

PRINT-‘Lunch Ladies’ Recall Nearly Three Decades Together

Delores, Muriel, Hazel and Dianne didn’t care what was on the menu, they knew nothing was going to keep them from their standing appointment.

‘We went to lunch every day at 11:30. That was just our time to go. And we visited. We became friends. She and I are relatives,’ Delores Shimmin said pointing to Hazel Boswell sitting next to her. “It was just wonderful,” Delores recalled about the nearly three decades she met up daily with her three best colleagues at Kewanee Public Hospital which was the early incarnation of OSF HealthCare Saint Luke Medical Center.

Kewanee Public Hospital took 15 years to build, mostly due to fundraising issues but opened the doors for its first patient April 17, 1919. So, 100 years later to the date, OSF HealthCare celebrated its early beginnings with an anniversary celebration, including a luncheon for retirees.

Collectively, Delores Shimmin, Hazell Boswell, Muriel Jackson and D. Dianne Lindstrom represent more than 120 years of combined service and they relished being back together again for one more lunch.

Hazel usually had the most trouble getting to the lunch table promptly because she worked in Admitting and couldn’t just walk away if she was in the middle of getting a new patient into the system. She jokes that it became easier with new technology.

“Starting on that old manual typewriter ... plunk, plunk, plunk. And, then we got the electric one. And then finally, you know, the computer. It was fun. It was busy!”

Dolores started in the Business Office and with the advent of data processing that used punch cards, she began sending them to a Saint Louis company which read them and then printed bills. Eventually a computer was brought in house and she became, as she called it, director of computers.

“If the girl at the outpatient desk had trouble with her computer, the terminal, I’d have to go in and re-start it, reboot it. So, I was all over that hospital in the middle of the night. I knew it very well,” Dolores shared.

Muriel Jackson put in 27 years in the Business Office and is the only one of the ladies who was still working in 2006, when the decision was made to build a full replacement hospital at the new location on South Street in Kewanee. Jackson said that transition was a challenge but that wasn’t the biggest challenge she remembers.

That was during January of 1979. Kewanee received 30 inches of snow. The community endured an ice storm and a blizzard and plows could not make it through 15 foot walls of snow.

Jackson remembers, “We had snow – very, very deep snow. There was a week where I did not even get in to work. There was just no way. And, people in town went on snowmobiles to pick some of them of them in so they could work.”

Many others who were around for the early days of what became OSF Saint Luke Medical Center gathered around scrap books and viewed memorabilia in a large meeting room on the first floor of the state-of-the art building. 89 year-old Frances P. Smith’s most vivid memory was working as a night nursing supervisor for a summer in the mid-1950s, filling in for someone who was on leave.

There was no emergency room. Patients needing help rang a bell at the reception desk that was unstaffed overnight.

“The person would be standing there ringing the bell waiting for someone to come. If you were busy on the floor, someone would try to contact you and say ‘you have an admission so you know you have to hurry down and admit this person.’ Yeah, it was so different Frances recalled.

She said those days, overnight nurses were jack-of-all-trades. Frances admitted patients, escorted them to treatment areas, or hospital beds, made coffee and put out food for the overnight staff, then cleaned up, checked patients, scrubbed in for a surgery if necessary, and finished with morning rounds and updated charts.

On April 1, 2014, Kewanee Hospital affiliated with OSF HealthCare and became OSF Saint Luke Medical Center. The leadership team chose the name Saint Luke because of its link to health care. Many know Luke as the apostle of Jesus who spoke about issues of helping the poor. He is also known as patron saint of physicians and surgeons.

There will be additional celebrations for the 100th Anniversary of OSF Saint Luke Medical Center

April 24 Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours-5:30 p.m.

May 3-Family Fun Celebration- 9 a.m.-noon, Visitation School Gymnasium

Mass-5:00 p.m., Saint John Church

Historical Timeline:

- **1917** Whirlwind campaign raises \$60,000 for original hospital building.
- **1919** Completed construction of 50 bed hospital. First patient admitted on April 17.
- **1989** Kewanee “Public Hospital” becomes Kewanee Hospital
- **2003** Designated Critical Access Hospital
- **2006** Groundbreaking for full replacement hospital
- **2008** Grand opening of full replacement hospital
- **2014** Affiliated with OSF HealthCare