

*Values in Action – Service
Ray Singer*

Ray Singer describes himself as happy, hard working and blessed to be here at St. Joseph Hospital of Orange. Team members say the lift tech and volunteer teen coordinator is a gentle giant with a warm, caring spirit.

Ray's hospital nomination form was submitted by Sara Sheldon, MSW, Renal Center. She wrote, "There are many of our team members who wanted to nominate him...everyone who talked with me about nominating Ray signed their name," and 49 signatures followed. Since Ray's service at St. Joseph Hospital began in 2002, he has been the Support Services Employee of the Year and the Resource Center Employee of the Year. He has received the Friend of Nursing award and was nominated previously for the Values in Action Award for Service by Volunteer Director Victoria Heidleman.

Ray considers a prior 18 years in another service industry, as an executive chef and restaurateur, as his training ground for service excellence. And at 60 years of age, he is still excited about learning new ways to serve. In June of this year he enthusiastically talked of undergoing in-house training to become a dialysis technician. "I love what I do and I've never had a back problem, but I'm getting older and in five years I want to still be able to provide a needed service," he says.

St. Joseph Hospital is blessed to have Ray Singer as its Service ambassador. For sharing his expertise in lifting patients to effect a safer working culture; for mentoring the next generation on providing the best possible service to patients; and for providing not only a physical lift, but an emotional one as well for the dispirited and discouraged, the St. Joseph Hospital family wholeheartedly nominates Ray Singer for the St. Joseph Health System Values in Action – Service award.

Acknowledges that every person and his/her need is unique and tailors each action and interaction to meet that singular special need.

"Ray is acutely aware of the needs of each individual patient...he knows that our patients can be in pain and scared when being transferred from a wheelchair to a dialysis chair or bed. He takes the time to talk to patients and let them know exactly what he is going to do and forms a

relationship with each individual patient,” writes Sara. “One of our patients is a double amputee and she has spent a great deal of time in the hospital as an inpatient. If he was in the hospital when she was and did not lift or transfer her, he would go by and say hi after his shift, just to let her know someone was thinking about her.”

Ray is a welcome face throughout SJO. Patients transferred to other units continue to see him throughout their stay. “Seeing they have the same lift tech, they often utter a visible sigh of relief. It’s as if they’re thinking, ‘I’m going to be okay,’” he shares.

Realizing many of the patients he helps are hurting, Ray patiently works with to win their trust. “I enjoy those small successes of making the patient comfortable, and the harder the patient the more exciting it is for me. I’ve had patients strike out at me, or tell me ‘Don’t touch me,’ and I know it’s the medications or that they are in pain,” he says.

He continues, “When I get a heart surgery patient up for the first time since the procedure and see him or her walk to a chair for the first time, I feel like I’m seeing a miracle. Every day I’m seeing the healing process working.”

Makes every person feel that they are important by actively listening and giving full attention in order to understand the best way to serve them.

From his past career in the restaurant business, when he supervised up to 600 employees, Ray explains that he has learned, “You don’t have repeat business if you don’t treat the customer right.” When the customer isn’t at their best, he notes that, “Sometimes you have to swallow things.”

Sara recalls how on one occasion in the Renal Center, the first patient of the day was being brought in by ambulance and the ambulance drivers were late in picking him up. Instead of standing around and waiting, Ray turned his attention to the second patient, who took the OCTA Access to and from dialysis. The patient was pressed for time because Access would leave her if she wasn’t ready when they came. Without being asked and to save time, he picked up the bleach wipes and wiped down the bed for the team while they prepared the machine for her dialysis, enabling the patient to catch her transportation home.

Sara remarks, “He looks at each patient and listens to them while they express their concerns, so that they know they are heard, and then he does his best to address the fears and worries before lifting them...He addressed needs with our team as they arise and does not think

twice before addressing an emergency...He might very well be the last arms a person feels, and how great it is he does it with such care and love.”

Ray’s supervisor, Ergonomic Coordinator Bryon Graulich, says that as a Lift Team member, Ray may be the only “common link” for the patient throughout his or her stay. “He’s often able to tell Nursing staff details about the patient’s and family’s needs and preferences. He helps complete the picture and make this a more holistic environment.”

Volunteer Services Director Victoria Heidelman says she recruited Ray to volunteer because of his “friendly yet take-charge attitude.” She adds, “He immediately built a rapport with the kids, working alongside them while encouraging them to do more... He has an extraordinary ability to empower teenagers while teaching them how to excel. They have come to know and respect him. He is a true mentor, and takes the time to groom those volunteers who he believes will be outstanding leaders for our high school volunteer committee.”

Recognizes opportunities to serve and facilitates or organizes people or groups to make it happen.

Taking service to a higher level, Ray goes beyond lift tech assignments to ensure the safety and back health of the staff. “I’m excited about the ambulatory program in the ICU,” he shares. “The Lift Team does rounds with the nurses, and we’re able to suggest equipment and styles of lifting.”

Whether for a nurse who has lifted patients the same way for 20 years, or the young, “macho male” nurse, Ray encourages them to take advantage of the top-of-the-line lifting equipment available at SJO. “I try to teach them to work smarter, and tell them it’s more fun to use the toys,” he says with a smile.

“Ray is well networked, and gets invited to all the potlucks,” claims Bryon. “For him it’s not about eating, it’s what can he bring. He’s always volunteering to cook at hospital barbecues and luncheons.”

For the past five years Ray has served as the volunteer coordinator for SJO’s teen volunteers, a responsibility that he says is harder than his day job. Ray impresses upon them the importance of smiling and saying hello to everyone they encounter in the hospital. “I work with the best of the best, and their energy is infectious,” recognizes Ray. “I not only see our future doctors, I see and try to impress upon them the huge effect they have now on our patients.”

Ray keeps a sharp eye on his charges and is not afraid to maintain discipline. In one example he relates, “Their idea of an emergency phone call and mine are different. I told them that they are not to be texting while volunteering and if I heard or saw that they were it would be their last day working on my shift. I’ve also had to remind them not to give their personal phone numbers to patients, even though their hearts are in the right place.”

Two young ladies volunteering under Ray’s tutelage a couple of years ago spent time with an elderly gentleman, reading to him and just stopping by his room to say hello. When the patient was transferred to a nursing home they went to visit, but found he had died alone. From their experience the SJO Compassionate Care Program was born, providing structure for volunteers to consistently offer lonely patients a listening ear and caring presence.

Responds to change constructively and helps others to remain positive during times of uncertainty.

Ray’s ability to grow and have a positive influence is evident in many ways:

- In order to be in top physical shape for his role, Ray has been working with a personal trainer and lost 60 pounds.
- Preparing for the future, Ray is currently training to become a Dialysis Technician in order to help some of “the patients I’ve gotten so attached to,” provide a needed service and “get more involved with diabetes management.”
- For his first three years at SJO, Ray would have lunch with the physical therapy team in order to glean information on how to encourage patients, helping him develop skills that he likens to “coaching a football team.”
- Ray believes that his role is not only to make anxious patients comfortable and to “pitch in and help wherever needed,” but also to protect nurses from all-too-common back injuries. He has trained hundreds of nurses to perform lifts ergonomically and to properly use new lifting equipment.

Bryon remarks, “Ray came to St. Joseph Hospital a broken man. He’d lost his business and needed to start over with a new career. He began working part time transporting patients, and from the start he was interested in doing whatever he could to help. He knows no barriers or boundaries in how to be of service to the organization, and is never afraid to go into a superior’s office for

help. Everybody at the hospital seems to know Ray. He is such an interesting, fun and giving person who has touched the lives of so many people. Wherever Ray is working he looks at ‘How can I make this the best possible situation?’ He has really helped the Lift Team evolve, and he’s good at getting Nursing staff to understand techniques for safe patient handling and how it benefits the staff and patients.”

Rose adds, “Ray likes nothing better than to walk into a patient’s room and put a smile on his or her face. On a typical day, Ray covers about 14 miles and has 10 to 12 scheduled lifts and turns, plus he never hesitates to lend a hand with emergencies. On one occasion as he walked into the Sister Elizabeth building, he came upon a man coming from another department who had fallen in the front lobby. Ray came running. He was so kind and caring toward the man. He helped him get in a position where he could be lifted and then lifted him swiftly into the wheelchair, giving him a big bear hug throughout the lift.”

Summary

By coming to SJO, Ray claims he “fell into a great family.” His service ethic is not only ingrained, but stems from a grateful heart. Ray claims he was given “a second chance” in a place where he has found his true calling, and remarks that he appreciates every minute.

Ray has served to build awareness about proper lifting at all levels of the organization. One day he walked into President and CEO Larry Ainsworth’s office to invite him to observe the Lift Team. Mr. Ainsworth made the appointment and kept it, donning scrubs and shadowing Ray over several hours. Most staff did not recognize the CEO, and Ray would simply tell them, “This is Larry. He’s in training today.”

From his own management background Ray believes that service excellence trickles down from the top of an organization. He has taken to heart a philosophy that to serve well employees need to, “Understand what they do and be made accountable.” His skill and servant’s heart make it easy for staff to work with him, for volunteers to serve under him, and for patients to rely on him. Truly, Ray Singer exemplifies Service in action.