft. Worth Northeast, TX  
Chapter 240  
Southwest Region