



Fifty Years of Care

Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

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In 2018, Wheeler celebrated its 50th anniversary, starting on our literal anniversary date of January 8th, when we opened our newly renovated Hartford Family Health & Wellness Center.

The celebrations culminated in September, when nearly 250 donors, friends, and leaders from throughout Wheeler's history gathered on September 29 and helped raise more than \$145,000 for services, a record for fundraising events.

Throughout 2018, we honored our history by profiling 50 people and organizations who made us what we are. When we rebuilt our web site in August 2025, we realized this online history would be lost if we did not preserve it, so the document you are reading is the collective set of articles we wrote in 2018, preserved in one location. Some names are sadly no longer with us, and some titles and faces have changed. The strong, vibrant, and innovative culture and history of Wheeler endures.

We hope you enjoy reading these 50 articles as much as we enjoyed writing them. They are listed in reverse chronological order.

Looking Ahead: A Message from Susan Walkama, LCSW, President and Chief Executive Officer

POSTED ON: 12.31.2018

It's been a remarkable year for Wheeler as we've honored our past 50 years and also accelerated growth that will carry us into the next 50.

Through our five decades, we've transformed from a vision of a center for children to delivering an array of services as diverse as everyone we serve. We treat issues from the common cold to chronic diseases like hypertension and diabetes. We help individuals and families recover from depression, anxiety, marital difficulties, and complex mental health and substance use disorders. We serve consumers with special needs, including autism spectrum disorder, anger management, opioid use, problem gambling, child and adolescent development issues, and special education needs.

Today, our more than 1,000 employees serve more than 90% of the state's cities and towns, with over 100 different programs providing services to over 30,000 individuals each year. Our success and growth was not a given; it happened because of visionary staff and leaders, sound operational planning and practices, and an innovative mindset that saw or drove trends, and then positioned us ahead of them.

If our past is proud, and our present adds to that a dynamic growth, *what's to come can only be described as visionary*. We've already seen the benefits of our organizational transformation in the form of higher patient satisfaction, lower costs, more accessible health care, and better outcomes for everyone. Both in the next few years and looking forward long-term, we will build on these strengths in every aspect of our work.

Our strategic vision moves us into the newest areas of health care. We will leverage state-of-the-art technology with time-honored best practices. We will seek partnerships with networks and organizations that advance our mission. We will expand our service continuum to meet pressing community needs. We will identify gaps in services, care, and access, and we will work to fill them. We will continue to be an employer of choice for a skilled, diverse workforce. And we will continue to position our whole organization as a leader in innovative, accessible, effective care.

Thank you for celebrating our 50th anniversary with us, and we look forward to an even better tomorrow.

Wheeler's future is bright.

Susan Walkama, LCSW, President and Chief Executive Officer
December 31, 2018

A Bright Future - Thoughts from our leadership team

POSTED ON: 12.31.2018

As our 50th anniversary draws to a close, we asked Wheeler's leadership team for their thoughts on how the organization has evolved and grown for five decades.

Here are some of their perspectives on the anniversary, the history, and what's to come.

"My experiences with Wheeler go beyond the 14 years that I have worked here. Wheeler has always had a strong reputation in the communities served, and that reputation has grown significantly in the past several years, expanding into new areas and new service types. The vision to embrace whole-person care has truly placed Wheeler in the forefront of an evolving health care environment with exciting opportunities and growth. Leadership and staff's commitment to Wheeler's mission makes this all possible. Working with such amazing and dedicated people makes Wheeler a top workplace. I am fortunate to be part of such an amazing team that remains focused on the people we serve!"

- Athena Dellas, MBA, Chief Financial Officer

"Four years ago, I joined Wheeler because of its reputation of being an innovative and high-quality provider. Wheeler had just launched its primary care services and was seeking to pursue HRSA designation as a federally qualified health center. A short four years later, not only did Wheeler attain community health center designation but has also expanded its health and wellness centers to three locations—Bristol, Hartford, and New Britain. Wheeler transformed its entire service delivery system to more effectively address "whole-person care" through the delivery of integrated primary care, behavioral health, dental, and recovery and wellness services, including acupuncture, mindfulness, yoga, and nutrition supports. Wheeler has leveraged its status as a community health center to continuously meet emerging needs of individuals presenting for care. An example of this is the development of Medication-Assisted Treatment to address the opioid crisis.

Wheeler, in the midst of very difficult federal and state budgetary constraints, has continued to grow in new services and product lines, all while enhancing access to high-quality, person-centered services and supports. Wheeler continues to be on the cutting edge and is recognized as a statewide leader. I'm excited to see what the next 50 years will bring! Happy 50th Wheeler!"

- Sabrina Trocchi, Ph.D., MPA, Chief Operating Officer

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"In the 14 years I've been here, no one thing has been as impressive as watching the Family Health & Wellness Center on Woodland Street become a reality. It's been the pinnacle of all the work Wheeler has done for the last several decades. We get to a Woodland Street by focusing on excellence, taking intelligent risks, and innovating. I think back to one example along the way, the opening of 75 North Mountain Road. In 2005, there was one program there, in one corner, and you could barely walk through the rest of the building. We transformed that space, won our first AIC program in a very competitive bidding process, and quadrupled services for adults in size and scope. We knew we could do the work, and we knew we could excel. You see that same mentality with Woodland Street.

Looking forward from where we are today, we're only going to do more of that. We understand where we need to expand. We'll continue to take intelligent risks, we'll innovate, and we'll excel like we've always done."

- Nicolangelo Scibelli, LCSW, Chief Transformation and Information Officer

"Wheeler has expanded multi-directionally in the last 50 years. Under Susan's leadership, Wheeler has transitioned to a provider of life span, integrated health care services. One constant in our success is that our employees have been committed to our mission, innovation and evidence-based best practices. Their energy and passion have made all the difference in our success. Our diverse workforce today is 1,000 strong, across three-dozen locations, is highly skilled and trained and very well-positioned for the dynamic future of health care and special education services. We did not get to this point by being reactive. We have thoughtfully and strategically invested in our staff, our infrastructure, technology, and our processes. Our culture is one of innovation and continuous improvement. Our ultimate goal has always been to recruit, develop, engage, and retain the very best talent possible. Receiving Top Workplace recognition consecutively for six years validates and recognizes these efforts, as well as the dedication and hard work of our staff."

- Patricia Speicher Werbner, MPA, Chief Human Resources Officer

"Susan hired me in 2008, originally to report to David [Berkowitz]. I quickly found that I loved the passion of the leadership team, and the diversity of services and people at Wheeler. I saw it was a place where people could come for care when they didn't have successes elsewhere. That continues today. We've grown, but we've stayed true to ourselves, the community, and community needs. Adding on the medical services of the health & wellness centers, we're committed to not treat people in a silo, but look at every person as a whole. Wheeler's stayed true to its core values and ethics, and that is important. We want to be the best and most ethical in getting there. Part of that is culture and that the people

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we hire share that vision, passion, and commitment, not only to patients but to the organization itself. It's a special place."

- Sandra S. Cohen, MA, CPHQ, Vice President, Quality/Compliance Officer

"In the 13 years I've been at Wheeler, the organization has grown in ways I don't think any of us really could have understood at the time. In 2006, Wheeler was half the size, which I still thought was considerable for a community nonprofit organization. The growth of programs and services is astronomical. By my count, there have been seventeen openings or major renovations in my time, and every day here is something different. My department works with every other area of the organization, and many members of the senior leadership team that were here in 2006 are still here today. My team's evolved, doing more, more efficiently. No two days are alike, and the variety of my position is what makes it exciting and fulfilling.

The 13 years have gone by so quickly, but we have accomplished so much. It's amazing to take a step back and look with bewilderment on how Wheeler has evolved in 50 years. The future looks bright."

- Todd M. Raymond, Vice President, Facilities

"What an honor it's been to tell the story of this incredible organization's last 50 years, and it's made me even more excited for all that's to come. As we build on our earliest foundation of excellence and innovation, and accelerate the visionary growth of the last 10–15 years, one theme that's been clear in every story and every interview we've published is that Wheeler's commitment to innovation and doing things differently has been what's set us apart.

It's the people that make us different and better. The donors, whose passion for—and support of—our work inspire us. Our trustees over the decades, who provided steady hands and a vision for where we could go. Our 1,000 colleagues, who are so talented, so focused, so dedicated to our mission, vision, values, and, most importantly, everyone we serve. There have been so many examples just in my short five years here; being part of the opening of Woodland Street was one of the best moments of my entire career, with all it meant to the organization and its vision, and all the work that went into it.

It's been a pleasure to come into work every day, be part of this team, and tell this story in 2018."

- John R. Sponauer, MBA, Vice President, Marketing Communications and Philanthropic Giving

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“I’ve been humbled and blessed to be part of an amazing Wheeler team for 18 years. There have been several consistent trends in that time. The first is growth—tremendous growth—in our scope of services, programs, staffing, and reach. Along with that, and really driving that growth, is the amazing, strategic, courageous leadership we have had in our presidents and trustees. Wheeler’s commitment to integrated care, whole-person health, and wellness sets it apart; one recent aspect of this that I greatly appreciate is the focus on prevention, wellness, and recovery through complementary health strategies such as mindfulness, yoga, acupuncture, and more.

That focus on the whole person, as well as Wheeler’s commitment to quality, caring, kindness, and compassion, keeps me motivated every day, and excited for the future.”

- Judith Stonger, MA, CPS, CARC, Vice President, Prevention, Wellness, and Recovery

50th Anniversary Spotlight: Wheeler Board Chair, Christine Skelly

POSTED ON: 12.07.2018

When longtime friend, Bill Torres, reached out to Chris Skelly eight years ago about becoming involved with Wheeler, she was open to his recommendation.

Having just left an executive leadership position with Aetna in Hartford, Ms. Skelly met with members of Wheeler's staff and Board of Trustees leadership teams, including former Trustee, Courtney Bourns. Shortly afterward, she was invited to join the board.

Ms. Skelly served in a number of capacities on the Wheeler board before becoming board chair in 2015.

"I first served on the Governance Committee with Laurie Brantner, a role in which I was part of a team that helped rewrite the organization's bylaws," said Ms. Skelly. "I also was part of an effort to start an Audit Committee, a best-practice standard that should be considered within any large non-profit like Wheeler."

With a background in strategic planning, finance and accounting, Ms. Skelly also served on the Executive Committee.

"Through the years, I have served on a number of boards, locally, and Wheeler is by far the largest," said Ms. Skelly. "It is gratifying to use my leadership experience to help guide the direction of this organization."

"Wheeler is an extremely complex agency that has made groundbreaking strides, especially in terms of its entry into the primary care arena," she added. "This organization does such important work. It is well-run and healthy and not only touches, but changes the lives of a lot of individuals and families."

A History of Addiction Services at Wheeler

POSTED ON: 11.30.2018

From the early start-up years to the leading edge of addressing today's opioid crisis, Wheeler's addiction programs have varied over time, but one thing remains constant. Over the course of Wheeler's five decades, the disease of addiction is increasingly approached with innovative methodologies at the intersection with other health conditions.



The first program at Wheeler focused on addiction was an “alcoholism court liaison” project in 1973, which diverted individuals to treatment instead of incarceration. Outpatient counseling for drug abuse followed soon thereafter, as did partnerships to place addiction counselors in local hospitals. Over the next several decades, specialized services such as Lifeline, a groundbreaking program designed to meet unique needs of pregnant and parenting women, as well as services for problem gambling, driving while intoxicated, and many other areas were created, each addressing specific, identified needs.

Between 1973 and 2004, Joseph Puzzo, MA, Mdiv. oversaw their growth and development.

“The Community Mental Health Centers Act that supported Wheeler’s early years included addiction as part of the services to be provided, but there often wasn’t funding that accompanied it, so we were always being creative in finding ways to support services,” he says. He established Employee Assistance Programs for local businesses, DWI programs in the Polish-speaking community in New Britain, prevention programs for local school systems, court diversion programs, and more.

By the 1990s Wheeler was increasingly positioned as a leader in the field. Puzzo says that Wheeler’s willingness to be innovative and creative led to opportunity.

“The constant all along was that we were always active at the state level, always had good relationships, and the state often came to us to create new programs when needs were identified. The creation of the Connecticut Clearinghouse is an excellent example. Because

of our reputation, the state knew we could deliver this kind of service well. We had the trained staff, we had the structure, and we could pull all these pieces together.”

As Wheeler grew, so did the needs.

“By the mid-1990s, it was pretty clear that substance use was extremely underreported in the families we served,” says Bill Kania, LMFT, now director of Children’s Outpatient Services. “We saw that earlier than most did. Working with school districts, we offered something different: substance use evaluations right in schools. This allowed for early identification and the ability to rapidly respond with matching adolescents with the appropriate level of substance use treatment within our specialized treatment programs.”



As the treatment field then embraced services provided in the home, Wheeler again was in the lead, as an early implementer of Multisystemic Therapy (MST) in Connecticut, one of the first to utilize Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDFT), serving as a pilot for model developers, focusing on proving outcomes, and committing early to the development of evidence-based practices to treat addiction.

“We had some of the best outcomes,” Kania says. “The state looked to us to come up with innovative solutions, use best practices, and build programs around them. We developed a fantastic continuum of agency-based and community-based services that complemented each other, and still do to this day.”

A similar transformation occurred in the 2000s in addiction services for adults. Nic Scibelli, LCSW, today Wheeler’s Chief Information Officer, began by overseeing adult services.

“Wheeler was quick to jump on the notion that substance use and mental health services were complementary, not regimented into two siloes. The best research in the field told us that evidence-based practices gave the best outcomes,” Scibelli says. “We weren’t just responding to funding opportunities, but responding to what we knew benefited the patients the most.”

Wheeler was also an early adopter of the notion that co-occurring substance use and behavioral health disorders required a unique approach, which blended in best practices, a focus on recovery, and a belief that the goal of treatment was more than just for a single condition, but the need to improve the patient’s overall wellness. Whether working together with the recovery community, or helping similarly innovative state leaders in government like the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Judicial Branch, or the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Wheeler was breaking new ground.

“We were one of the first to work with DMHAS on co-occurring disorders, in both treatment and in training the rest of the field,” Scibelli says, “We understood the respective competencies of mental health and addiction treatment, and how to pull from the best of both. Integrating mental health services into addiction treatment was new and completely innovative.”

Partnering with the model developers and DCF, Wheeler was selected to pilot an adaptation of MST for families in the child welfare system struggling with addiction, overseen by Elisabeth Cannata, PhD, Wheeler’s vice president of Community-Based Family Services and Practice Innovation. Cannata also works closely with the higher education field to ensure the next generation of providers is prepared to work and lead in a treatment environment using evidence-based practices.



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At the Connecticut Clearinghouse, dozens of programs in prevention, wellness, and recovery now focus on topics as varied as preventing fetal exposure to alcohol and other substances, training and information dissemination on opioids and overdose prevention, suicide prevention awareness efforts with firearms retailers and owners, and working with tobacco merchants statewide to prevent the sale of tobacco including vaping devices to underage youth. Judith Stonger, MA, CPS, CARC, is Wheeler's vice president of prevention, wellness and recovery, and is a statewide leader in prevention, advocacy, and training.

"Implementing effective prevention and health promotion strategies is a key element in a public health approach to addressing addiction and other harmful behaviors," Stonger says. "Our focus not only has to be on individual treatment when problems arise, but also on prevention, early intervention, education, stigma reduction, and awareness. Individuals and communities need to know that prevention works, early intervention is critical, treatment is effective, and recovery is possible."

Just as Wheeler positioned itself early in advance of widespread acceptance of evidence-based practices, co-occurring disorders, and in-home services, the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010 provided an opportunity to incorporate addiction treatment into overall health and wellness, a direction Wheeler had moved in for nearly a decade prior.

Today, addiction treatment is fully integrated with primary care and a full continuum of care at Wheeler's Family Health & Wellness Centers.

"There's no 'wrong door' to treatment," says Sabrina Trocchi, PhD, MPA, Wheeler's chief operating officer. "Regardless if a patient is presenting for substance use, behavioral health, primary care or even dental care, we can identify and address conditions that are affecting their overall wellness. As a community health center, we offer a comprehensive continuum of care, bringing these key service components together in one location."



Trocchi says an emphasis on patient engagement and outcomes, using peer recovery staff, online support tools like myStrength, Community Health Workers dedicated to addiction issues, and other programming elements, helps sustain long-term recovery for patients, as well as evidence-based care like medication-assisted treatments.

“We are able to engage patients even pre-treatment before they come in the door, and help existing patients with every step of their recovery,” Trocchi says.

Wheeler continues to develop innovative services designed to address developing needs. A recent example is a new recovery facilitation program for the commercially insured, which integrates behavioral health, care management, peer support and more, helping and supporting patients with complex needs as they return to their community following inpatient stays or hospitalizations.

In the future, Trocchi sees only more movement toward further integration of addiction treatment into a broader continuum of health.

“Health care is changing, and there’s an increased need to address all conditions together, not in isolation. That requires moving away from siloed thinking, and instead looking at

whole person care. Wheeler is positioned very well to do that, including in areas like telehealth, to reach more individuals who need care.”

Despite the changing nature of the services, the challenges remain. Approximately 2/3 of the patients Wheeler serves have some connection to addiction in themselves or family, not inconsistent with trends nationwide.

While the substances have changed in popularity over time—Kania is especially concerned about vaping today, and kids buying THC online—some elements remain the same. We work hard at engaging adults, adolescents, and caregivers, to form a partnership and establish treatments that support sustainable gains.

“The trick has always been convincing many people that substance use is not harmless or ‘just a phase,’ but it can be effectively treated, and you can become healthier.”

50 Years of Visionary Donors

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Wheeler began with a vision, supported through philanthropy. Through our five decades, side-by-side with our funders, donors, community leaders and friends, we've transformed from that vision of a center for children, to today delivering an array of integrated primary care and behavioral health services as diverse as everyone we serve. Our 1,000 employees serve more than 90% of the state's cities and towns, with over 100 different programs providing services to over 30,000 individuals each year.

To our donors, supporters, volunteers, and friends, THANK YOU.



Community leaders came together in the late 1960s to establish a center for treating children's mental health needs in Plainville, supported by the estate of Bertha Wheeler. A historic groundbreaking took place on October 25, 1972 at what is now Wheeler's 91 Northwest Drive, Plainville location. Learn more about Wheeler's earliest days from one of our earliest board

chairs, Marlene Hoerle (in photograph, far right).



Nearly 250 donors, friends, and leaders from throughout Wheeler's history celebrated its 50th anniversary on September 29 and--with a concurrent Board of Trustees Challenge--helped raise more than \$145,000 for services, a record for fundraising

events at the organization.



Mary Fran and Peter Libassi, visionaries and legendary community leaders, supported workforce development initiatives to help us develop our talented and diverse staff, and created the Wheeler Innovation Fund, which allows us to pursue innovative approaches to the greatest health care challenges.

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Through historic public and private support, on January 8, 2018, we opened the Wheeler Family Health & Wellness Center at 43 Woodland Street, Hartford. This new flagship location offers families in the capital region accessible, fully integrated primary care and behavioral health services.



Courtney Bourns, a dear friend of Wheeler's, inspires us to dream and set great goals, particularly in the area of children and family services. Mr. Bourns's late wife, Jane Bourns, developed many of Wheeler's earliest programs for children and families. Today, Courtney's support, combined with a donation made by Lois Aaron in memory of longtime Wheeler Executive Director David Berkowitz, allows us to establish an early childhood intervention program integrated with our pediatric services in Hartford.



For the past three years, Wheeler and the employees of the Mott Corporation have teamed up on a new model of corporate philanthropy. Employees from Mott serve as Health Ambassadors at community events, working side-by-side with our staff. The company also supports our Community Health Workers to make culturally appropriate connections to community services that address the social determinants of health.



Generous donations from his family memorializes the life and passions of Raymond Corsini, Wheeler's longest-serving trustee (more than 27 years of service!). Philanthropic support established the Corsini Kitchen at Wheeler's Family Health & Wellness Center in Hartford, where an on-site nutrition program promotes healthy eating and lifestyle choices for the individuals we serve, addressing related chronic health conditions like obesity.

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Wheeler's Annual Golf Classic, now in its 34th year, brings together friends, business and community leaders from all corners of the community to benefit the individuals and families in our care. More than \$1.1 million has been raised since the tournament began!

Caring Community Partners

POSTED ON: 11.16.2018



As we've celebrated our 50th anniversary this year, we've highlighted partners in our work, including AFCAMP, Saint Francis Healthcare Partners, FAVOR, the Connecticut Health Foundation, the Town of Plainville, and many more.

Our 50th anniversary story this week features two local community partners with whom we have worked closely to better serve the needs of our consumers. In this season of giving and season of need, we thank them for their partnership.

Plainville Food Pantry



For nearly 20 years, the Plainville Food Pantry and Wheeler have worked together to provide resources for Wheeler consumers, including Bristol and New Britain Alternative in the Community clients as well as other individuals and families in need. This agency provides food, energy assistance, clothing, crisis intervention and referral services.

“Plainville Food Pantry has been an invaluable partner to us and truly makes a difference in the lives of those we serve,” said Sharlene Croteau, director, Adult Services, Wheeler. “When our consumers are in need, we often turn to this agency, and this team far exceeds our expectations.”



Sharlene cited one example in which an AIC consumer requested one pair of pants to supplement his only one existing pair. What he received instead was an opportunity to select several articles of clothing and an array of household items to meet additional needs. “This client continues to be extremely grateful for the Food Pantry’s assistance,” she said. “As a local provider, we are extremely appreciative as well.”

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The involvement between the Plainville Food Pantry and Wheeler extends even deeper than the help for consumers. Wheeler President and CEO Susan Walkama, LCSW, served on the pantry's board for several years.

"It's been a pleasure to work with Wheeler over the last couple of decades," said Susie Woerz, executive director, Plainville Food Pantry. "Working with organizations such as Wheeler, we can have an even greater impact on the community and on individuals who need our help. We exist to provide a hand up, as opposed to a hand out."

For Goodness Sake



The large space at For Goodness Sake on Whiting Street in Plainville is filled with lovingly arranged tables, chairs, couches, dishes and other furniture and household items, as well as a sense of caring and compassion for individuals and families who need support with starting a new home.

According to Kendra Morales, president, For Goodness Sake, the design of this space is intentional. The intention when clients come to shop is that this isn't a charity--it is an organization dedicated to helping people by helping them create a safe, comforting environment for them and their families.

For Goodness Sake is a Plainville-based nonprofit that partners with local social service agencies to help people who may be formerly homeless, escaping a domestic violence situation or rebuilding a life after a fire, incarceration or other traumatic life circumstance.

This agency and Wheeler's Bristol and New Britain Alternative in the Community programs have worked closely for nearly five years to provide furniture and other household items for clients in need as well as provide community service opportunities for individuals with court-involved individuals.

"We are here as a resource to help people in their efforts to start a new life in a new space," Morales said. "Our volunteers guide individuals through the selection process, as this can be an overwhelming experience. Same day delivery also is available for client's who do not have resources available to them."

For Goodness Sake has helped nearly 900 families since it was founded in 2013.

"For Goodness Sake continues to grow and evolve to meet the needs of its community partners and those we serve," said Marta Korba, program manager, Bristol Alternative in the

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Community Program. “The team continuously provides hope and dignity for families trying to improve their lives.”

Two Brothers: One Path – Ron and Rick Bucchi

POSTED ON: 11.12.2018

The following 50th anniversary stories highlight the leadership and contributions of two local residents and brothers, Ron and Rick Bucchi. Both individuals served on the Wheeler Board of Trustees and were instrumental in helping to guide the organization through periods of notable expansion.

Blazing Trails, Friendships and Growth: Ron Bucchi



A longtime friendship with former Wheeler Trustee, Ray Corsini, led to Ron Bucchi's involvement with Wheeler Clinic.

"Ray and I were longtime friends. He and Bill Petit, Sr. got me involved in the community when I was 23 years old," said Ron. "I served on the Wheeler YMCA board and chaired the group for last two years of my term. It was interesting to join the Wheeler Clinic board, having served on the YMCA board, which both were funded by local community leaders, Frank and Bertha Wheeler."

Ron served on the Wheeler Board of Trustees from 1989 to 2003 and served in various capacities, including as Vice Chair, Secretary and Board Chair from 1994 to 1996, a role in which he worked closely with Executive Directors Dennis Keenan and Dr. David Berkowitz.

Ron characterized both men as selfless leaders. "Although very different, these individuals were great leaders who served the organization at just the right time. They inspired confidence. They helped the organization to grow, and they secured the confidence of the board," said Ron.

"During my time on this board, I made great friends and observed significant expansion within the organization," said Ron, noting that the organization's financial diversification and well-managed programs allowed it to flourish and meet the needs of the community.

Ron said Wheeler's role as an integrated behavioral health and primary care provider is exceptional. "I never could have imagined the growth and direction the organization has taken today," he said. "I tell people about Wheeler all the time, though many are familiar with this organization because it is more visible in communities. But the needs are still there, and sometimes people don't know about you until they need you."

Following Footsteps, Making New Ones Too: Rick Bucchi



After serving for 13 years on the board of directors at the Wheeler Regional Family YMCA, Rick Bucchi decided to follow his twin brother, Ron, and join the Wheeler Clinic board. Ron was leaving the Wheeler board after 14 years of service and spoke highly of the board members, organization and staff.

“I saw the board position as an opportunity to expand my understanding of non-profit operations. Having participated in several of Wheeler’s golf outings, I was always impressed with the staff and volunteer relationships, as well as the organization’s ability to run one of the most successful golf outings in the area,” said Rick.

Former Wheeler Executive Director, Dr. David Berkowitz, asked Rick to join the board in 2004. After getting acclimated to the board in his first year of service, Rick assumed responsibility as Finance Chair, a capacity in which he served for two years. “In this role, I gained a great appreciation for the jobs performed by each department head within Wheeler,” said Rick. “I understood more clearly how adept this team was at budget management, grant funding and leveraging the value from each budget dollar.” Rick said he always respected the management team’s ability to offer such a broad range of quality services, while managing a noteworthy expansion of programs and site locations.

Rick became Board Chair in his last year of service and worked with Dr. Berkowitz and current President and Chief Executive Officer, Susan Walkama, LCSW. “David and Susan’s leadership, vision and management expertise cultivated Wheeler into the multi-million-dollar organization that it is today, which helps and serves people throughout Connecticut,” said Rick.

Since the early 80s, Rick has been active in several community organizations. “I was taught early in my business career that it is important for successful executives to be involved in the community, not only to represent your company, but to contribute to organizations that make a difference,” said Rick. “I will continue to support Wheeler in whatever way I can.”

A Lifetime of Innovation

POSTED ON: 11.05.2018

Wheeler's driving vision of innovation has long been supported by similarly visionary donors, and there are few who fit that description better than Mary Fran and Peter Libassi.

Mary Fran served on Wheeler's Board of Trustees for 13 years, including time as both the chair and vice-chair. Her time in leadership was instrumental, as the organization completed strategic planning that carried it forward a decade and smoothly transitioned executive directors from Dennis Keenan to David Berkowitz.

A social worker, groundbreaking researcher, and professor at the UConn School of Social Work, Mary Fran established the Mary Fran Libassi Education and Training Fund with her husband, Peter, to support education and training of social work students and Wheeler professionals from 2000 to 2014. During that time, 14 scholarships were awarded to second-year UConn students completing field placement at Wheeler, and nearly 100 employees received training in evidence-based approaches to care. The fund also supported an expansion of an internship program for bilingual students, allowing Wheeler to build a more diverse workforce.

At the time, Mary Fran said the couple's philanthropy was ultimately about creating change.

"This contribution supports Wheeler's commitment to nurture change and create new approaches to care and service delivery based on the needs of the community," she said.

"When you see something in the world that needs to change, you have a responsibility to help shape and drive that change. Not every idea will be successful, but it's critical to make the effort."

Mary Fran's personal commitment to the future of social work was impactful on everyone who worked with her.

"For decades, in her role as a professor at UConn, Mary Fran nurtured countless master's interns at Wheeler. She was always committed to helping students succeed in placements. Similarly, as a trustee and officer, she was devoted to the success of the organization, particularly its staff," says former staff member Mary Hess. "She continues to be a dear friend and mentor."

The Libassis' vision carried forward in 2016, with a commitment of a \$500,000 legacy gift to Wheeler to establish the Libassi Endowment Fund for Innovation. The Libassi Endowment fund is part of the Wheeler Fund for Innovation, designated to advance innovative approaches to care and service delivery as well as other initiatives across the organization.

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The support provided is already paying dividends, through new and innovative approaches to pain management and wellness, such as yoga and other alternative and complementary medicines.

Peter is a visionary in his own right. A retired attorney and leader in the Hartford corporate and non-profit communities, he served in both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, working on the forefront of civil rights issues in the turbulent 1960s. His passion in supporting systemic change and improving health outcomes carries through his life, and believes the innovation fund is the perfect vehicle for change at a forward-thinking organization like Wheeler.

“This fund is designed to catalyze major shifts in organizational processes and activities,” said Peter in 2016. “It will allow Wheeler to create new programs to meet the needs of individuals and families, cultivate workforce and organizational development, and implement efforts to test and measure change.”

“Philanthropists and friends like the Libassis enable us to take intelligent risks, try new approaches, grow, and, ultimately, improve care and outcomes for everyone we serve,” says Susan Walkama, LCSW, Wheeler president and chief executive officer. “The Libassis have always been partners at the forefront, encouraging us to dream and succeed.”

Focused on Success - Jane Tedder

POSTED ON: 10.25.2018



Jane Tedder's role in Wheeler's success is both subtle and wide-ranging.

A former trustee and vice chair, she helped the organization refocus, adapt, and change in important ways that ensured long-term growth. Today, she's volunteering again, shaping philanthropic approaches during Wheeler's 50th anniversary.

Tedder first came to Wheeler in a consulting role when former executive director David Berkowitz asked her to examine Wheeler's education services. With a long career and background in education and nonprofit organizational management, she says the experience was eye-opening.

"At the time, I was aware of Wheeler, but only in the area of education," she says. "Through my project, I became much more familiar with the full scope of services, which was impressive, and I became engrossed in what Wheeler was doing in so many areas."

She joined the board later, bringing her unique knowledge and background to the governing body then comprised heavily of business and community leaders.

"It was an interesting experience, being new and also having a background very different from many of the others. Sitting next to long-time smart leaders like Ray Corsini or Ken Boudreau, I saw right away that this was a very committed group of volunteers. That was exciting."

She recalls David Berkowitz's passing as a deep personal and institutional loss, and feels that the board coalesced around a continuation of his work—and new directions—in its wake.

"It was a difficult time for everyone. The board, in its wisdom, chose Susan to carry us forward, and she had that confidence and awareness of where we could go. It's clear we made the right choice. She has very good instincts and daring, which were and are crucial in a leader. However, at the time it was fascinating, we were really in the middle of our organization reinventing itself. So many big decisions about Wheeler's future were fraught with peril especially as when we decided to become a federally qualified health center. It was clearly the right thing to do."

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

After leaving the board, Tedder became heavily involved in the philanthropic work of her *alma mater*, Regis College. She currently serves as a Trustee and has chaired that board's institutional advancement committee for several years. During that period, the university launched a bold new capital campaign and restructured its annual fund raising efforts. Tedder found herself learning much about the world of philanthropy and the pragmatic steps to encourage people to contribute. It was this fundraising experience in a higher education that brought her back to her time with Wheeler, and suggested how some of her new knowledge and skills might help.

"I recall one Wheeler Board meeting years ago when Courtney Bourns spoke passionately about the need to increase Wheeler's philanthropic efforts. At the time, I thought, 'Please don't ask me to ask for money. I will give, but don't ask me to ask.' My Regis experience flipped that. I saw that if I cared about something, I had to 'show up.' And that meant 'show up' financially. I have a competitive streak and wanted to blow the Regis campaign out of the water. To do that, leaders and alumnae had to step forward. If you don't have a goal, you'll never accomplish anything. But if you don't ask people to help, they are not inclined to give. We shouldn't be reluctant to ask individuals to join us in a cause."

For Wheeler's 50th anniversary, Tedder is helping to reengage her former trustee peers, and made a leadership gift herself in honor of the historic moment. She also offers guidance on long-term approaches and philanthropic strategies.

Despite her more than decade of service in multiple aspects of Wheeler's work, she says the benefits go both ways.

"I don't feel like I'm a leader. I feel like I'm a do-er," she says. "I have always taken away as much as I gave from my time with Wheeler. I'm just captivated by what we do."

Supporting Outstanding Care, Staff

POSTED ON: 10.18.2018

Every year in December, a select few Wheeler employees receive the Anna Tedesco Award in recognition of outstanding work. Since the award began in 1983, nearly 120 employees have received it, from all areas and levels of Wheeler.

The award is named for the mother of longtime trustee Fred Tedesco, whose generosity established the honor and who wanted to highlight employees who go above and beyond in their commitment to serving others.

"In my time on the board, I saw so many staff doing so many great things, I just wanted to find a way to recognize them," he says. "It was so impressive to be part of Wheeler, an organization that I could see lived up to its desire to support people and that attracted employees who seemed to me to routinely exceed my expectations. The more I got involved, the more I saw the difficult nature of the work. We weren't dealing with simple issues. But everyone was so dedicated."

Fred served twelve years on the board in the 1980s, four of those years as secretary. After stepping down in 1991, he returned as the chair of the Wheeler Golf Classic in 1994, and introduced his wife, Carol, as well.

His involvement to Wheeler started with his family business, Pa-Ted Spring Company in Bristol, which employed about 150 employees nationwide. Through a business connection, he learned of Wheeler and contracted for Employee Assistance services for his employees.

"There was a tremendous value to me for my employees to be able to go there when they needed help. In business, your employees are everything. I can specifically say that Wheeler saved the life of people who worked for me. Once I got involved, and saw what the clinic was like, I of course was happy to come on board and help as a trustee. It was a wonderful experience."

He says he was routinely impressed with Executive Director Dennis Keenan.

"Dennis was honest, which I appreciated and which I think takes a great deal of courage. He told you the truth, and was straight with you, no matter what the pressure or situation. We'd have lengthy conversations about difficult topics, and I never doubted his ability to lead, especially a team of such competent people like John [Mattas], Mary [Hess], David [Berkowitz], Elaine [Couture], Joe [Puzzo], and Jane [Bourns]. For a business owner, wow, that's really everything."

He says he is amazed at the size and scope of Wheeler today.

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

“Did I think that Wheeler would grow and have a bigger impact in the future? Absolutely. I never saw a person on that board who wasn’t committed to helping us grow. People showed up and you knew you could count on them,” he says. “But could I have seen everything Wheeler is today? No way. But I couldn’t be happier. I think it’s one of the greatest organizations because of its people. I’m so proud to see it.”

Neighbors and Friends

POSTED ON: 10.12.2018



Nearly two decades ago, Jeff Loureiro was approached by Plainville's former State Representative Betty Boukus (D-22) about the potential for an outdoor community project at Wheeler's Northwest Village School, just across the street from his company on Northwest Drive.

Mr. Loureiro, chief executive officer of Plainville-based Loureiro Engineering Associates, said his employee-owned company was in search of community service projects where his team could put their skills and talents to good

use.



Representative Boukus introduced Mr. Loureiro to the organization, and the rest, is literally history, including projects such as colorful playscapes on the grounds of Wheeler's Northwest Village School and a sturdy outdoor pavilion at the same location in 2010. Each project engaged dozens of employees from Loureiro.

"It's always a privilege to be able to give back to the community," said Mr. Loureiro. "It's the things you do to help other people that are truly the most rewarding."



In addition to spearheading the three construction projects, Mr. Loureiro served for nine years on Wheeler's Board of Trustees, and as President from 2009-2013. The company also has supported Wheeler's Annual Golf Classic as a Golf Cart sponsor for 17 years. With consistent contributions from companies such as Loureiro, the Golf Classic, now in its 33rd year, raised more than \$1 million for programs and services for individuals, families and communities.



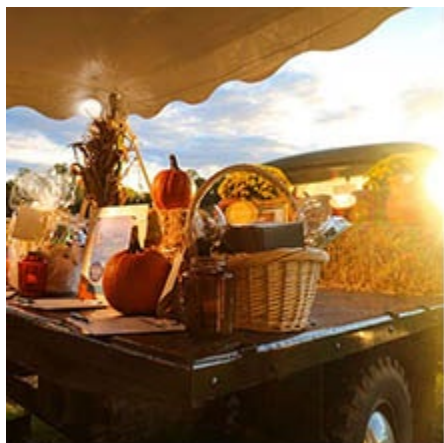
"I have always believed that it's really important to get people involved in the community but also to fully understand the mission of their organization they're serving. It gives everyone a sense that they are contributing to something much larger," he said.

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

Mr. Loureiro reflected on the progress that Wheeler made from its role as a regional behavioral health provider, to a leading statewide provider of integrated care and other community-based services. “Wheeler has come a long way from being ‘that little organization across the street,’” he said. “It has come so far in just 20 years!”

Wheeler Celebrates 50 Years

POSTED ON: 10.01.2018



Anniversary Celebration, Challenge Raises More Than \$145,000 For Services

Nearly 250 donors, friends, and leaders from throughout Wheeler's history celebrated its 50th anniversary on September 29 and helped raise more than \$145,000 for services, a record for fundraising events at the organization.

The dinner and an ongoing Board of Trustee fundraising challenge for the anniversary year and event benefits a new fund at Wheeler that addresses a range of environmental and social factors that interfere with clients' health and well-being, which are not addressed by other means of funding.

Attendees included staff and leaders from every year of Wheeler's history, two of the earliest trustees, and both the current and the founding leadership teams. The 2018 leadership team were the largest donors for the dinner, contributing to a collective group gift of nearly \$20,000. Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield, The Barnes Group and Loureiro Engineering Associates were also major sponsors, with all three organizations having deep connections to Wheeler through the decades. The full list of public sponsors is available below. Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman served as the dinner's honorary chair.

In her remarks, President and Chief Executive Officer Susan Walkama, LCSW, praised the leaders, donors, and supporters who have guided Wheeler since 1968; unveiled a plaque of philanthropic supporters of Wheeler's Family Health & Wellness Center in Hartford; announced a new significant gift from Lori and David Brantner in honor of longtime trustee Raymond Corsini; and showcased a 50th anniversary tribute video.

"From the moment a group of community visionaries came together in the late 1960s to establish a center for treating children's mental health needs in Plainville, Wheeler has always been different," Walkama said. "We've always looked at things with an innovative lens, applied state of the art programming, used the newest technologies, engaged a talented staff, and had the unique ability to change quickly to meet community needs and deliver the highest quality care."

Celebrating 50 Years of Care: Wheeler's Farm to Table Gathering was hosted by Rosedale Farms and Vineyards of Simsbury, with a Max Chef to Farm Dinner provided by the Max

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

Restaurant Group. Rosedale Farms and Hanging Hills Brewing Company provided wine and beer, and The Meadows Brothers were the musical entertainment for the evening.





Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

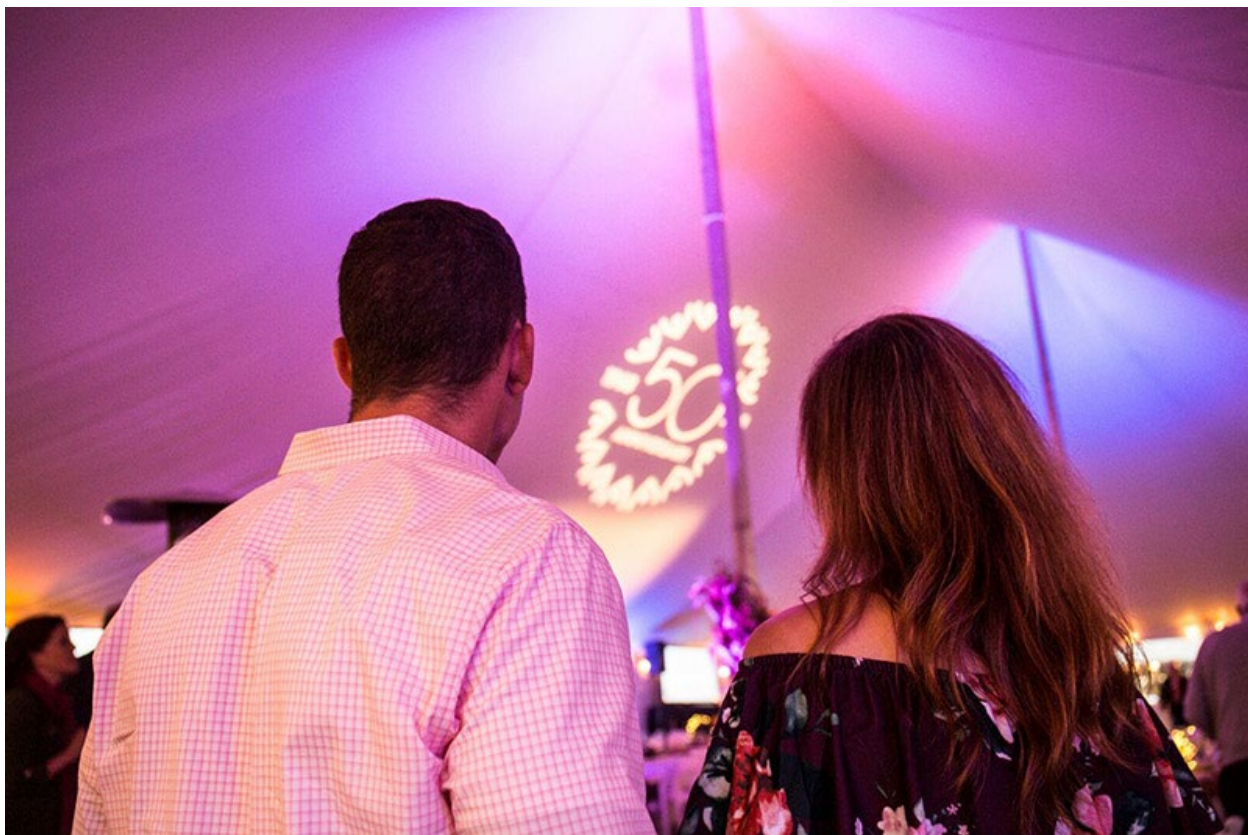


Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)





Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)





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- Diana and Mark Levsky
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“Celebrating 50 Years of Care”

Planning Committee

Jake Biscoglio, Co-Chair

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Francis Vincent

On Wheeler's 50th, A Thanks To Our Team

POSTED ON: 09.21.2018

September 21, 2018

I can't help but notice that a common theme throughout this year of *50 Years, 50 Stories* is the recollection from so many people that Wheeler was always different, always innovative, always committed to the best outcomes for everyone it serves, and an exceptional place to work and deliver care.

That is partly through our focus on evidence-based practices, being data-driven, and putting each and every patient at the center of a whole-person approach to care. However, all of that, in turn, hinges on one simple fact: we attract, recruit, and hire the best employees, and we always have.

This week, our *50 Years, 50 Stories* article is a simple note of thanks to all our past and current employees who devoted and devote so much time, hard work, and energy to provide the best care since 1968. We also celebrate now that for the sixth year in a row, we are a Hartford Courant Top Workplace in 2018. This honor comes from anonymous surveys taken by our employees, so it's particularly meaningful.

We each have our own stories and experiences about what Wheeler means to us, and I'm no exception. I started here in 1982 as a volunteer on the Help Line, and throughout my career, I have been fortunate to have mentors, supportive peers, and friends at all levels of our organization. We were a much smaller place in 1982, with fewer than 200 employees! I developed here as a clinician and administrator. I learned so much in a supportive, creative, and continuously changing environment.



Today, we have a highly skilled, diverse workforce of 1,000 employees, at about three-dozen locations, across the entire state. The scope of Wheeler has changed over the decades, but it's still the people I work with, and our mutual focus on our mission, that drives me.

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Every time I visit one of our sites, or talk to one of my colleagues in the elevator, or meet with the leadership team, I leave with a sense of gratitude. We sometimes do challenging work at Wheeler, and we do it well, which is at the same time equally rewarding. I'm continually impressed with the spirit of innovation, teamwork, and dedication I see and what we aspire to daily.

To my colleagues today, thank you for all you do, every day, in every way, for everyone we serve. And to everyone who was once part of the Wheeler team, we are grateful to be able to build on what you helped create. Thank you as well.

Our history is the collection of hundreds of thousands of stories, and it's written in the work of each and every person who has been a part of the Wheeler team. Together, we've done great things, and anticipate even better days are ahead. We're certainly not without challenges, but the spirit of teamwork, success, and innovation, which we've had since 1968, has always been a constant.

This 50th anniversary, that's something to celebrate.

Susan Walkama, LCSW
President and Chief Executive Officer

Leading Together: The Boudreaus

POSTED ON: 09.14.2018

About 200 people have served as Wheeler trustees since 1968, but only one couple can claim to both have served, albeit at different times. The dedication of Ken and Judy Boudreau came in pivotal moments for Wheeler and helped position it for future growth.

They each brought an entrepreneurial approach to their roles, honed from decades of owning their own successful business. Ken served as chair or vice-chair for seven of his nine years, was a vital figure in Wheeler's first fundraising campaign, and helped guide financial decisions that solidified Wheeler's footing. After he left the board, Judy's service from 1993 through 1998—and as chair of the personnel committee—helped Wheeler transition from longtime Executive Director Dennis Keenan to David Berkowitz, a key evolution for the organization.

"Serving on the Wheeler board was my first experience with a nonprofit," Ken says. "Since then, I've served on about ten others, but Wheeler stands out because it was such a new and interesting role, sitting around a table with people who had passion and opinions, coalescing together to create ideas and make things happen; I look back and see it was formative and instructive."

Judy agrees, saying that the experience introduced her to many new and dedicated individuals on the board and in the staff.

"Wheeler was a different experience for me. What I found especially striking was the staff. They were so committed to the mission and to each other. They always seemed happy to be doing this work, and seemed to work together easily. When you see a team like that, it doesn't make it difficult to devote the time to help."

Ken considers longtime board members like Ray Corsini to have been mentors and inspirations of what service to community means. He sees both Dennis Keenan and David Berkowitz in a similar light.

"Dennis was great. The perfect person for the role at that time. His interest in life was service. He knew how to build, and he was a visible leader. I respected that," Ken says. "After I left the board and through another affiliation, David and I became fast friends. He was driven and committed to success. Even in his own fitness, it was a level the average person can't appreciate. You've got to be a special breed to be able to ride a bike 200 miles, and he'd routinely do that until he became sick. We'd get together for coffee and talk about two things: Wheeler and exercise. He was an absolute pleasure."

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

During Wheeler's first fundraising campaign in the mid-1980s, the Boudreaus made a lead gift toward the effort, which expanded Northwest Village School and renovated clinical space at 91 Northwest Drive, Plainville.

"I was fortunate to have [campaign chair] Phil Davidson," Ken says. "His leadership, community roots and, really, heroics, made it a success. Judy and I believe we've had good fortune in life. Philanthropy is appealing; to apply capacity toward where interests lie. Like my time on the board, Wheeler was also my first real experience in philanthropy. We've come to believe that what we belong to, we support."

Both Judy and Ken have different and complementary styles of leadership, formed from their own life experiences.

Judy says the work of running their own business gave her an advantage helping steer Wheeler's personnel policies.

"When you are an entrepreneur, you look to hire your team and you want commitment. But to lead that team, you have to practice what you preach. To me, leadership is about being committed to your ideals and goals and moving forward with the people around you. When you're working with a leader, you know it, and I think we both saw that in Wheeler's staff and board."

Raised in a blue-collar household, Ken says that he learned about leadership as a young Marine Corps officer in Vietnam, and then as an entrepreneur. He says the Wheeler experience rounded out his approach.

"I learned a lot of lessons in a serendipitous way at Wheeler. One meeting, we were talking about finances; I made a comment about what I thought was a better way. By the end of the meeting, I was asked to oversee it. That was a lesson right there; when you are vocal and care, you serve."

Looking at Wheeler today, they're both amazed at the work being done.

"I'm very impressed at how Wheeler has grown, in services and also geographically," Judy says. "In business, sometimes you need to be careful when you start growing, especially if it's into a new area. A lot of businesses just stick to one thing, but that's not the case with Wheeler. The best part is you can see that it's still doing the same great work as when we were each involved."

Spotlight on Former Board Chairman Steve LeFebvre

POSTED ON: 09.09.2018

Wheeler's Annual Golf Classic, now in its 33rd year, often provides an opportunity for business and community leaders to learn more about the organization. This was the case for Steve LeFebvre, former chief operating officer of the East Berlin-based manufacturer Fletcher Terry, who played in the golf event at the suggestion of Ed Lorensen, one of Wheeler's longest-serving and dearest volunteers. For more than four decades, Mr. Lorensen and the entire Lorensen family have been steadfast supporters of the mission, nearly from Wheeler's very beginning.

"Ed thought highly of Wheeler," said LeFebvre, now chief financial officer at Jones Companies. "As I got to know the organization better, I more clearly understood why."

Mr. LeFebvre said he was initially inspired to become more involved with Wheeler after touring the organization's Northwest Village School, a therapeutic day school designed for students ages 4-21 with special education needs who exhibit complex social, emotional, learning and/or behavioral challenges.

"I saw how well these students were cared for, and I was impressed with the caliber of professionals at the school," he said.

In addition to golf, Mr. LeFebvre served on the Board of Trustees' Finance Committee, and eventually as chairman of the board. Under his leadership, Wheeler opened a community health center in Bristol; completed major renovations at Northwest Village School, including new multi-purpose room/gymnasium, media center, literacy lab and updated classrooms; and acquired property at 43 Woodland Street, Hartford, the site of another community health center, the Wheeler Family Health & Wellness Center, which opened in January 2018. He also played a strong supporting role in Wheeler's Evening of Wonder galas.

Mr. LeFebvre appreciates how well Wheeler operates and serves the community. "Wheeler reaches the underserved and does so in compassionate, cost-efficient way. This organization—and its team—are first rate, and individuals, families and communities are, without question, better for it."

Building Community Ties - The Lorensen Family

POSTED ON: 08.31.2018

Community-based organizations like Wheeler rely on the knowledge and passion of local citizens who serve as volunteers and leaders, making connections and guiding the institution.

One of Wheeler's longest-serving and dearest volunteers is Ed Lorensen. For more than four decades, he and the entire Lorensen family have been stalwart supporters of the mission, nearly from Wheeler's very beginning.

"I was friendly with a lot of the people from Plainville and Bristol who originally worked on the Wheeler trust, which established the clinic. At the time, I was in my 30's, and was president of Bristol Savings Bank. It made sense to become involved in this new organization, and help make connections that allowed it to grow."

Lorensen also felt a strong connection to the new organization through his experience with his son, who has special needs. First serving as a corporator, then a trustee in 1973 and committee member, Ed leveraged contacts across the community and was a catalyst for a number of new efforts, like helping support the Wheeler golf classic, which began in the mid-1980s. Along with leveraging the bank's support, Ed and his brothers, Ralph, Harold, and Fred, and their spouses, became avid participants in the event, a commitment lasting decades.



After a time off the board of trustees to focus on work, Ed returned in the early 1990s, and eventually served as vice-chairman and later chairman.

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“I was retiring, and it was good to get more involved and get excited about the work we were doing. It was an interesting time for Wheeler. [Executive Director] David Berkowitz was intense and smart. He was concerned and focused on growth, but what impressed me from a business perspective was that it was intelligent growth. He understood new ideas and understood the outside influences in the environment that Wheeler had to address.”

With his business expertise, Lorensen helped with strategic planning, and helping to manage the rapid growth of the organization with Berkowitz. Lorensen also helped build a connection with the Main Street Community Foundation and Bristol Brass, which helped establish the Dennis Keenan Fund at the Foundation, in honor of former Wheeler Executive Director Dennis Keenan.

He says one thing that always impressed him was Wheeler staff.

“From day one, the people who came to Wheeler were hard-working and I was always impressed that they grew within Wheeler,” he says. “Many picked up new roles and used their talents in multiple ways. I’ve been involved in a lot of organizations, and I think Wheeler had that dynamic far in excess of a lot of organizations. I think that’s one of the things that’s made it so successful.”

He says he sees that dynamic at work today.

“Especially in the early years, there was a real sense of ownership in the community of the Wheeler name. People knew the Wheeler family, and wanted to make sure their legacy was sound financial management and doing good work. I bought into that philosophy,” he says. “I look at Wheeler today, and it’s an understatement to say it’s grown in ways I couldn’t have imagined back then. Susan’s done a wonderful job. I am blown out of the water by what Wheeler’s become.”

Of Lessons and Leadership: Spotlight on Raymond Arroyo

POSTED ON: 08.24.2018



A neighbor and Wheeler employee at the time convinced Raymond Arroyo to become involved with the organization and eventually to join the organization's board.

"My neighbor didn't have to ask twice, as I already knew of the reputation of Wheeler Clinic," remembered Raymond, now chief growth officer, Association of Latino Professionals for America (ALPFA). "The role also represented an alignment for me between my work at Aetna [at the time] and the health care services Wheeler provided."

Raymond served as a trustee from 2011 to 2015, then joined a few committees and eventually co-led the Finance Committee and was the Treasurer on the board. He also played a strong supporting role in the organization's Evening of Wonder gala, which raised more than \$400,000 over the course of four years to benefit the individuals and families served by Wheeler.



"The board and I were massively committed to Wheeler Clinic's mission, and under our board chairman, Jeff Loureiro's strong leadership, and Susan Walkama's vision, we helped to preserve the focus on what mattered most: the community," said Raymond. "The Evening of Wonder galas were always a big hit for me, as I loved attending and seeing the impact that we were making in

the community."

Raymond recalls the many lessons from working with Wheeler. "I learned about the lives that the Wheeler Clinic was impacting in the community. I learned about hardships with the state budget that affected what we could and couldn't do," he said. "Most of all, I learned that the trustees cared deeply about the community and each other. I've served on many boards, but none better than this one."

Former Wheeler Board Chair, Ann E. Thomas

POSTED ON: 08.17.2018

Ann Thomas, independent non-profit consultant and former board chair, became involved with Wheeler at the suggestion of community leaders and philanthropists, Mary Fran and Peter Libassi. The couple, whom Ann knew through the board of what was then Center City Churches—now Hands on Hartford—made an introduction to Mary Hess, Wheeler’s director of research & development at the time.

Ann, Mary and other Wheeler leadership formed a professional working relationship, and Ann eventually was asked to join the board. “As I became more involved with the organization, I became thoroughly impressed with its staff and programs,” she remembers.

After chairing the planning committee for several years, Ann served as board of trustees chair from 2007 to 2009, during which time she oversaw the leadership transition between the late David Berkowitz and current President and Chief Executive Officer, Susan Walkama, LCSW.

Ann reflected on her period of leadership as a time of significant expansion. “Ten years ago, Wheeler was in a period of substantial growth, and I’m not sure this growth ever subsided,” she said. “Board chairs who came after me remarked about the same thing, which is a testament to the exemplary leadership of Dennis Keenan, David, and Susan. They each had the ability to pursue growth by securing funding to support both programs and infrastructure.”

Ann said she enjoyed many aspects of her role as board chair, including the opportunity to learn about Wheeler’s more than 100 programs and services.

“Clinicians would often visit our board meetings to talk about their work, including the technical aspects of their programs as well as very personal stories about growth and change,” she said. “Each time I’d hear a presentation, I’d think to myself, ‘This is how Wheeler does it. One program, one family, one individual, one group, one classroom at a time. This is how Wheeler makes a difference in our community. This is how Wheeler changes lives.’”

Jan Neri, CPA, Former Wheeler Board Chair

POSTED ON: 08.11.2018



Our personal and professional connections often lead us to unexpected, rewarding places. This was the case with former Wheeler board of trustee and board chair, Jan Neri, whose late husband, Ray, was a good friend of community leader and Wheeler trustee, Ray Corsini.

“Ray was looking for women to serve on the board, and he reached out to recruit me,” remembers Jan, who worked as a young CPA at the West Hartford-based Filomeno & Company in the mid-1980s. “We were sitting at Roger’s

Bakery in downtown Plainville one morning, and he said to me, ‘I need your help. We are looking for professional people to serve on the Wheeler board,’ ”

When Jan first joined the board, she became involved with the Pension and Investment Committee. “I was impressed with the management team, and I always felt that Wheeler was one step ahead of folks in the community,” she remembered.

Jan served in various capacities on the Wheeler board, before serving as chair for five years. Under her leadership, the Wheeler board established competitive packages to recruit and retain employees, consistently expand and diversify revenue streams to meet community needs, and under the direction and leadership of Dennis Keenan, hired Wheeler David Berkowitz, Ph.D. as Wheeler’s Executive Director.

“David knew everything about managed care as well as other aspects of behavioral health. He was instrumental in leading this organization through significant growth and change,” she said.

In addition to Wheeler, Jan also served on many other community boards, including the United Way of Plainville, United Way of Bristol, Plainville Chamber of Commerce Business and Professional Women’s Club of Plainville, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Connecticut Society of CPAs, Network of Entrepreneurial Women, and Main Street Community Foundation.

Jan characterizes her experience on the Wheeler board as positive and productive. “Among the most gratifying aspects of my position was to watch Wheeler grow and expand to better serve individuals and families,” said Jan. “This experience also helped me to cultivate lasting friendships,” including long-term bonds with Wheeler leaders Mary Hess, Elaine

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Couture, and board member Noreen Schumann. “This was, by far, one of my best board positions,” she added.

Reflections on Susan Walkama, LCSW, Wheeler President and Chief Executive Officer

POSTED ON: 07.31.2018

Recently, we shared the story of Wheeler President and Chief Executive Officer, Susan Walkama, LCSW, as part of our 50th Anniversary series. Below are some reflections on Susan's role as a leader at Wheeler.

"What really stands out about Susan is that she is really low key but has an amazing handle on everything related to Wheeler. She understands everything from the ground up. She came up through the organization, which gave her a strength and understanding of the organization that no one could ever have. What also stands out to me are her vision for primary care opportunities and integration with behavioral health. Susan saw the benefit and the potential and now this is clearly the direction in which Wheeler continues to go."

Christine Skelly, Wheeler Board Chair from 2015-present

"Susan is a visionary leader who has dedicated her career to ensuring access to effective, high-quality community-based services for Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens. She has a deep understanding of community systems and personal commitment to eliminating disparities in health care. I'm honored to work with Susan and am in awe of her tireless dedication to healthcare excellence and to improving health outcomes for the more than 30,000 individuals served by Wheeler annually."

Sabrina Trocchi, PhD, MPA, Chief Operating Officer

"Susan's visionary leadership, passion and clinical insights have positioned Wheeler as a leader in integrated health care. She is able to balance strategic and tactical thinking with practicality and kindness. Susan has a genuine concern for our clients and staff that embraces innovation and sets excellence as the organization's performance standard."

Tish Speicher-Werbner, MPA, Chief Human Resources Officer, Wheeler

"Susan's leadership has steered Wheeler through changes in the health care delivery system. Through careful strategic planning, undertaken with members of our team and our board, she has helped Wheeler to be better positioned for these changes, promoting an environment that is centered on the patient and innovation. On a personal note, Susan has been an outstanding mentor for many years, helping me to flourish in countless ways."

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Athena Dellas, MBA, Chief Financial Officer

"Susan is an outstanding kind, compassionate and visionary leader who has dedicated her career to providing and developing a service system to improve outcomes to tens of thousands of individual annually. Her knowledge of community service systems along with her passionate commitment to improving access and quality health care for all has positioned Wheeler to be recognized as a statewide leader. I am honored and privileged to have her as my professional mentor."

Kimberly Nelson, LCSW, Senior Vice President, Services

"When David Berkowitz needed to take a medical leave of absence, he recommended that the Board appoint Susan as acting Executive Director until he returned. He had great things to say about Susan's understanding of the services provided by the Clinic and her ability to manage a group of those services. He also felt that Susan was passionate about the work of the Clinic and had the vision to see the big picture. When David passed, the Board's Executive Committee (which I served on at the time) had to decide who would replace David. Given the significance of this decision, we felt the need to consider Susan as well as others inside and outside of the Clinic. Ultimately, we choose Susan, and I'm glad we did. She has proven to be a fabulous choice demonstrating all of the skill, vision and leadership ability that David saw in her. The decision she made with respect to the direction the clinic would take once the Affordable Care Act became law was bold and risky and, in hindsight, obviously the correct choice. I very much enjoyed serving on the Board with Susan leading the way!"

Jeff Loureiro, President, Loureiro Engineering, Board Chair 2009-2013

"I remember Susan as a proactive, strategic thinker. Her commitment to quality and to Wheeler's mission, staff, clients and community partners never wavered. She sought input from others and continuously incorporated new ideas and concepts into her thinking and actions. She was willing and able to grapple with and make tough decisions about very difficult issues such as staff layoffs, underfunded programs, and Connecticut's budget crisis.

Susan introduced me, and other Trustees, to the significance of integrating behavioral health and primary care. Under Susan's leadership, Wheeler took steps to ensure that the

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

organization would be well positioned to take a leadership role in implementing related innovative and impactful programs and partnerships in the years ahead.”

Ann Thomas, Wheeler Board Chair from 2007-2008

“Susan has strategic plans in her mind that are multidimensional, and I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to be mentored by her in my role. I learn something from Susan daily and her poise and professional nature are exceptional! She has a transformational leadership style and is considerate, direct, authoritative, yet patient and motivating. She makes me want to excel. Wheeler is in good hands with Susan at the helm.”

Heidi Joseph, Vice President, Health Center Operations

“As we go through this year of stories about the people and events that helped make Wheeler what it is today, it's impossible to miss the tremendous positive changes Susan has led. The changes by themselves are impressive, but what's equally impressive to me is that she ensures we keep our eyes focused on the core values driving the organization from the beginning: innovation; providing high-quality, accessible care; and understanding that we put the needs of everyone we serve at the forefront of everything we do, every day. A lot of leaders can create institutional change. It's easy. Very few can do it successfully, while not only maintaining, but strengthening, our focus on the mission and why we come to work every day. Susan has.”

John Sponauer, Vice President of Marketing Communications and Philanthropic Giving

50th Anniversary Spotlight: Wheeler President and Chief Executive Officer, Susan Walkama, LCSW

POSTED ON: 07.20.2018



Wheeler President and Chief Executive Officer, Susan Walkama, LCSW, exudes a quiet, strong confidence—fueled, in part, by experience and the many forms of inspiration in her life. With warmth, grace, humility and a commitment to achieve the very best outcomes for individuals and families—especially the most vulnerable—Susan guides a team of more than 1,000 at Wheeler in achieving its mission to *provide equitable access to innovative care that improves health, recovery and growth at all stages of life.*

Early Inspiration

At the age of 10 growing up in Stamford, Susan became more attuned to the idea of kindness through an Italian immigrant neighbor. “She had a kind heart and always looked at the most positive things in people,” said Susan. “By the way she treated me and everyone around her, she taught me compassion and acceptance.”

A Lifelong Professional Tie

An observer of individuals and systems with a passion for social justice, Susan pursued her BS in Sociology from Central Connecticut State University in 1981. She started at Wheeler as a volunteer and became a crisis worker and then unit coordinator of Wheeler’s Emergency Services program in 1982 before obtaining her MSW in Administration and Casework in 1989 from the University of Connecticut.



Susan left Wheeler in 1987 to become program manager for Waterbury Hospital’s Grandview Psychiatric Center. She then served in a variety of roles at other community nonprofits before returning to Wheeler in 1998 as the director of managed care. She later served as the director of Children’s Outpatient Services and was named president and chief executive officer of Wheeler in 2008, following the death of then-executive director, Dr. David Berkowitz.

“Wheeler has always been the best-run, highest-quality provider for which I’ve worked. I always felt I could do my best work and be the most helpful to the people I served working here,” she said. “The opportunities and support for training and

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

development are unmatched in any other organization. The talented people you are exposed to are the best in the not-for-profit sector in administration and service.”

Lessons and Mentors

Several professional mentors helped guide Susan’s career, including former Wheeler Executive Directors Dennis Keenan and Dr. Berkowitz, as well as other members of Wheeler’s senior leadership team. “My mentors taught me about “creativity, innovation, striving to do my best, reaching high and maintaining a sense of humor,” said Susan.

Outcomes and Accomplishments



Under Susan’s leadership and direction, Wheeler was named a *Hartford Courant* Top Workplace for six consecutive years, expanded its children’s service continuum and became a federally qualified health center and integrated care leader, focusing on expanding health equity across the state. The organization standardized and modernized

administrative systems; upgraded and expanded facilities in its Northwest Village School and health centers; and continues to demonstrate strong stewardship and growth of resources and assets for the future. During Susan’s tenure, Wheeler’s budget grew from \$47 million to \$76 million, and its endowment increased from \$8.5 million to \$32 million.

The organization also continued to focus on evidence-based outcomes, an approach valued and implemented by Dr. Berkowitz. “Practices proven to be effective produce the best results in the shortest period of time,” said Susan. “This is critical for the people we serve. We need to be focused and purposeful in all that we do.”



Susan is a leader in the community as well, serving on numerous non-profit organization boards, legislative task forces, committees and councils that have focused on community mental health, human services and healthcare policy. She is a tireless champion of issues related to health equity and integration. In 2014, Susan was named a “Woman of Influence” by Central Connecticut State University. She also was a YWCA Women in Leadership Honoree and Connecticut Center

for Primary Care (CCPC) Primary Care Leadership Award recipient.

The Future

As a strategic, innovative thinker, Susan leads Wheeler forward with a focus on the organization's diversity of services, growth and development as a statewide leader in integrated care, producing the best outcomes based on the use of state-of-the-art practice and best technologies, as well as partnerships with other health care and community-based organizations.

"We continue to adjust to meet the ever changing-needs of the people and communities we serve," she said. "The importance of our work and the people we are here to serve are what drive me, as well as the exceptional colleagues with whom I work each and every day."

Reflections on David Berkowitz, Ph.D.

POSTED ON: 07.07.2018

Recently, we shared the story of David Berkowitz, Ph.D., former executive director of Wheeler Clinic, as part of our 50th Anniversary series. Below are some reflections on David's life and role as a leader at Wheeler.

"David was a genuine leader. He always told you what he was thinking. He was clear in his direction. He believed in employee development. He loved to teach and mentor, and everyone on our team felt supported by him."

Susan Walkama, LCSW

President and Chief Executive Officer, Wheeler (2008-Present)

* * *

"[David] was so incredibly bright, but he had that ability to give and take. And he had insight into how things worked, not just clinical, but in terms of all that we did."

John Mattas

Northwest Village School, Education Services

John worked at Wheeler from 1978 to 2012.

* * *

"David always was a really brilliant thinker who could think out the details of a problem and look for other ideas and solutions."

Elisabeth Cannata, Ph.D.

Vice President, Community-Based Family Services and Practice Innovation

Elisabeth first began working at Wheeler in 1995.

* * *

"After I retired, David and I would breakfast together once or twice a week. These meetings were very important to me as they kept me connected to David and Wheeler. I greatly appreciated David taking time out of his busy schedule. I miss those meetings. I miss David."

Dennis Keenan, Executive Director of Wheeler from 1977 to 1998

* * *

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

“In any group, David set the standard for energy, enthusiasm and intensity, a level that we all strived and struggled to sustain. But we all went farther, higher and faster because he was setting the pace.”

Mary Hess

Research and Development

Mary worked at Wheeler from 1970 to 2008.

* * *

“Within Connecticut and beyond, David is remembered as an impassioned and dedicated colleague with very high standards and a very strong work ethic, as well as a compassionate champion of struggling children, adults and families. Within Wheeler Clinic, he was a steadfast and dependable leader, our vision and our rock. To me personally, David was a gifted supervisor, an amazing mentor, but most importantly he was a friend.”

Michael Russo, Psy.D.

Vice President of Education and Early Childhood Services

Mike first began working at Wheeler in 1988.

David Berkowitz, Ph.D., Leader, Innovator, Optimist

POSTED ON: 06.30.2018



"Brilliant, analytical, detail-focused, an incredible clinician and an uncompromising advocate."

David J. Berkowitz, Ph.D., former executive director of Wheeler, relentlessly pushed boundaries to better serve the behavioral health needs of individuals, families and communities in Connecticut. As Wheeler's top leader for 10 years, from 1998 until his death in 2008, Dr. Berkowitz led the organization through an array of notable changes in response to emergent behavioral health needs in Connecticut. He is credited with a number of achievements, which positioned the organization for further growth and expansion, including Wheeler's role as an integrated primary and behavioral health care

provider.

"David was the kind of person who challenged all of us to think creatively. He was never satisfied with the status quo and always asked 'what could we, what should we, do better,'" said Susan Walkama, LCSW, president and chief executive officer, Wheeler. A longtime colleague and friend, Ms. Walkama was named Wheeler's president and chief executive officer in 2008, following his death.

Dr. Berkowitz started at Wheeler in 1977, the vital early years of the organization, serving as coordinator of clinical services at Northwest Village School. He grew in a number of leadership positions before being named executive director in 1998.

As executive director, Dr. Berkowitz cultivated Wheeler in ways almost unimaginable in the not-for-profit sector. Staff grew from 300 to more than 750. Wheeler's service area expanded to more than 20 sites. Its range of services dramatically increased, including a full continuum for juveniles and adults involved with the court system, congregate care programs for children and youth, and the most comprehensive array of evidence-based, in-home and outpatient services in Connecticut.

"David was a visionary leader whose extraordinary contributions to the behavioral health community fostered positive change for children, families and communities across Connecticut," said Ms. Walkama. "His areas of focus, particularly in the realm of evidence-based practices, significantly advanced Wheeler's growth and impact."

Managed Care Leader

In the mid-1990s—when managed care plans were seen as a way to curtail rising health care costs and transform delivery to the state’s Medicaid-eligible population—Dr. Berkowitz assumed the role as Wheeler’s director of managed care. He positioned Wheeler as a successful leader and innovator in the managed care environment. He designed and implemented systems for utilization management, client satisfaction, outcome measurement and financial arrangements and negotiated contracts incorporating the broadest range of services and clinic providers possible. He also served as the director of Behavioral Health for the Anthem Blue Cross /Blue Shield Medicaid program and was instrumental in shaping the behavioral health contracting process on a statewide level.

“David influenced how managed care companies operated in Connecticut and elevated Wheeler’s role in this area,” said Walkama. “His experience, background and acumen allowed him to provide an accurate community-based service provider perspective. He helped foster a greater understanding [among commercial insurers] of what it was like for patients to access, receive and benefit from care.”

Proponent of Evidence-based Care

Among the hallmarks of Dr. Berkowitz’ leadership was steady use of data in clinical and program decision-making and the use of evidence-based practices in all domains. His progressive approach to the adoption of evidence-based models of care and commitment to developing staff competency in the most effective practices earned him recognition from funders, model-developers and community providers.

“David set a high bar in the approach to outcomes measurement,” said Walkama. “As an organization, we continue to practice rigorous methods to gauge the effectiveness of our treatment and quality of our care delivery.”

Special Education and Health Information Exchange Pioneer

As a leader of the clinic’s Northwest Village School in the 1980s, Dr. Berkowitz passionately and successfully pursued computerization of students’ special education records—an achievement clearly ahead of its time and a precursor to his vital contributions to the state’s electronic health information exchange initiative.

By 2004, the need to convert medical records to EHRs became a national priority. But long before EHRs rose to this level of importance, Dr. Berkowitz saw the potential in electronic health records as a means to collect and house patient data in one place and to use that data to gain a greater understanding of a patient’s behavioral health status. His keen understanding of the value of innovation helped found a groundbreaking electronic health

information exchange initiative, which set the standards for the state's electronic health records.

Early Adopter of Integrated Care

During the course of his leadership, Dr. Berkowitz considered the marriage between primary and behavioral health services as a way to meet the whole-health needs of individuals and families. In 2001, he led Wheeler's first effort to embed behavioral health services into a Bristol, Connecticut-based pediatric primary care practice. Still in existence, the program includes an on-site behavioral health screening program; expanded office-based behavioral health intervention services and access to behavioral health clinicians; and a collaborative medication management program.

Dr. Berkowitz' vision, commitment and penchant for innovation also helped guide Wheeler toward its eventual entry into the integrated health care realm. In 2013, Wheeler fully operationalized its plan to deliver integrated primary and behavioral health care through its federally funded Family Health & Wellness Centers in Hartford, New Britain and Bristol.

Dr. Berkowitz is commonly described by colleagues, friends and community leaders as "brilliant, analytical, detail-focused, an incredible clinician and an uncompromising advocate and leader." His work, leadership and pursuit of innovation paved the way for Wheeler's continued expansion and evolution as an integrated health care provider.

"David was always stretching himself, professionally, physically and spiritually," said Walkama. "He had this same capacity to stretch everyone around him in very much the same way. He transformed our team, our organization and thousands of lives through his curiosity, passion, expertise and his eternal optimism."

Community Catalyst: Dick Salmon, MD, PhD, Cigna

POSTED ON: 06.21.2018

“When an organization like Wheeler shifts its focus on integrated approaches to care, it’s absolutely huge...there is such a strong body of evidence of the integration of the mind and the body.”

In 2014, soon after opening our first two Family Health & Wellness Centers, Wheeler recognized Dick Salmon, MD, PhD, at our “Evening of Wonder” gala for his commitment to building health equity in underserved communities.

The years since have seen tremendous changes at Wheeler: the expansion to additional service areas, achieving designation as a federally qualified health center, and—most recently—the opening of the Family Health & Wellness Center on Woodland Street in Hartford, Wheeler’s flagship site for integrated primary care, behavioral health, and dental services in the capitol region.

Health care has changed, too, as the focus on providing value-based care, proven outcomes and a more integrated approach to wellness accelerates. Salmon sees Wheeler’s transformation perfectly in line with trends.

“When an organization like Wheeler shifts its focus on integrated approaches to care, it’s absolutely huge. Having a mindset of approaching behavioral health separate from physical health is an artifact, I believe, of cultural discomfort with mental health issues. I think we’re more enlightened today, and there is such a strong body of evidence of the integration of the mind and the body. It requires a different approach.”

Along with the more holistic view of care, health care providers and funders are also shifting to reimbursement strategies that are based on tangible, data-driven improvements in care for patients.

“You can’t talk about the total cost or quality of health care without understanding the role of behavioral health,” Salmon says. “So, improving the integration of behavioral health and primary care is not only the right thing to do; we know that it will also produce better results and a better quality of care for individuals. The challenge is measuring the impact and the value of that care, and I don’t mean just in one year, but trends over time. The total value is measurable health outcomes for individuals and communities.”

Salmon considers himself fortunate that, as a young family practice physician, he was exposed to behavioral health treatments and practitioners, and the exposure has shaped his view of health throughout a long and successful career.

“We all have a bias based on our practice and training. Many physicians did not have the firsthand experience with behavioral health treatment that I did, or practiced in an environment where a behavioral health clinician works side by side with primary care providers as a whole team,” he says. “It’s not about having a few more people who show up from time to time; that doesn’t get you integrated health care. It’s about having a thoughtful and proactive approach.”

This kind of approach is appealing about Wheeler in dynamic times of change, he says.

“When I look at the whole scope of services Wheeler provides, from in-home care to families in distress, to their focus on primary and integrated care, this huge spectrum and range makes a difference. And more importantly, I think Wheeler’s focus on outcomes matters a great deal, especially when it drives program development on that basis. Because of your leadership, you’ve landed in an area where the organization is doing not only what *feels* like the right thing to do, but doing it because the data shows IT IS the right thing to do to address overall health outcomes. I think Wheeler’s doing a great job.”

Of Events and Engagement

POSTED ON: 06.14.2018



Bill Torres got to know Wheeler as a golfer in the organization's annual golf classic nearly two decades ago. His relationship with the organization evolved into so much more, including as Golf Classic event sponsor, two terms as a very active and involved Wheeler trustee and board officer, always offering thoughtful suggestions and advice, and four years as chairman of the Wheeler golf event. Mr. Torres also served on a number of board committees,

including the Quality Committee and Retirement Benefits Committee. He supported the development of the health center services and recruited numerous new trustees, expanding the Wheeler board's talent and capabilities.

"Wheeler's golf outing first provided a window into the organization's many programs and services and value to the community," said Mr. Torres, president and chief executive officer of Southington-based Gibbs. "It was quickly apparent that Wheeler provided many critical services to underserved populations and made it easier for people to access the care they needed."



Under Mr. Torres' leadership, Gibbs has been a Wheeler Golf Classic Lunch Sponsor for 17 years, and Mr. Torres provided individual support through the event's Chairman's Circle sponsorship. His company also got involved in other events such as Wheeler's *Evening of Wonder Gala*.



The Wheeler Golf Classic was founded by a group of business leaders and top companies in 1986, and some of the original supporters still remain involved today. Now in its 33rd year, the event has raised more than \$1 million to support and sustain critically needed services for individuals and families. Proceeds from past Golf Classic events have benefitted Wheeler's continuum of integrated primary and behavioral health care services, the renovation of Wheeler's Northwest Village School, the delivery of Children's Outpatient Services, and the expansion of primary and

behavioral health care services through Wheeler's federally qualified health and wellness centers.

In addition to providing generous financial support, Mr. Torres helped to expand Wheeler's circle of friends. "I appreciate the way this organization runs and the way that it welcomes members of the corporate community," he said. "The organization and its great team are always finding innovative ways to engage donors and volunteers in work that supports and advances the mission."

Wheeler's Golf Classic, a Time-Honored Tradition

POSTED ON: 06.08.2018

The Wheeler Golf Classic was founded by a group of business leaders and top companies in 1986 to raise money for behavioral health and community-based services for children and adolescents. The event, now in its 33rd year, engages members of the business community in a great day of golf to support Wheeler's mission.



More than \$1.1 million has been raised since the first golf classic, and some of the original supporters remain involved today, including Yarde Metals, McPhee Electric and Tollman Spring Company. Proceeds from Golf Classic events have helped Wheeler address emergent community needs such as ensuring access to integrated primary and behavioral health services in underserved communities, child abuse prevention, and providing a state-of-the art

learning environment for students with emotional and behavioral challenges.



Wheeler's 33rd Annual Golf Classic, happening on June 11, 2018, is made possible by a number of local businesses, including Platinum Dinner Sponsor, Farmington Bank; Platinum Logo Sponsor, Manafort Family Foundation; Golf Cart Sponsor, Loureiro Engineering Associates Inc.; Lunch Sponsor Gibbs; Beverage Cart Sponsor, Richard Cartland; Practice Range

Sponsor Whittlesey; Putting Contest Sponsor, Anonymous; Grand Prize Sponsor Sanditz; and Hole-in-One Sponsor, Land Rover Farmington Valley. Wheeler's Chairman's Circle Sponsors also provided generous support, including Barnes Group, Inc., Mott, Mutual of America, Laurie & Bill Torres and Karl Krapek.

Golfers Tee Off for Kids in First Annual Golf Classic

POSTED ON: 06.01.2018



The story below is a reprise of the very first newsletter article highlighting Wheeler's First Golf Classic, held in June 1986. Since its inception, thanks to the support of local business and community leaders and volunteers, this event has raised more than more than \$1.1 million to benefit individuals and families in our communities.

It was a perfect June day as 144 participants in the First Annual Wheeler Clinic Golf Classic teed off, competing for prizes but mostly enjoying the warm sunshine and companionship of their fellow golfers.

At the evening banquet, awards and door prizes were distributed, but the real winners in the June 17 event were the children served here at the Clinic. The event raised \$13,300 for their benefit.

Held at the Hop Meadow Country Club in Simsbury, the Golf Classic was organized by a group of golfers who had played together in other benefit tournaments and had decided that they would like to run one of their own.



The group formed a planned committee with Gerry Barr as chairman and John LaDucer, Burt Brown, Ernie Brackett, Jim Petruzella and Gerry Anastasion as committee members.

The planning committee was assisted in its efforts by a group of able vounteers, including Jo Anastasion, Zocia Barr, Grace Basile, Helen Brown, Connie Gibson, Mary Kenealy, Donna LaDucer, Louise Murphy, Geri Petruzella and Corrine Zettergren.

Glenn Block, Bob Cardello, Fletcher Carter, Ray Corsini, Henry Curtiss and Bob Provost served on this year's tournament committee.

Over \$8,000 worth of prizes were contributed by 72 individuals and businesses. In addition, 71 individuals and businesses made contributions as Charter Sponsors.

“Everything went so well . . . the weather, the people the tournament itself. They were a good group, a very good group . . . the best organized we have dealt with. I’m still hearing about the Golf Classic . . . how beautiful all of those blue sweaters looked out there in the morning sun.”

Ken Doyle
PGA Golf Professional
Hop Meadow Country Club

“It was important to us that the day be a success, not so much for us but for the kids at the Clinic. We wanted to make and continue to make a difference in their lives through this annual golf tournament. We are appreciative to everyone who gave of his or her time, money and gifts in making our first effort a successful and enjoyable day. I don’t think any of us could ask for better results than that which we financially achieved for such a good cause.”

Gerry Barr
Chairman, Planning Committee
First Annual Wheeler Clinic Golf Classic

Enter as Volunteers – Leave as Friends

POSTED ON: 05.25.2018

In 2010, Forestville residents Claire Holden and Aline Towne became Wheeler volunteers through a local chapter of RSVP, a national volunteer network for people 55 and over. They didn't know each other at the time, but became and stayed friends through this assignment and beyond.

Their relationship with Wheeler continues as well, and for the past eight years, they've faithfully volunteered with the organization on the second Monday of every month, working for Wheeler's Executive Office. Claire and Aline assist with packaging employee recognition gifts and assembling anniversary and birthday cards for employees.

Claire and Aline are unfailingly reliable. In fact, this pair has never missed a monthly volunteer assignment, not even when Claire was involved in a very serious car accident two years ago.

"These wonderful ladies are an important part of our team, and they continue to make a significant contribution," said Linda Finlay, executive assistant for Wheeler, who oversees the dynamic duo. "Claire and Aline were initially referred to us through RSVP, but have been independently volunteering for us since 2106. They enjoy the work, and they love the organization."

"This is such a joyful place to come and to work," said Aline. "It's been our pleasure to help out the team for all these years."

Outside of Wheeler, Claire and Aline are very much involved in each others' lives. They lunch and have taken tai chi classes together and are planning to take part in a soon-to-be-determined summer activity.

"We both have volunteered at many places," added Claire. "Wheeler is by far the best."

Equal Partnerships, Positive Outcomes

POSTED ON: 05.18.2018



For Bill Carbone, MPA, partnering with statewide non-profits has always been an essential part of maintaining youth and adults safely in the community. As former executive director of the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch, Court Support Services Division (CSSD), Mr. Carbone worked with Wheeler for many years until his retirement from state government in 2014.

Mr. Carbone said that CSSD and Wheeler forged a relationship in the 1990s when the State of Connecticut made a significant investment in alternatives to incarceration for adult and juvenile offenders.

“At that time, CSSD approached the non-profit community to be partners in this effort,” remembered Mr. Carbone. “Who better to collaborate with than well-established, deep-rooted organizations with a history of working with people in the local community?”

“Half of our work depended on our ties with non-profit organizations, without which we couldn’t accomplish the goal of transforming individuals from law-breaking to law-abiding,” he added.

For nearly two decades, CSSD has funded an array of programs delivered by Wheeler, including Wheeler’s Alternative in the Community program, which offers community-based intervention services for adults involved with the court or probation. Other CSSD-funded programs include services for individuals and families affected by domestic violence, as well as pre-trial drug and alcohol education, in-home and community-based family therapy programs and more.

“The vision was [and still is] to foster greater safety in our cities and towns and prevent individuals from committing new crimes,” said Mr. Carbone. “Part of the solution is to provide support to individuals who depend on help from organizations like Wheeler.”

Mr. Carbone said that as the CSSD-Wheeler partnership deepened, both organizations discovered their shared passion for—and commitment to—demonstrated outcomes.

“I strongly believe in data-driven policy making and really appreciated the fact that Wheeler was equally interested in data, which put the organization in a category by itself,” said Mr.

Carbone. “Wheeler is professional, clinical and different in its approach, with the ability to adjust service delivery based on what the research says.”

This approach has led to continued programmatic expansion for Wheeler in many areas of the organization, including community justice services.

Now a Senior Lecturer and Executive Director of Justice Programs at the University of New Haven’s Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice & Forensic Sciences, Mr. Carbone shares with graduate students many lessons from public life. Among the most notable, “Creating safer communities is a multi-pronged effort that involves a close working relationship between government and non-profits,” he said. “The partnership *is truly* a 50/50 arrangement.”

Reflections on Dennis Keenan

POSTED ON: 05.11.2018

Last week, we highlighted the long career of Dennis Keenan, executive director of Wheeler from 1977 to 1998, as part of our ongoing series of 50th anniversary stories. This week, we're sharing some personal reflections on Dennis from his team and current Wheeler leaders who worked with him.

“Dennis was a tremendous mentor to me. He’s a wonderful person and leader who was and is passionate about Wheeler’s work and people. It was obvious from even a casual conversation with him that he truly listened, cared and told you like it was. His leadership was key, at pivotal points in our early history and growth. He and his team laid the foundation we build on today.”

Susan Walkama, LCSW

President and CEO

Susan first began working at Wheeler in 1982.

“Dennis was a very committed and caring executive director; committed to everyone we serve and our staff. He wanted to know about our families and would remember surprising details. Several years after he retired, he asked me once about my mother's artwork, and the fact that he remembered she was an artist and remembered specific details of her art was impressive. He also identified that he was inspired himself by the work being done; when he talked to you about Wheeler, you knew he was proud of our staff, and that was energizing.”

Elisabeth Cannata, Ph.D.

Vice President, Community-Based Family Services & Practice Innovation

Elisabeth first began working at Wheeler in 1995.

“Dennis encouraged each of us to grow, to believe in our own talents, and to use those talents to move Wheeler forward. He helped me to reach further and to achieve goals that had seemed out of reach. His leadership style included trust and compassion, wisdom and generosity; it was always clear that he valued each staff member’s contribution to the success of the organization. And, not to minimize for a second, he recognized that laughter is a daily necessity for success. Dennis remains a good and dear friend. I will be forever grateful.”

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

Elaine Couture (far right in photo below)

Human Resources

Elaine worked at Wheeler from 1972 to 2011.

“How to describe a dear friend and mentor? Under Dennis Keenan’s leadership, Wheeler Clinic earned the highest respect from the Board, community, donors, state and federal agencies, including its funders, for service quality and financial integrity. But from a staff perspective, perhaps his most enduring legacy was his work to assure that Wheeler develop as a welcoming, productive and positive place to work. With enlightened policies and thoughtful benefits, Wheeler has been able to recruit and retain the best staff. Dennis knew how to nurture and inspire and to elicit the best from each of us. There was a reason that our leadership team was virtually unchanged over 20 years. It was a gift to work with him, and we were proud to be part of such a humane, thriving organization. “

Mary Hess (second from right in photo below)

Research and Development

Mary worked at Wheeler from 1970 to 2008.

“Dennis's greatest gift was giving people the support to grow and to be make sure the hard work had outcomes. He fostered that and he never lost it. He had that ability to make everyone around him know that they counted. That is critical when you work with a hard, hard, hard-working staff. It's critical they know that the person in charge has the ability to connect with the work we do.”

John Mattas

Northwest Village School, Education Services

John worked at Wheeler from 1978 to 2012.

“Dennis’s most important talent—besides being very knowledgeable about working with young people and special education—was that he was a very good manager. If he thought you could do the job, he’d let you do it, and he’d support you. His view was ‘Tell me what you want to do, tell me what you need to do it, and go ahead and do it.’”

Joe Puzzo, MA (far left in photo below)

Special Services

Joe worked at Wheeler from 1973 to 2004.

"Dennis fills the room with his personality the minute he walks in. Through personal connection, humor and genuine interest, he had a way of connecting with staff that was amazing and often made it a point to walk through the building just to check in. His vision for meeting the needs of at-risk students helped shape the special education landscape in Connecticut and made our school stand out in terms of the comprehensive mental health services offered within an educational setting. He encouraged creativity, understood the importance of diversified funding and introduced the entrepreneurial mindset that continues today."

Michael Russo, Psy.D.

Vice President of Education and Early Childhood Services

Mike first began working at Wheeler in 1988.



Dennis with some members of his team. From left: Joe Puzzo, MA, David Berkowitz, PhD, Dennis Keenan, Jane Bourns, LCSW, Keith Davis, Mary Hess, Elaine Couture.

The Rewards That Come from Taking Chances

POSTED ON: 05.04.2018



"Be flexible, stay entrepreneurial.
That's what guided us."

After Dennis Keenan interviewed for a job running Wheeler's then-new special education school in 1974, he went home and told his wife to not expect him to work there long.

"The organization was very young, very innovative, very youthful. In my interview, we sat in a circle on the floor, which, I guess, was what you did back then. It was the '60s and '70s; it was an innocent time, in some ways. It was a time when people wanted to work together. Wheeler was so new; it wasn't a place to go if you were looking for stability, because to be honest, there was no indication we'd succeed. I took a chance coming to Wheeler. No one like me with three kids at the time should logically have done it."

Not only did Keenan succeed, but his leadership proved pivotal to the success of the organization. When he retired in 1998 as the executive director, Wheeler had tripled in size and the budget had grown from \$1.7 million in 1978 to \$12.5 million. His core team of managers remains dear friends, stay in touch, and are proud of where the organization is today.

"We were young and aggressive and grew old together. We had kids, watched those kids grow, saw our parents age, went to weddings and funerals together. We cared for each other."



Keenan was recruited to Wheeler to oversee Northwest Village School, and had a long history as an educator, from an entire family of educators. The out-of-the-box nature of Wheeler appealed to him; his own unique background included a life-changing wanderlust road trip to Alaska as a young man, and more than 50 airborne jumps as a combat controller in the US Air Force.

Keenan helped grow Northwest Village School in an era that was the beginning of a new philosophy in special education.

"Wheeler was unconventional. It attracted people with that kind of mindset. Our model was that we only wanted to keep students as long as they needed us. We were innovative in that we wanted the clinicians and the teachers to work as a team. This was a new way of thinking."

That mindset extended to other areas as well.

“With Jane Bourns, we started some programs for children by allocating resources for it, and developed expertise in this area. This wasn’t unusual by itself, but there was no funding for this! We could see that there would be, though, so when the time came, we were ahead of the curve and ready for it.”

As executive director, financial stability was vital to his focus. His team worked to diversify funding sources, making sure the fledgling organization was not too dependent on any one source of revenue. He said his team’s mindset was focused on opportunity.



“Our team was entrepreneurial and we were also careful to take risks that were calculated. I think building the school was a risk. A lot of the schools that were around at that time no longer exist. We tried new approaches. Some worked, some didn’t. We never risked so much in one area that it would destroy the organization. We ventured into areas that other places didn’t want to go.

It was in all of our character. If you were adverse to change, we probably were not the place for you, and some people just didn’t fit in or work out. You’ve got to be able to gamble and accept you may fail. I think that’s been part of Wheeler’s mindset all along.”

While they didn’t call it “integrated care” at the time, Keenan said his team could see where the future was going, and they fought to give Wheeler a foundation to build on.

“We didn’t directly foresee Wheeler becoming exactly like it is today, but we could see that the way health care worked was changing and that more services would be provided in the community. I think the most stressful part of my time was navigating the politics of the changing health care environment. We were growing enough to be an irritant to a lot of the old ways of doing business. We were competing against places that were larger and more established.”

“An organization like Wheeler will only succeed if it’s nimble, stays lean, always ready to jump on an opportunity. Be flexible, stay entrepreneurial. That’s what guided us. I just loved working there. We wanted to create something that would be there after we were gone. That it has grown to what it is today is of great credit to many hard-working, caring people.”

Bertha and Frank Wheeler: A Legacy of Care

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Plainville resident Bertha Buell Wheeler and husband Frank shared a passion for community that spanned two World Wars and beyond. Their vision and support bolstered many local non-profit organizations, including the Plainville Library and YMCA, and also led to the establishment of Wheeler Clinic.

In 1960, Mrs. Wheeler originally left a trust to establish a hospital for children in Plainville. This generous bequest, along with vital construction and staffing grants from the National Institute of Mental Health, helped establish the clinic in 1968 and led to the 1972 construction of the first facility at 91 Northwest Drive in Plainville. At the time, the purpose of the clinic was to deliver cost-effective, compassionate care for children and adults with addictions, emotional disturbances and other behavioral disorders.

“The Wheelers were clearly ahead of their time and among the town of Plainville’s most influential benefactors,” said Susan Walkama, LCSW, president and chief executive officer, Wheeler. “Through their extensive volunteer work, and penchant for problem-solving, they identified the need for additional services in Plainville, and they left a legacy of care to ensure those needs were met.”

Today, Wheeler Clinic has grown and expanded significantly to address the diverse needs of individuals, families and communities, and the organization takes an integrated approach to delivering primary and behavioral health, education, community justice and recovery services.

“This extraordinary bequest is the very bedrock upon which our organization stands. Because of Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler’s generosity, we are able to deliver accessible, quality care and positively transform the lives of thousands of individuals each year,” added Walkama.

Community Catalyst, Adam R. Silverman MD, FACP

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“Innovation is about execution of great ideas where others have failed.”

Wheeler’s path to its 50th anniversary and as a provider of whole-person, integrated care is heavily influenced by a strong, ongoing relationship with Saint Francis Hospital and Trinity Health Of New England. Adam Silverman, MD, FACP, vice president of population health at Saint Francis Healthcare Partners, has been a stalwart partner and

advocate.

“What has always appealed to me about Wheeler is its willingness to be collaborative and work with other organizations,” Silverman says. “Health care is a difficult space and providers are all living and dying through collaboration.”

Silverman believes that Wheeler’s growth is largely due to a unique combination of opportunity, vision and work.

“It’s not natural or given for organizations to evolve as Wheeler has,” Silverman says. “The idea of integrated care isn’t visionary by itself; people have talked about this idea for 40 years or more. Innovation is about execution of great ideas where others have failed, and Wheeler’s been able to execute on a vision that others have just been able to talk about. I think the perspective it brings, of bringing primary care into a traditionally behavioral health-focused organization, versus the other way around, has been key.”

The relationship between Wheeler and Saint Francis / Trinity Health Of New England is a textbook example of how organizations can collaborate. Wheeler’s first Health & Wellness Center in Hartford in 2013 was opened through a partnership with the hospital for coordination of primary care and behavioral health services. In the years since, the two have worked together on emergency department behavioral health services in Stafford Springs, OB-GYN services in Hartford, and ensuring that pediatric patients of Saint Francis’s Gengras Clinic were efficiently and appropriately transitioned to Wheeler’s new Family Health & Wellness Center.

“Susan [Walkama] and her team have coalesced around an idea,” Silverman says.

“Through their Family Health & Wellness Centers, they have created a service that has gone beyond behavioral health and substance abuse and really begins to get at whole-

person care. It's great to be able to partner, bounce ideas, share experiences and enable a successful relationship. When I was first introduced to Wheeler, they were described as the premier partner of behavioral health services in the region. And they continue to be the premier provider to collaborate with. That speaks to leadership and vision. “



“I think [Wheeler] becoming a federally qualified health center is a natural extension of what it wanted to do. Wheeler's not just content to be successful in what it's doing. It wanted to reach more people and address more needs. Wheeler is small enough that it can make a decision, take action, assess the outcome, and if the outcome is negative, it can adjust. It's been willing to take chances and willing to get into spaces where others have failed or fled.”

Silverman sees significant challenges in tomorrow's health care environment for all providers and funders.

“The fact of the matter is that quality needs to get better and costs need to drop across our health care system. We're in an untenable situation in this state. When you talk to business owners, they describe health care expenses as 'crushing.' The 'haves' have access, and the 'have nots' do not. If we're being honest, even the 'haves' don't have access to care that is—by any objective measure of quality—as good or as affordable as it should be.”

The ongoing partnership with Wheeler fits into Saint Francis's philosophy of service to community-focused health today and for the future.

“Saint Francis is dedicated to health equity and committed to value-based health care. Inherent in that must be available, accessible behavioral health care. That's the logical connection in our relationship with Wheeler for a hospital that is an anchor in our community and gives that community a voice. Hospitals in cities have a major economic and psychological impact on the local quality of life. Interacting with organizations like Wheeler improves economic development, helps make care better for everyone, keeps people in the most appropriate level of care, and keeps everyone healthier.”

Community Catalyst Patricia Baker, President and CEO, Connecticut Health Foundation

POSTED ON: 04.13.2018



“The imperative to get health care right is so strong...”

Patricia Baker’s life work and passion centers on making a healthier tomorrow for us all. That’s a challenge in a rapidly changing health care environment.

“What we know today is that we won’t know what the world will be like four years from now.” But one thing is certain; those who want to maintain the status quo will be unable to do so,” she says. “On a national and state level, the dollars allocated for health care are adding up and crowding out everything else. We spend more, have more unnecessary costs, and we have often have poorer outcomes compared to the rest of the industrial world.”

Baker is the founding leader of the Connecticut Health Foundation, having guided the organization since its creation in 1999. Under her leadership, the foundation has become the state’s largest independent health philanthropy and uses a combination of grantmaking, policy work, and research to improve the health status of Connecticut residents. Patricia came to the foundation with two decades of experience as a visionary, pragmatic leader in health care policymaking, service provision, advocacy, and community engagement.



Baker’s relationship with Wheeler predates her work at CHF, when she served as vice chair of the Governor’s Cabinet on Nonprofit Health and Human Services.

“Wheeler has always demonstrated tremendous vision, coupled with strong, adaptive leadership. It shows a consistent willingness to embrace accountability that has been demonstrated over decades,” she says.

Baker’s focus at CHF is on advancing health equity, and a key strategy for the foundation has been the integration of oral health, primary care, and behavioral health to improve health outcomes through a whole-person and systems approach to care.

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

“My first conversation with Wheeler was about integrated care, back in 2001, and how we can get behavioral health and primary care talking to each other. It was an early grant to support a local system of health care coordination and care development. So, what is now considered imperative for the entire health care system is something Wheeler was experimenting with more than 15 years ago.”

More recently, the Foundation has supported Wheeler with a grant to analyze disparities in access to care, patient engagement, preventative screening and public health indicator data at Wheeler's Family Health & Wellness Centers in Bristol and Hartford.

Baker has worked closely with Wheeler at each step.

“Just like Susan Walkama, Dennis Keenan and David Berkowitz [past presidents of Wheeler] had, I think, a vision and commitment and a passion for serving all of the health needs of Wheeler's clientele. Whether we could always name it as ‘integrated care,’ I'm not sure for each point in time. But all of your leaders have had the design and passion in mind to get Wheeler where it is today. Wheeler is the epitome of embracing the concept and being willing to do the hard work.”

Baker and her team of staff and volunteers have their own hard work ahead.

The Foundation's 2018-2022 strategic plan centers on advancing health equity by ensuring access to coverage, increasing connections to care, improving care delivery, linking clinical care with communities, and strengthening advocacy and leadership.

“We have a commitment and vision that the next generation will not face the same racial and ethnic health disparities their parents and grandparents faced. We're going to continue the most effective use of investing in systems of change, focusing on access, connections to care and care that's comprehensive, meaning oral, physical and mental health. Care that is affordable and accountable,” she says. “That makes delivery system reform critical, particularly in Connecticut, where race, ethnicity, and language play huge roles in getting services that are meaningful to the patient. Wheeler has certainly demonstrated a commitment and dedication to that.”

Like many of the individuals who have been nominated as a Community Catalyst for Wheeler's 50th anniversary, Baker remains optimistic in the future of health care, despite—or, perhaps, because of—the hard work ahead.

“These are challenging times, and sometimes this will slow us down. There will be hurdles and challenges. The imperative to get health care right is so strong that we have to move forward. I am optimistic, but it's probably more of a cautious optimism coupled with a sense of perseverance. We have to be steadfast, we can't be deterred, and we have to try things that move us forward. What Wheeler has done for decades is set a standard of

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

excellence through a commitment to evidence-based care. They are willing to take chances and experiment.”

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Wheeler Community Catalyst, Beresford Wilson, Interim Executive Director, FAVOR

POSTED ON: 04.05.2018



“If you are purposeful in everything you do, your purpose will find you.”

For more than twenty years, Beresford Wilson has tirelessly worked for Connecticut families with children with mental, emotional, behavioral health challenges, and developmental and intellectual disabilities. Like many advocates, he found a calling to social change through his own lived experience. His future in family advocacy became

clear shortly after he became a father himself; Wilson’s oldest son weighed fewer than two pounds at birth.

“Our local community has great needs,” he says. “What I learned quickly is that African-American and Caribbean families often did not readily have the knowledge of, or access to, the services available to them.”

Wilson is now the interim Executive Director of FAVOR, a grassroots organization created to respond to the need for leadership and coordination among family advocacy and support groups in the state. He helps empower families to effectively advocate on behalf of their children and access family-driven and culturally sensitive services that improve health outcomes and well-being. Wheeler has been a steady partner throughout FAVOR’s 15-year history.

“I have found Wheeler to be one of the more conscious community service organizations, the most family-friendly, the most true to their word and their mission.” Wilson says, recalling his work developing multiple programs with Wheeler as a partner in the process.

“Wheeler always has shown interest in our communities and our families. They are present at the same tables we are at, at the important intersections of juvenile justice, behavioral health and child welfare in Connecticut. That always spoke loudly to me. As I’ve grown and matured in this work, I see so many key people across the state who were at, or end up at, Wheeler in their career.”

Wilson’s work is always complicated and often difficult, helping families navigate and advocate in sometimes-complex systems of care and services.

“I can always find the fuel to motivate me. In Connecticut, unfortunately, tragedy sometimes is the primary motivator of change, and we’ve had our portion of tragedy, such

as the daily exposure to violence in our urban areas. In the land of steady habits, we often don't seem to learn repeated lessons. That margin of understanding always remains the distance we have to go to be a more equitable state. We have some of the largest disparity gaps in the nation, and that must be an overarching concern for us all."

Despite the challenges, he sees reason to hope.

"The advent of Connecticut as a data-driven state, using data deliberately to determine policy, is a light that shines bright on our future as advocates. At FAVOR, we are engaging and fully employing families, providing access and equity into a complicated process. The partnerships we've created, sustained and fostered speak well to all who suffer the arduous task of being at all these different tables and spaces over the years, and to those who mentor families to take on leadership roles. Our families are increasingly taking on the heavy work, getting a voice. We have to be deliberate and intentional in our work, but I think the future is bright."

He sees Wheeler's 50th anniversary as a time to reflect on how far the organization has come and how much it has strategically grown.

"Wheeler has progressed quickly and learned from the experience of many other organizations along the way. It has accomplished so much in 50 years, and that speaks well to its leadership, its responses to the populations it serves, and its forward-thinking ways. Wheeler partners with communities it serves to analyze and find the needs of local families. Ultimately, Connecticut families are the primary benefactors of Wheeler's history."

A Friend for All Seasons

POSTED ON: 03.30.2018



There wasn't a time when the late, former State Representative Betty Boukus (D-Plainville, New Britain) wasn't advocating for Wheeler and the individuals and families served by the organization. Ms. Boukus—who served for 22 years in the state legislature—supported Wheeler as a corporator and trustee, and was a steadfast champion for the expansion of its programs and services.

“Betty’s advocacy was crucial to our efforts to preserve access to behavioral health and other services for some of our community’s most vulnerable residents,” said Susan Walkama, LCSW, president and chief executive officer, Wheeler. “She always went above and beyond the call to help statewide leaders and others to understand the value of the work we do.”



A Passion for Education



Ms. Boukus’s early career as an elementary school teacher in Plainville may have fueled her interest in Wheeler’s programs. She was instrumental in sparking community connections that led to three projects at Northwest Village School (NVS), Wheeler’s therapeutic day school for special education students, ages 4-21. Ms. Boukus connected Wheeler with its

Northwest Drive neighbor, Loureiro Engineering Associates. This connection led to the construction of two multi-dimensional play scapes, as well as an outdoor pavilion on the back grounds of the school. Jeff Loureiro, the company’s president, also served in various capacities on Wheeler’s board of trustees and continues to be an unwavering supporter. He served as chairman of the board from 2009-2013.

Supporting Creative Learning

Ms. Boukus worked closely with Governor Dannel Malloy, Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman and other state leaders to secure \$2 million in state funding for expansion and renovation at Wheeler’s NVS in 2013. The project, also supported by contributions from local

foundations, helped to create a state-of-the-art learning environment for students and included:

- ❑ A sensory-sensitive environment with more engaging classrooms
- ❑ Additional space for smaller group learning
- ❑ An expanded and enhanced Media Center
- ❑ A Literacy Lab to provide dedicated space for individualized literacy supports
- ❑ Cutting-edge educational software and technology to engage students in learning
- ❑ A 10,000 square foot multipurpose center that houses a new gym and performance stage

“Betty’s tireless work helped to bring this project to fruition and fill a critical need for our students,” said Walkama. “As a result of her efforts and the support of statewide leaders and local foundations, hundreds of students are growing and thriving in these beautiful, dynamic spaces.”

A Champion for Whole-Health Care



Ms. Boukus’s advocacy and support continued as Wheeler evolved into an integrated care delivery provider. Ms. Boukus, Governor Malloy and Lt. Governor Wyman played a significant role in helping Wheeler to secure a community health center grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to expand health care services at Wheeler’s federally qualified health center at 10 North Main Street Bristol. This center delivers primary and behavioral health care to meet the needs of residents in Bristol and surrounding communities. It is one of three community health centers operated by Wheeler.

Ms. Boukus was honored by Wheeler in 2010 with Positive Change Award, and in 2013 with a Gold Star Award at the organization’s Evening of Wonder gala. Shortly before her death in December 2016, she was also honored with an “All Heart” Award from Wheeler “with heartfelt appreciation for a lifetime of community service and passionate commitment to building healthier tomorrows.”

“We are eternally grateful for Betty’s support and guidance,” said Walkama. “She is a key part of our history, and because of her contributions, she will always be part of our future.”

Community Catalyst: Bristol Hospital and Wheeler: A Creative Approach to Care

POSTED ON: 03.22.2018



The most pressing community issues often require leaders and organizations to rethink and reimagine. This is how as Kurt A. Barwis, FACHE, president and CEO of Bristol Hospital and Health Care Group, approaches problem-solving. A reinvigorated partnership between Wheeler and Bristol Hospital exemplifies creativity, giving rise to programs that serve the whole-health needs of individuals and families in Bristol and surrounding communities. Wheeler and Bristol Hospital share a long

history of working collaboratively. This relationship deepened as the health care landscape changed.

Mr. Barwis, who joined Bristol Hospital in August 2006, remembers his first meeting with Wheeler President and Chief Executive Officer, Susan Walkama, LCSW. “Susan approached me about developing a partnership shortly after I took this position,” said Barwis. “With significant shifts in the health care environment—and many more expected—Wheeler was looking for innovative, effective ways to meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents.”

This discussion would eventually form the foundation for local delivery of integrated care—a systematic coordination of primary and behavioral health care.*

“As an organization concerned with outcomes and reducing disparities in care, we asked ourselves if we were doing enough to meet the needs of the community,” remembered Ms. Walkama. “We decided we needed to do more, and we refined our strategic direction to begin building a more systemic approach to health care. Partnerships with organizations like Bristol Hospital were important building blocks in our efforts.”

In 2013, Wheeler opened its first Family Health & Wellness Center, a federally qualified health care center at 10 North Main Street in Bristol, which offers primary and behavioral health care services, and coordination of and linkages to care in the community. Bristol Hospital was a key partner in this effort.

“When Wheeler opened this facility, we were one hundred-percent supportive,” Mr. Barwis said. “We collaborated closely, especially in the areas of pediatric care and breast health,

as well as intervention and treatment for people with chronic disease and addiction issues.”

Two years later, Wheeler and Bristol Hospital partnered to further improve behavioral health crisis services for children, adolescents, adults and families in the Greater Bristol region. Wheeler assumed responsibility for Bristol Hospital’s Emergency Department Crisis Services from 8 am to midnight, seven days a week, providing immediate intervention and connections to community services and resources, including the Bristol Hospital Counseling Center and Wheeler’s Family Health & Wellness Center.

Bristol Hospital is actively engaged in monitoring this effort with a keen eye toward patient readmission rates and patient satisfaction. Since the partnership between Bristol Hospital and Wheeler began, the hospital reports a marked improvement in its Press Ganey patient satisfaction scores.



The Wheeler-Bristol Hospital relationship continues to take on new dimensions. For example, in 2016, both organizations co-sponsored a “Community Conversation on Opiate and Heroin Use and Misuse,” featuring a six-member panel discussion highlighting what individuals, families and communities need to know about opiates and overdose; where to get help; how to support and set limits for those struggling with addiction; and the value of recovery.

“Like anything else, we’ve had success, and we’ve had areas where we still need to make improvements,” said Barwis. “But this doesn’t mean we won’t keep trying. We have to partner broadly and assess our progress on a regular basis to make sure that what we’re delivering, first and foremost, benefits our community.”

Reference:

*www.integration.samhsa.gov, SAMHSA-HRSA Center for Integrated Solution, What is Integrated Care? <https://www.integration.samhsa.gov/about-us/what-is-integrated-care>

Community Catalyst: Town Manager Robert Lee and the Town of Plainville

POSTED ON: 03.16.2018



“It’s Really An Ideal Relationship.”

While Wheeler serves 30,000 Connecticut residents from 90% of the state’s cities and towns every year, its roots go back to a field in Plainville, Connecticut in 1968 and the vision and generosity of prominent Plainville citizen, Bertha Wheeler.

Robert Lee has worked closely with Wheeler in his 14 years as Plainville town manager, and the town has been a partner for much of the organization’s growth in that time.

“What I’m most impressed by is that Wheeler is an embodiment of Plainville,” he says. “You started here, you’ve grown here, bought property here, hired so many Plainville residents, helped the local economy. Wheeler is part of the community. As Wheeler’s become a leader across the state, I think that reflects well on our town.”

Lee says there are countless formal and informal ways the town and organization have collaborated.



“We have used Wheeler’s Employee Assistance Program for many years and they’ve always been very responsive and there in times of need. This has meant grief counseling and support for our police and fire departments, helping staff decrease conflict, health, wellness and community events, trainings, and much more. These are very valuable services, and they are not easy to find. I think it means more when you can access them locally.

“As an employer, Wheeler is always present. I regularly meet people in town who either work at Wheeler or know someone who has. Many of Wheeler’s leaders and volunteers, like the late Ray Corsini, are residents and have worked closely with us on a host of other issues.”

Recently, Wheeler and the Plainville Public Schools have partnered to expand access to health services for students and their families. New school-based behavioral health clinics at Linden Street School and the Middle School of Plainville help students address trauma-related issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and behavioral health issues, and provide other evidence-based interventions to address an array of

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

problems, including anxiety, depression, academic and peer challenges, and more. Linkage to other services in the community also are provided. A Wheeler clinician supports each school location.

“I think Wheeler’s a good neighbor. We understand that sometimes, when you’re providing health care, people come to see you in difficult situations,” he adds. “Our interactions with Wheeler staff are always professional. It’s really an ideal relationship to have.”

A Deep Commitment to the Mission

POSTED ON: 03.08.2018



For former Wheeler board of trustee member, Courtney Bourns, Wheeler's work and mission were personal. Mr. Bourns' late wife, Jane, spent nearly 30 years of her professional career with Wheeler, and was a former director of Wheeler Children's Outpatient Services, serving children and youth in Central Connecticut.

"It was through Jane's eyes that I came to truly understand the family as a system," said Mr. Bourns, a retired partner with the Hartford-based law firm Berman, Bourns, Aaron & Dembo, LLC. "Jane had such compassion for children and families."



Jane passed away in 2003, and the following year, Wheeler asked Mr. Bourns to join its board of trustees, a role he assumed for nine years. He served on the Governance and Development committees and was instrumental in garnering community and financial support and participation in Wheeler's two major fundraising events: the annual Golf

Classic and Evening of Wonder gala.

"My time on the board was extremely productive because it was a place where there was always good conversation and constructive approaches to problem-solving," said Mr. Bourns. "Wheeler as an organization is never just satisfied with providing service. It is always measuring its own performance as well as consumer satisfaction. Wheeler is always asking the critical question, 'does this service help?'"

Mr. Bourns says he has always appreciates the caliber and spirit of Wheeler's staff. "The organization takes a team approach and believes, 'we can do more, we can get there,'" he said. "Whenever I have reached out to Wheeler, the organization has always responded with a resounding 'yes,' or at the very least, 'we will find a way.'"

Jane C. Bourns, Statewide Leader and Child Advocate

POSTED ON: 03.01.2018



Some people have jobs, while others have callings. For Jane C. Bourns, a deeply devoted clinician, administrator, child advocate and Wheeler employee for nearly three decades, the latter was clearly true. Jane, who passed away in 2003, spent most of her career developing mental health services for children at Wheeler, and strengthening statewide systems and communities serving youth and families.

A social worker by training and graduate of the UCONN School of Social Work, Jane was Wheeler's first director of the Department of Children's Services from 1977 until her retirement in 2000. Under her leadership, Wheeler provided thousands of children and their families with a continuum of prevention and clinical services. She was one of the first child guidance directors to fully embrace the family therapy model and encouraged therapists to become expert in this approach.

Support for Youth and Families

In 1981, Jane secured funding from the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect to launch the region's earliest specialty treatment services for children who had been victims of physical and sexual abuse. She also introduced the Connecticut Healthy Families program, an evidence-based, in-home child abuse prevention strategy—now known in the state as Nurturing Families—which continues to serve thousands of families each year.

"Jane was a dedicated and compassionate leader at Wheeler, and I had the privilege of working for her, and learning from her, for many years," said Mike Russo, Psy.D., vice president, Education Services, Wheeler. "She taught us all so much about finding inner strength when faced with adversity, remaining focused on our mission to help children and families regardless of challenges that may arise, and always maintaining integrity and kindness in all that we do. I still keep a picture of Jane in my office as a reminder of the type of leader and person we should all strive to be."

Community Services and Broad Impact

Jane passionately supported the concept of community-based, non-institutional services for children. She developed specialized foster care, foster treatment homes, small group homes, extended day treatment and adolescent substance abuse treatment programs.

Jane's contributions extended beyond Wheeler. In 2000, she was recognized with the Children's Health and Well-Being Award from ConnectiCare, which honored individuals in the community who made a difference in the lives of children. She also spent many years in crucial statewide planning and policy-forming roles and chaired the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) Statewide Advisory Council, as well as the Association of Child Guidance Clinics.

"There are several of us at Wheeler who still feel that we are carrying forth the mission and passion that Jane inspired," said Elisabeth Cannata, Ph.D., vice president of Community-Based Family Services and Practice Innovation for Wheeler, and current co-chair of the same DCF Statewide Advisory Council. "When I get discouraged about challenges within the behavioral health system, I often think about Jane's legacy, dedication, and her belief in the team that she lovingly mentored at Wheeler, and I feel renewed energy to promote and advocate for the best services and supports to foster child and family well-being."

Perpetuating Jane's Legacy

After Jane's passing, Wheeler worked collaboratively with Jane's husband, Courtney, on efforts to memorialize her legacy, including the creation of the Jane C. Bourns Leadership Institute, designed to prepare emergent Wheeler leaders and new supervisors to sustain growth in a rapidly changing health care environment. Mr. Bourns also was asked to join Wheeler's Board of Trustees. He served as a trustee in various capacities for nine years.

The late David J. Berkowitz, Ph.D., Jane's longtime colleague and Wheeler executive director at the time she retired, remembered Jane as someone who embodied the best values in the field. "Jane was always known for her expertise, her professionalism and her humanity, but she always gave much more of herself to her relationships and work than most people. She always showed that extra degree of concern and caring that comes from the heart."

One Family, Many Gifts

POSTED ON: 02.22.2018



Parents are often their child's most influential role models, providing tools and lessons that last a lifetime and beyond. This was clearly the case in John Lacey's life. His mother Marie, and father, the Honorable J. Robert Lacey, exemplified service and generosity, and influenced his path as a lawyer, philanthropist and community leader. Mr. Lacey, who passed away in December 2013, left a legacy gift to Wheeler of \$25,000 in the name of his parents. Funds are used to support delivery of accessible, equitable care

for individuals and families.

Mr. Lacey's connection to Wheeler is rooted in his mother's close childhood and lifelong friendship with Bertha Trumbull Wheeler, whose bequest to the Plainville community—along with her husband Frank Wheeler in 1960—ultimately helped to start Wheeler Clinic. When Mr. Lacey's mother passed away in the autumn of 2002, she left also legacy of her own: both a charitable remainder unitrust and a bequest, made in honor of Bertha Wheeler, to the clinic. Her gifts, totaling more than \$75,000, support Wheeler's mission to encourage health, recovery and growth for individuals, families and communities.

Mr. Lacey practiced corporate and international business law. He was a partner in the Hartford firm of Copp, Berall & Hempstead and a founding partner of Lacey, Meissel, Koven & Kaufman. In 1994, he was nominated by President Clinton to serve on the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission. He was later elected Chairman. In 2002, he was appointed as an Appellate Hearing Examiner for the September 11 Victim Compensation Fund.

"The Lacey family's commitment and generosity have been invaluable to our organization and the communities we serve," said Susan Walkama, LCSW, president and chief executive officer, Wheeler. "Their legacy gifts are essential reminders to our community of the impact planned giving can have."

Dottie Hubbard, Wheeler Pioneer

POSTED ON: 02.15.2018

The success of any start-up organization depends on a community that nurtures it, as well as the talent and driving forces of local leadership. The presence of these elements—coupled with the vision and mobilization efforts of Mrs. Dorothy K. “Dottie” Hubbard—moved Wheeler from vision to reality.

In 1965, Mrs. Hubbard convened individuals concerned with mental health, corporate, hospital and community leaders to create the Central Connecticut Regional Mental Health Council (CCRMHC). This planning organization studied the needs for services and advocated for new services. In 1967, the council commissioned a Feasibility Study to survey available services and developed a mental health plan for the region. Eighteen members of the council then created a new non-profit in 1968, Wheeler Clinic, Inc.

Plainville resident Bertha Wheeler had died in 1960 and left most of her estate to “establish a hospital in Plainville.” The CCRMHC and the newly formed Wheeler Clinic petitioned the court, in a will-construction suit concerning the Wheeler bequest, and used the Feasibility Study as important evidence that the area was well-served with general hospitals but needed expanded facilities for mental health treatment. The court agreed and, in 1969, approved Wheeler Clinic as trustee for the bulk of the bequest.

During those early years, Dottie Hubbard served both as executive director of the mental health council, and she provided administrative support for the young Wheeler Clinic. From 1970 to 1973, when the new clinic facility on Northwest Drive opened, the Central Connecticut Regional Mental Health Council and Wheeler Clinic shared an office on Cooke Street in Plainville. After setting up the organization, creating a regional plan and securing the early funding for the clinic, Ms. Hubbard continued to advise the clinic staff and remained a friend of Wheeler until her retirement in the mid-1970s and beyond.

“Dottie was a lovely person, gifted at organizing and mobilizing volunteers, and an extremely savvy advocate. She was the driving force who laid the groundwork for the organization’s first staff,” said early Wheeler employee, Mary Hess.

An Enduring Gift and Commitment to Youth

POSTED ON: 02.08.2018



The examples we set through leadership and service often extend to the next generation and beyond. Herman Papenfoth, a Wheeler board of trustee member in the organization's earliest years, clearly was a strong role model for his daughter, Doris Nims, who passed away in 2015 at age 89.

Ms. Nims, formerly of Cheshire, Connecticut, left a significant legacy gift to Wheeler of approximately \$1.9 million to Wheeler to advance programs and services that

support children and adolescents.

Mrs. Nims was a woman ahead of her time. She held a degree in preschool education and was an independent, intelligent woman with a good head for business. Her husband, Dr. Robert Nims, was a physician at the VA Medical Center in West Haven and assistant professor at Yale University.

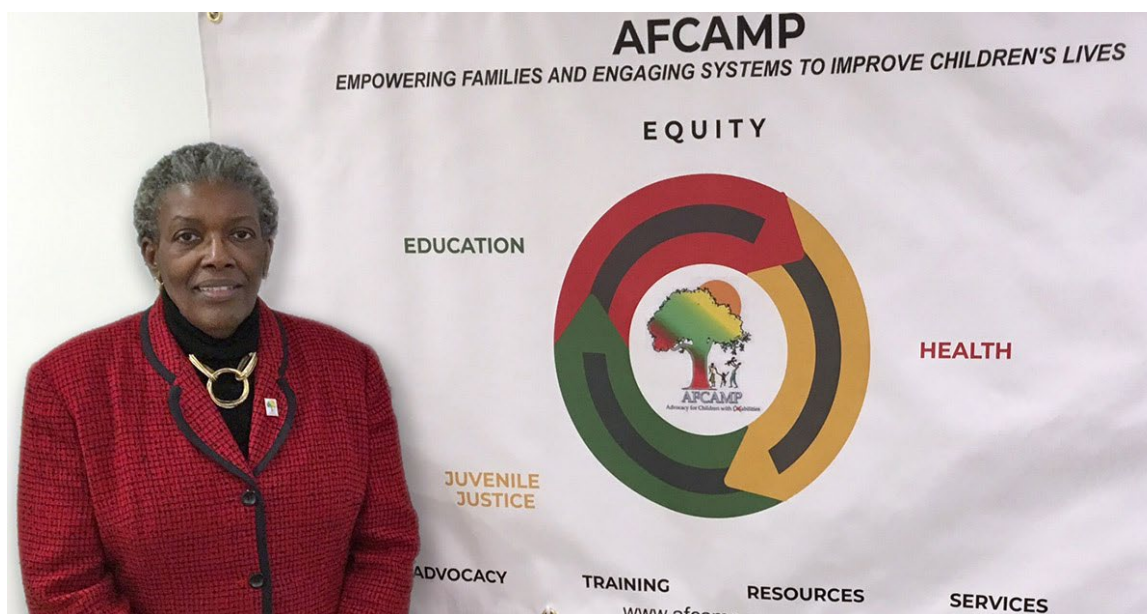
As an early trustee, and local community leader, Mr. Papenfoth, or "Pap," helped set Wheeler on a solid financial foundation with the strong business orientation he would pass on to his daughter Dorie. He also shared his commitment to Wheeler's mission with her.

"It is an honor to steward Mrs. Nims' legacy," said Susan Walkama, LCSW, president and chief executive officer, Wheeler. "The gift is among the largest ever received by Wheeler and has been invested in our continuing transformation to a community health system, particularly in programs and services that support adolescents and families."

Wheeler traces its beginnings to a generous bequest in 1960 from prominent Plainville resident Bertha Wheeler. Mrs. Wheeler's gift helped to establish the clinic in 1968 and led to the 1972 construction of the first facility at 91 Northwest Drive in Plainville.

Community Catalyst: Ann R. Smith, JD, MBA (AFCAMP)

POSTED ON: 01.31.2018



AFCAMP

"Our combined potential is limited only by our collective vision."

Even the first time you meet Ann Smith, the executive director of African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities, Inc. (AFCAMP), you immediately sense her passion for her work and the value she places on interpersonal relationships. A close community partner with Wheeler, Ann recalls that one of her most meaningful experiences working together came in a time of great uncertainty for AFCAMP and the families it serves.

In 2016, the organization unexpectedly learned that it had to move from its office space at the Office of Protection and Advocacy.

"We were literally without a home," Smith recalls. "I ran into Elisabeth Cannata [Wheeler vice president of community-based family services and practice innovation] at a meeting and told her what was going on. She asked if she could tell [Wheeler President and CEO] Susan Walkama, and I said, 'sure,' not really thinking much about it. I don't think two hours passed before Susan called me and said, 'I don't know where or how, but we'll find a place for you.' We were in a time of very great need and our partners came to our aid."

AFCAMP moved to Wheeler's campus on 43–49 Woodland Street in Hartford, and is now permanently housed in the historic Perkins-Clark Estate at 49 Woodland Street. The already-close relationship between AFCAMP and Wheeler has blossomed into a hand-in-hand partnership, benefiting both organizations.

“One of the things I admire about Wheeler and your team and leadership is the vision. We sit together and we talk about the vision for this campus. There are so many forces moving us all toward greater integration of care across the continuum and providing the necessary supports for clients and community.” She says. “The opportunity here is so well-aligned; AFCAMP empowers much of the same client base that Wheeler serves through its Family Health & Wellness Center. Our combined potential is limited only by our collective vision. ”

AFCAMP’s creation dates to a 1999 needs assessment of the African Caribbean American community in Hartford. The results revealed a profound need for education services for parents of children with disabilities. Parents had significantly limited knowledge or no knowledge of parental or student rights and lacked information about the availability of services for their children. Little or no information was being disseminated by schools, agencies or advocacy organizations to these families and the larger community regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other protections.

Many families who contact AFCAMP need not only special education services, but are trying to navigate health, child welfare and the juvenile justice systems. AFCAMP provides family engagement, training, and advocacy services to promote better outcomes for parents and youth involved with those systems.

The two organizations first engaged around 2006 when the Department of Children and Families was adopting the “differential response” approach to families in the state’s child welfare system. Over the years, opportunities for AFCAMP and Wheeler to collaborate increased and the partnership grew. Smith says a pivotal moment came in 2013, when AFCAMP and Wheeler jointly developed a family engagement grant proposal.

“As we walked out of the bidders’ conference, my team said to me, ‘We should work with Wheeler on this. That proposal would really stand out.’ I had intended to reach out to Susan later that afternoon, but she called me first. It was a wonderfully successful collaboration. I’ve continued to be impressed by the vision, compassion and talent of the people at Wheeler.”

Ann says that AFCAMP’s new home provides a unique and powerful synergy for even greater collaboration.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime alignment of two organizations that work well together and have demonstrated they are able to make a positive impact on the lives of the people we serve, not only by virtue of the partnership but each organization’s individual strengths.”

Plainville Man's Legacy of Service, Gardening Memorialized through Demonstration Kitchen, Nutrition Program

POSTED ON: 01.22.2018



A Plainville man's legacy of health, gardening and community service is now memorialized through a demonstration kitchen that will assist thousands of families to maintain wellness through better nutrition.

Raymond Corsini served as a member of the Board of Trustees of Plainville-based Wheeler Clinic for 27 years. He passed away on November 24 at the age of 85. In early January, Wheeler memorialized his legacy by naming a demonstration kitchen for him at their new Family Health & Wellness Center at 43 Woodland Street in Hartford. The Corsini Kitchen will serve as the hub for nutrition programming and services at the federally qualified health center and will be supported by a philanthropic gift from the family. Corsini's widow, Lorraine, and daughters Lori (Brantner) and Mary (McDonald) were on hand for the commemoration. Lori Brantner herself also served as a trustee of Wheeler.

This summer, individuals and families that Wheeler serves in the Hartford area will have even have access to fresh vegetables at the kitchen, thanks to an agreement with Holcomb Farm's Fresh Access Program ([link](#)).



"Our family is thrilled that the legacy of our father is honored by an organization he believed in and a cause he cared so deeply about," said Lori Corsini Brantner.

"Ray's life was devoted to growing: friendships, organizations, communities, and—dear to his heart—nourishment from the soil beneath our feet," said Susan Walkama, LCSW, Wheeler's president and CEO, in her remarks at the dedication. "The Corsini Kitchen carries on Ray's legacy for compassion, health, hard work, and community."

A Korean War veteran, Ray Corsini grew up in the Bronx in a large extended family. The Corsini family often did not have enough to eat; Ray's first exposure to gardening was planting vegetables in nearby vacant lots, which sustained the family in the summer and provided canned food for the winter.

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

He was an avid gardener. He became a Master Gardener through the UCONN Extension, and freely shared his knowledge, volunteering to teach gardening at Wheeler's Northwest Village School, initiating community gardens, spearheading a parish potato-growing project to raise funds for housing in Central America, assisting neighbors and friends in their gardens, and giving away his own harvest to others in the community.

Ray devoted himself to providing for the Plainville community in many other ways. He served on and led boards of numerous organizations, seeking to expand human services and social justice for the homeless, the poor and those without access to health care. During his time as a trustee for Wheeler, he oversaw tremendous institutional growth through additions and renovations in Plainville, New Britain, and many other locations across the state.

A parishioner of Plainville's Our Lady of Mercy Church for more than 50 years, Corsini convened the churches in Plainville to create Castle Apartments, a HUD-supported housing project. During his decades of managing the property, he worked to connect tenants to the supports they needed to thrive in the community. In the 1990s, Ray helped launch a homeless shelter in Plainville, and he was a key force in establishing St. Philip House, a residence for persons living with HIV/AIDS. With the encouragement of the town, in 1990 Ray again brought together Plainville's churches and other organizations, including Wheeler, to launch Plainville Affordable Housing Corporation (PAHC). In two projects over the next 10 years, PAHC created 32 homes for low-income first-time buyers at Cassidy Commons and 21 homes for low- and moderate-income buyers at Bruce and Franklin and Burnham streets in Plainville.

"Ray leaves a legacy of service to the community that is profound and meaningful," Walkama says. "His hard work and dedication lives on in the hundreds of thousands of individuals and families we served while he guided Wheeler. Ray's humble nature left an impression on everyone he met; we do not get to meet many people like him in our lives."

Marlene Zahnke Hoerle - Perspectives on Wheeler's Beginning

POSTED ON: 01.19.2018

On January 8, 2018, we kicked off our 50th anniversary with a look at the future: our new Family Health & Wellness Center in Hartford. Now, we're going back to the very beginning and hear from one of Wheeler's first leaders, Marlene Zahnke Hoerle, chair of Wheeler's board from 1971 to 1975. The video is embedded and transcribed below, or available [here](#). Read more about Marlene [here](#) from a story we wrote in 2017.

Introducing Marlene Zahnke Hoerle, Chairman of Wheeler Clinic Board (1971-1975)

She played a vital leadership role in the early years of the organization

OUR BEGINNING: The vision and contributions of some of Wheeler's earliest leaders shape and guide our direction and delivery of integrated, whole-person care to individuals and families of Connecticut.

HOERLE: "At that time, there was a hospital, New Britain General, there was Bristol Hospital, there was Southington Hospital, and then we had all our Hartford hospitals. So, there was opposition to a small public hospital in Plainville. And at that time, the regional mental health council was very active. And Dottie Hubbard, who headed that regional mental health council, really pondered the situation and she said, 'You know, there are no facilities for mentally ill children. Why don't we see if we could get the money to build a hospital for mentally ill children in Plainville.'"

Wheeler was created through a generous 1960 bequest from prominent Plainville resident Bertha Wheeler. Local attorney Bonnie Barnes also played a key role in creating Wheeler, taking on the effort pro bono.

HOERLE: "The concept of Wheeler Clinic originated, but there was a problem: how do you get something like this started? So they tried to get a board together, and that got four people, one of whom was my sister-in-law, Peg Hoerle. So, Peg was on the board, and she attended three meetings and she said, 'You got the wrong one. You want the other one.' So that's how I got on to the board of Wheeler Clinic. And, of course, like always, I was always the one willing to do all the work, so I became its chair."

AN EARLY LEADER: Marlene served on many local boards, including New Britain General Hospital. She and her husband were committed to serving the community and inspiring shared vision. Marlene Hoerle was presented with the Liberty Bell Award in 1974 as the citizen who made the greatest non-financial contribution to the field of mental health in the state of Connecticut.

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

HOERLE: "We were both very committed to trying to increase services to the town and the population. We really wanted people to have more; as much as they could have."

INTEGRATING CARE: Marlene helped lead the organization to become a whole-person care provider. Marlene's passion about quality health care became even more important when she herself became seriously ill.

HOERLE (Reading from her book, "Riches to Rags to Riches"): "When were they ever going to learn that the physical and psychological dimensions of the self are intertwined. And that medicine is only partly about the body. The spiritual needs and emotional reactions we experience at the time of serious illness are not only real, they are profound. To ignore them, or dismiss them, is, in fact, wrong."

HOERLE: "I said to Susan [Walkama] when I saw primary care and integrated care, I said, 'Oh god, I need to talk to the staff to tell them how important it is.' We have multiple needs, and Wheeler now does that, and I am so proud of Wheeler. We had this little thing we started with, and look at what you have done. I can't tell you, and I hope all the staff sees this because I want to say, 'Thank you. Congratulations. Well-done.'"

HOERLE: "So, I thank all of you, and I wish you well. Keep up the good work. Your leadership is great. Your clinicians are great. They are needed. Just continue the quality and the the creativity and the hard work you're doing, and know how important it is. And savor it, my friends. Reap from it. You know, be proud in your own hearts."

Community Leaders, Supporters and Staff Celebrate Opening of Wheeler's Family Health & Wellness Center at 43 Woodland Street, Hartford

POSTED ON: 01.09.2018



More than 125 community leaders, supporters and staff gathered on January 8th to celebrate the opening of Wheeler's Family Health & Wellness Center at 43 Woodland Street, Hartford. This facility is now the organization's flagship Hartford location and home to its federally qualified health center, formerly located at 999 Asylum Avenue. Other Wheeler outpatient and community-based programs also will be housed at this location.

Prior to the ribbon-cutting, Wheeler President and Chief Executive Officer, Susan Walkama, LCSW, and Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin delivered remarks. Ms. Walkama underscored the significance of the opening and described the programs and services available to individuals and families in the region, including primary care, family dental, women's health, mental health and addiction treatment, complementary medicine, and prevention and outreach services.

"Our team-based approach to care is grounded in the belief that physical and mental health are interconnected," said Ms. Walkama. "To achieve the best outcomes, we will ensure the whole person is cared for within Wheeler's full continuum and in coordination with other services, organizations and businesses within the greater Hartford region."

In her remarks, Ms. Walkama also highlighted developments within key service areas, including the availability of pediatric services to families served by the St. Francis/Gengras pediatric clinic; the launch of women's health services at this location through a partnership with the St. Francis OB/GYN Clinic, and the opening of a complementary pain management center as an additional strategy to address chronic pain and the opioid crisis.



Ms. Walkama also highlighted the opening of the new Corsini Kitchen, named after former Wheeler Board of Trustee Raymond Corsini, who passed away in November 2017. Housed on the same campus at 49 Woodland Street, the kitchen was made possible by a major philanthropic gift from the Corsini Family to Wheeler to support comprehensive wellness and nutrition programming, including a toddler nutrition program, general nutrition education, supplies, fresh vegetables and kitchen equipment.

Fifty Years of Care: Stories from Wheeler's History (1968 to 2018)

Pictured from left, former Wheeler Trustee Lori Brantner, Lorraine Corsini and Mary McDonald.

In her remarks, Ms. Walkama thanked a number of Family Health & Wellness Center philanthropic and grant funders, including: **Governor Malloy's Non Profit Grant** program, which supported parking lot expansion and exterior renovations; the **Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority**, which funded a dental operatory, equipment and a panoramic x-ray machine; **Delta Dental** for helping Wheeler develop best practices for dental and primary care integration, supporting start-up dental staffing, equipment and a community dental outreach and education program; **The Ensworth Charitable Foundation and the Maximilian E. & Marion O. Hoffman Foundation, Inc.**, for supporting the purchase of dental equipment; **Mott Corporation** for funding Wheeler's Community Health Worker Program; the **Mary Fran and Peter Libassi-Innovation Fund**, which supported the launch of Wheeler's complementary pain management program; and the **Holcomb Farm Fresh Access Program**, which will provide fresh vegetables for Wheeler's nutrition program.



Lisa Perrone (right) district aide from U.S. Congressman John Larson's office, presents a Certificate of Congressional Recognition to the Wheeler Family Health & Wellness Center and Susan Walkama, LCSW, Wheeler president and chief executive officer.

A sliding fee scale is available based on family size and income. No patient will be denied health care services due to an individual's inability to pay. Funding is provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Improvements to the Family Health & Wellness Center are supported in part by the State of Connecticut Nonprofit Grant Program, the Connecticut Health & Educational Facilities Authority, the Maximilian E. and Marion O. Hoffman Foundation, and the Ensworth Charitable Foundation. Wheeler is a Health Center Program grantee under 42 U.S.C. 254b and a deemed Public Health Service employee under 42 U.S.C. 233(g)-(n).