



Health Heroes 2013: Meet 7 honorees who chose to help others

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GRAND RAPIDS, MI — The same theme runs through the work of all seven Health Heroes to be honored by the Alliance for Health Tuesday, Nov. 12.

From the 90-year-old founder of Wings of Mercy to the 13-year-old with a new heart, they each find joy in helping others when they could as easily just have taken care of themselves.

The seven were chosen from among 27 nominations submitted to the Alliance, a local nonprofit dedicated to improving health care in West Michigan. An independent panel of health professions selected the winners.

This year, three new awards were added to the ceremony to be held at the Watermark Country Club in Cascade Township.

Here is a list of the Heroes, what the nominators said about them, and what winners said about the health issues that inspired them and lessons they've learned along the way.

LIFE GIVING HERO

Brent Garvin, 42, district manager for dental radiography sales and stem cell donor

Nominators said: To be a lifesaving hero once is remarkable, but to do it twice is exceptional. Garvin, with his own lifesaving stem cells, was able to cure two people of cancer within three years. In 2008, he was a match for 32-year-old man from London and the transplant was a success. Garvin donated a second time as a booster for the man who now lives a healthy life as the father of a young daughter. In 2011, he donated stem cells to a Montreal man in another successful transplant. The two men have remained in contact, meeting in Montreal in May. Garvin purchased identical watches for his new friend and himself as a reminder

IF YOU GO

West Michigan Salutes Health Heroes
Hosted by Alliance for Health

When: 6-8 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 12

Where: Watermark Country Club, 5500 Cascade Road SE

Keynote: Don Kern, Guinness world-record setter for seven marathons on seven continents

Tickets: \$30 online at afh.org

2013 Health Heroes

- Brent Garvin, Life Giving Hero
- Dr. Allyson Mulder, DMD, Rising Hero
- Dr. Jihad Mustapha, Innovation Hero
- Devon Saliers, Conquering Hero
- Peter VandenBosch, Regional Hero
- Richard Walquist, Volunteer Hero
- Bonnie Wesorick, Organizational Hero

of the "gift of time."

He said: "My wife's cousin had cancer and asked if I would participate in a stem cell drive to determine if I was a match for her. (While it wasn't a match), the blood bank asked if I would join the national/international donor registry to help other cancer patients in need. Of course, without hesitation, I agreed."

Life lesson: "When people have asked how the process works, I've told them it's simple, you just donate your blood. Everyone has had the same response, 'I had no idea it was that easy.' We need to spread the word on how simple the process is and get more people on the registry."

RISING HERO

Dr. Allyson B. Mulder, 29, dentist and owner of WestSide Dental; partner at A Life of Smiles Dental Office

Nominators said: She is the definition of an entrepreneur and philanthropist. After graduation from dental school, she worked with her dentist father, Jerry Mulder, and after only five months bought a dental practice. She can be found on weeknights and weekends at the office making sure records are well kept and everything is ready for the next day. She is also involved in continuing education to help patients with sleep apnea and temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders. She encourages her employees to continue their education as well.

She said: "Early signs of many systemic diseases often appear first in the oral cavity. Therefore, as dentists, we have a unique opportunity that gives us a glimpse into a patient's overall health and can detect concerns early on."

Life lesson: "You never know what tomorrow may bring, so enjoy the moment."

INNOVATION HERO

Dr. Jihad Mustapha, 46, Metro Health director of interventional endovascular medicine and director of cardiovascular research

Nominators said: If Mustapha has his way, amputation as a treatment for vascular disease will end. He is an interventional cardiologist who saves the feet and legs of diabetic patients by performing atherectomy, a painstaking procedure to open blocked blood vessels and restore circulation. He invented and co-invented many devices for his limb-salvaging work. Word has spread. He and the cardiac catheterization team have treated patients from more than 19 states and six countries, and physicians from across the country visit to learn his techniques. He has come a long way since arriving in this country from Lebanon as a 16-year-old who could not speak English.

He said: "I knew patients with blockages in their hearts could be treated in the cardiac catheterization lab,

but patients kept coming with blockages in their legs. These blockages could and often did lead to amputation, which all too often leads to death. I knew we could do better. I believed that if we applied the same principles that worked for unblocking blood vessels in the heart, we could unblock blood vessels in the legs and save patients' limbs and lives."

Life lesson: "Everyday we make choices: we can let the obstacles in our way stop us and prevent us from moving forward, or we can keep trying, keep problem solving and eventually find our way. I don't believe failure is a reason to quit. I believe in learning from failure to make your next attempt the one that might work."

CONQUERING HERO

Devon Saliers, 13, eighth-grader at East Rockford Middle School

Nominators said: Born with a congenital heart defect, Devon underwent three open-heart surgeries before his second birthday. He has since shared his story and sometimes even shown off his "zipper" incision scar to many people, including participants in the American Heart Association's 2011 Grand Rapids Heart Walk, the 2012 Rocco's Heart Charity golf outing and the Heart Association's 2012 executive breakfast. His photo has been on billboards to promote the walk and he has done many TV and radio interviews to seek help, as he says, for children with "broken hearts."

Last year, he was hospitalized for congestive heart failure and placed on a mechanical heart while awaiting a transplant at the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor. He spent his time at the hospital encouraging younger children with similar ailments and their parents by telling them about his active life. In August, he underwent a heart transplant and is making a strong recovery, according to his parents.

He said: "I was born with a congenital heart defect called Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome. I did my first Grand Rapids Heart Walk when I was 7 months old, and have been doing them ever since. This event is important to me because we raise money to fund life-saving research, awareness initiatives and wellness programs."

Life lesson: "I want to show other kids and families they too can have a second chance at life. I have been scared and have had many obstacles, but it is important for others to see that hard work and determination can help them get back to normal."

REGIONAL HERO

Peter J. VandenBosch, 90, founder and president emeritus of Wings of Mercy Inc.

Nominators said: After selling his business in 1983, he and his wife traveled in Europe, bought a motor home, and a home and a boat in Florida. Then he knew he needed more. He moved back to Holland at age 67. A friend suggested he fly people who need medical treatment but couldn't afford the trip. His first flight

was July 9, 1991, when he took two children from Holland to Mayo Clinic. He knew then what his “more” was. His Wing of Mercy took flight. There are 70-plus airplanes and 300 pilots flying patients in Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana and Wisconsin. There is also a Minnesota Wings of Mercy. He has flown 221 missions himself.

He said: “After eight years of living the good life, I was in my fishing boat when I heard the voice: ‘Peter, there is more to life than this.’ Wings has now completed more than 7,000 missions.”

Life lesson: “Giving your time, talents and resources to help low-income patients offers back to you countless joys and blessings.”

VOLUNTEER HERO

Richard Walquist, 80, retiree

Nominators said: Walquist has been a volunteer with Michigan Blood since 2004, spending more than 3,682 hours helping ensure a safe and adequate blood supply. He started out as a helper at blood drives and has expanded his role to driving blood to hospitals twice a week and answering the call for last-minute deliveries. He is known and loved by the staff and when he volunteers at a blood drive, the staff knows donors are well cared for. On Sept. 11, he spent 10 hours working at a special blood drive at Michigan International Speedway in Jackson. And when Michigan Blood set up one of its buses as an ArtPrize exhibition, he was on hand to greet visitors.

He said: “I’d been a blood donor for 40 years and one day, I was donating blood when someone there asked me to volunteer. I said, ‘Why not.’ I was retired and not doing much. Now I give out cookies and talk to people after they give blood.”

Life lesson: “If I can help someone, more power to me.”

ORGANIZATIONAL HERO

Bonnie Wesorick, 70, nurse and founder and chairman emerita of Elsevier CPM Resource Center

Nominators said: Wesorick’s innovations span local, regional, national and international markets. With her nursing background, she developed an interprofessional clinical practice model (CPM). It provided solutions to deeply rooted problems within delivery systems and revolutionized the ways care is delivered across the United States and Canada. She launched her business in 1983 in Grand Rapids and partnered with a software company and publication firm to embed the model within electronic health records. She also produced books, DVDs and videos. In conjunction with the care practice model, she established an international consortium of more than 400 health care organizations to integrate care.

She said: “The realities of the health care environment — filled with complexity, change and often stressful,

demanding schedules — motivated me. We are the healers and often spend more waking hours at work than our own homes. It is not OK for the cultures we practice in to be unhealthy. I knew there was much to be done to serve both those who give and who receive care and it became my passion and my life's work.”

Life lesson: “As healers, we must support each other. Interprofessional relationships rooted in shared purpose bring hope, resources and innovation.”

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