

2018 Doctor's Day

A Doctor's Day tribute to physicians of the North Platte region.





A thank you to our community doctors

National Doctor's Day on March 30 provides the Great Plains Health team and our region's communities another opportunity to show our appreciation for the many fine physicians who serve our region.

We are truly grateful for the commitment to exceptional medical care that our physicians provide and for the many miles they travel to ensure that the people of our region receive quality care as close to home as possible. This special publication is a tribute to our physicians, who spend countless hours making a significant impact on the health of our community.

In an age of increasing regulation, reimbursement reductions and change, the healthcare industry has become a highly complex environment to deliver care. Our physicians work tirelessly to stay in-step with these complex changes while keeping patients at the center of care, always. Our physicians not only care for local residents, but they are community leaders, neighbors, soccer coaches and friends. We salute these fine men and women who have dedicated their careers to improving the lives of others.

As we carry out our mission to inspire health and healing by putting our patients first – ALWAYS – and move forward to our vision to be the region's most trusted healthcare community, we are honored to partner with the physicians of the North Platte region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mel McNea". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being more prominent.

Mel McNea, MHA
Chief Executive Officer
Great Plains Health

Dedicated doctor intrigued with technology... and life in North Platte



Ask Clark Diffendaffer, MD, what's so awesome about his medical specialty, and he'll give you a quick, easy answer:

"We play a role in the care of nearly every patient who comes to the hospital."

Dr. Diffendaffer is a diagnostic radiologist. He's fascinated with technology, and he uses it to examine pictures and images that reveal what's happening inside the human body.

"I read x-rays, CT scans, MRIs, ultrasounds, mammograms, 3-D mammography, and nuclear medicine studies," explains Dr. Diffendaffer. "With these high tech images, we can diagnose a wide variety of medical issues and illnesses, including stroke, pneumonia, cancer, tumors, blocked arteries, pinched nerves and traumatic injuries."

As a medical student, Dr. Diffendaffer enjoyed his rotations through all the medical specialties but realized he was especially drawn to radiology.

"The computer and technology component is a lot of fun," says Dr. Diffendaffer, "And we're fortunate to use this in our profession to help people understand their illness and hopefully, help them heal."

Making a life in North Platte

Dr. Diffendaffer, Vice-President of Innovative

Imaging, also feels fortunate to live in the town of North Platte and partner with Great Plains Health.

He and his wife Diana moved here eight years ago with their two sons – Brendan, who is now 14, and Easton, who is 10. They appreciate the chance to raise their family in a small town atmosphere that also offers endless professional opportunities.

"It's exciting to be part of an expanding medical community. The hospital has grown tremendously, adding a lot of subspecialty care in addition to our outstanding primary care physicians," says Dr. Diffendaffer. He also enjoys working alongside colleagues who often run into each other outside the hospital as well.

"One of my favorite things about practicing here in North Platte, as opposed to a large city, is that we not only know each other's names, but we also get the chance to know something about each other – like who their family is and what they enjoy," explains Dr. Diffendaffer. "And sometimes we see each other in the community as well – maybe at kids' activities, like band or sporting events."

Giving back to the community

Dr. Diffendaffer has noticed that North Platte is a place where people do things for one

another - not for any glory that they may receive but because they truly want to help. And he likes that attitude.

Whenever he can, Dr. Diffendaffer helps the coaches who are in charge of his sons' baseball or basketball teams.

"I like to have an impact on children as they grow up. Kids need adults to look up to, encourage them and show an interest," says Dr. Diffendaffer. "When they have good coaches, kids see that people care about them and want them to succeed."

At his church, Dr. Diffendaffer facilitates small groups for Financial Peace University, which teaches people how to control their money and get out of debt.

It's a class that impacted his life in a positive way, and he wants to share it with others. "I think the program helps people who are struggling with their money to not be so scared," he explains. "And it teaches people who are 'just getting by' how to put themselves in a position where they can be financially secure."

From volunteering at church, to helping on the ball field, to diagnosing complex medical issues for his patients, Dr. Diffendaffer enjoys all elements of life in North Platte.

"I love what I do and view myself as a very fortunate person."

Caring for every generation

Wendy Gosnell, MD, chose family medicine practice because she loves to interact with entire families – each and every member from birth to age 98 and beyond.

“I see the mom, deliver the baby, see the grandparents, and I have several families for whom I see multiple generations – the brothers, sisters, in-laws, whole clans,” explains Dr. Gosnell. “It’s fun to meet everyone, figure out who is related to whom and learn the family dynamics.”

Dr. Gosnell has been caring for families in North Platte for more than 15 years now.

A typical day starts early in the morning, often with a trip to Great Plains Health to visit her patients who are in the hospital. Next, she heads to her clinic, Gosnell Family Medicine, where she starts seeing her patients for regular office visits. In the evening, it’s back to the hospital for final rounds.

“I do obstetrics, well-child checks, sick visits, manage chronic diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure, take care of broken bones, treat colds and coughs and everything in between,” says Dr. Gosnell.

When she started college at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, she thought she wanted to be an engineer. Eventually, she decided engineering wasn’t for her, but Dr. Gosnell’s analytical mind serves her patients well.

“I love to solve puzzles and try to figure out stubborn diagnoses,” says Dr. Gosnell. “When I can make a difference and get my patients down a healthier path or help them live longer or have a better quality of life, it’s a wonderful feeling.”

Caring for the community too

In the community, Dr. Gosnell is a strong advocate for children who are suffering due to neglect, physical and sexual abuse, or a parent’s drug abuse.

She serves as medical director for The Bridge of Hope Child Advocacy

Center, an organization that cares for child abuse victims and performs medical exams and forensic interviews to find out what happened. The center also tries to increase the successful prosecution of the alleged perpetrators.

“These children are in desperate need. It’s a side of society that people don’t want to be aware of, necessarily,” says Dr. Gosnell. “But it’s out there, and we need to help reduce the trauma. We need to listen and make sure these children and all victims of abuse are being heard.”

Dr. Gosnell believes it’s important to get involved and help strengthen families.

She also supports Deborah’s Legacy, a faith-based program that helps women break their cycles of addiction and homelessness.

“Deborah’s Legacy is for women who are ready to work hard to conquer their addictions and make healthy life choices,” explains Dr. Gosnell. “These women work at a job. The program provides housing and teaches them how to take care of themselves and their finances.”

Loving life in North Platte

When not working at her family medicine practice or in the community, Dr. Gosnell enjoys time with her own family.

Basketball is high on their interest list. She doesn’t play anymore – although she used to play in high school. Now, her sons play. She and her husband John enjoy traveling to watch their teams compete.

Their son Benjamin is a college student now. Jacob, 16, and Thomas, 14, are in high school.

She enjoys raising her family in a place like North Platte.

“It’s a larger community with a small town feel; I like the fact that I can recognize a lot of people when I’m out and about,” says Dr. Gosnell. “It’s a good family town, with a nice community feel.”



The medical staff of Great Plains Health

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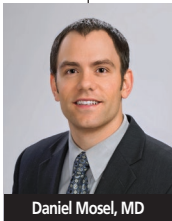
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The medical staff of Great Plains Health

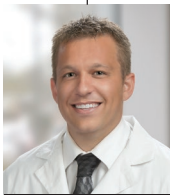
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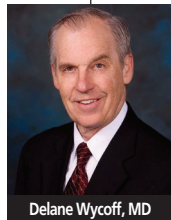
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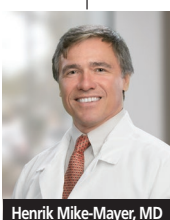
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Living a life in marriage and medicine

Jovanka Vuksanovic and Eduardo Freitas came to the United States from two different parts of the world.

Jovanka is from Serbia, in southeast Europe, part of the former Yugoslavia. She always knew she wanted to be a doctor.

Eduardo grew up in Brazil, the largest country in South America. Early in life, he had flirted with the idea of becoming a soccer player.

But by the time they met, both had finished medical school and were pursuing their dreams to practice medicine in the United States.

“I had fallen in love with this country,” says Jovanka. “And here was this very fun guy who was nice and sweet. We had lots to talk about.”

“She was pretty and fun,” remembers Eduardo. “We had similar goals. I could tell that she was hardworking, and I admired that quality.”

Getting married, finishing residency and building a life together was the natural thing to do.

Building a life in North Platte

Today, 13 years later, Jovanka Vuksanovic, MD, and Eduardo Freitas, MD, are thrilled to be caring for patients and raising their family in North Platte. They’ve lived here almost nine years now.

“We interviewed several places and really liked the people we met here and found it to be a good place to work and raise kids,” says Dr. Freitas.

They have Marko, age 10 and Maria, age 6.

Dr. Freitas works as an infectious disease specialist for Great Plains Health.

“I treat patients with all types of illnesses, including pneumonia, bone and skin infections, hepatitis and MRSA,” explains Dr. Freitas. “I also monitor antibiotic usage to help make sure antibiotics are being used correctly.”

Dr. Vuksanovic is an internal medicine specialist. She works as a hospitalist, a doctor who sees all types of patients who are admitted to the hospital and coordinates their care.

“I love my patients and enjoy helping them get better,” she says.

Sure, juggling medicine and family life is busy, but she believes her children help her to be a better doctor.

“After I became a mother, I really grew as a person. Motherhood helped me be more empathetic and understanding of people’s suffering,” says Dr. Vuksanovic. “I understand their struggles, and sometimes their struggles are also my own.”

Both Dr. Vuksanovic and Dr. Freitas agree that the long hours of patient care are worth it.

“You keep pushing yourself, and you try to provide the latest and best care available,” says Dr. Freitas. “It makes sense when you think, ‘I’m doing this for another person, for a purpose.’ That’s what compensates for the lack of sleep. It’s a great feeling when you can help someone.”

Enjoying family life and making it work

So how do they manage their busy schedules ... and family life?

“Having help from parents who can visit and spend time with us and cook is wonderful,” jokes Dr. Vuksanovic.

The children are their number one priority.

“What little time we have, we try to spend with the children,” says Dr. Vuksanovic. “They have activities too, and we need to focus on them and listen to them as well.”

When they can, Dr. Freitas and Dr. Vuksanovic enjoy a date night – often at the movies. She likes action films, with superheroes, but avoids the horror genre.

With the kids, they enjoy waterparks, museums, aquariums and travel to their home countries.

Contributing to the community

In the North Platte community, Dr. Freitas serves as medical director of the West Central District Health Department.

He says, “The clinic offers great services – vaccinations, dental and education programs. If there’s an infection outbreak, we put our heads together to figure out how to control it. A healthy community benefits everyone.”

Dr. Vuksanovic and Dr. Freitas also support the Great Plains Health Care Foundation

“Every day we see patients who can’t afford healthcare. The foundation tries to help,” explains Dr. Vuksanovic. “It’s all about helping people.”

Putting a bow on their life in North Platte

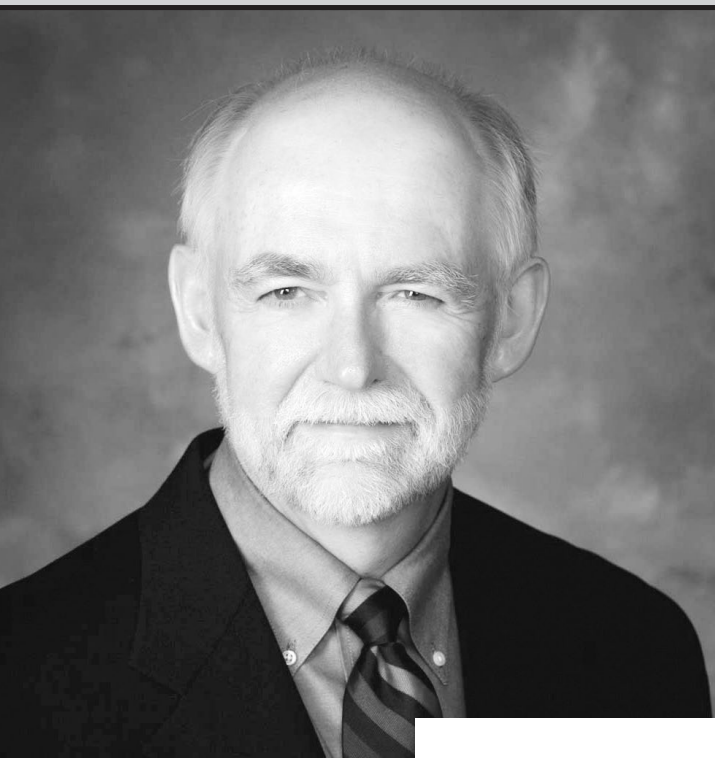
Just recently, life for Dr. Vuksanovic and Dr. Freitas grew even more meaningful.

They became United States citizens.

“It was a wonderful, emotional ceremony. It took many years, and we went through all the proper channels,” explains Dr. Vuksanovic. “It’s been a lifelong dream for me and my husband.”

They’ve made this country and North Platte their home.

“We feel very blessed.”



The career of a lifetime

What career choice can you make and still enjoy after more than four decades of practicing?

For Leland Lamberty, MD, the answer is family medicine. On July 1, he'll celebrate 46 years of helping patients – all but one of those years in North Platte.

"To have an occupation that is truly as rewarding and as much fun as this is, I would have never dreamed possible," says Dr. Lamberty.

Dr. Lamberty sees patients of all ages, from newborn to 90, for a range of issues – annual physicals, flu, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, injuries – you name it. He says the day-to-day practice is often very different from the glamorous profession you see depicted on television.

"On TV, you see patients who get miraculous cures. In family practice, we don't usually save lives quite that way. We do the little things," explains Dr. Lamberty. "For example, we try to help people with diabetes lose weight and control their blood sugar. Or, we teach people with

high blood pressure how to bring it down."

Those "little things" are what he likes about his job.

"When our patients feel better, you realize that in a small way you've made a difference in someone's life," says Dr. Lamberty. "For some people, that might be a big thing."

Everyone has a story

Dr. Lamberty enjoys practicing in North Platte because people here are "unique," "straightforward" and "delightful." Everyone has a story.

"When patients come into my office, the special thing is that they have a level of trust. They can talk and visit with us about very personal things," says Dr. Lamberty. "Some things are difficult and heartbreaking. Other things are humorous, and they're happy to share."

Sometimes, both doctor and patient learn from each other.

"We talk about anything and everything – farming, ranching, the railroad, school, or athletics. It's a great way to break the ice. I've learned a significant amount about these various areas of life that I previously had minimal knowledge of."

Dr. Lamberty has seen a lot of changes in medicine over the years – from new cancer and heart treatments, to new medications, to the use of technology.

"It still comes down to the personal contact between you and the patient and whether you can really understand their problem and how you can help," he says.

Giving back ... as a mentor

Dr. Lamberty has received so much joy practicing family medicine here in North Platte that he tries to give back to the community.

He works with TeamMates, a one-to-one, school-based mentoring program started by the former University of Nebraska head football coach Tom Osborne and his wife Nancy.

Through TeamMates, Dr. Lamberty mentors middle school and high school students who struggle in school or with personal issues or just need a friend to talk to.

"You try very hard to make a difference in their lives," explains Dr. Lamberty. "Sometimes children have trouble expressing their feelings. You talk with them and try to help them open up."

The idea is to build positive relationships with students and increase their chances of graduating from high school and realizing their potential. Students can also apply for college scholarships through the TeamMates program.

"If we work together, these young people can be more successful and find more opportunities in life."

Coloring the community with greenery ... and scenery

Through his favorite pastime, Dr. Lamberty makes the world a better, more beautiful place.

"Since 1980, we've planted about 600 trees on our acreage," says Dr. Lamberty.

That's right, 600. And when not spending time with his wife Jody and his children and grandchildren, he enjoys caring for his trees – walnut, ash, maple, fir, burr oak and pin oak trees.

"The pin oaks are probably about 40 feet high. It's impressive," says Dr. Lamberty. "In fall, they turn a beautiful bronze color. It's just spectacular."

No doubt, his collection of trees is unique to Nebraska.

"When we have to give someone directions, we just say look for the house with all the trees, and you'll be in the right place," says Dr. Lamberty. "It's amazing how many people comment on my trees and seem to enjoy them a lot."

Helping patients fight cancer

“The ultimate.”

That’s how Todd Hlavaty, MD, describes the days when he and his colleagues can help their patients beat cancer.

Dr. Hlavaty is a radiation oncologist and medical director of The Great Plains Health Callahan Cancer Center.

“We have a wonderful team here,” says Dr. Hlavaty. “And when we can help give people a second chance at life or improve their quality of life, there’s no better feeling.”

As a radiation oncologist, he uses radiation therapy to treat people with all types of cancer, including cervical, prostate, lung, breast, head and neck cancer.

All his patients are memorable, but there are certain cases that Dr. Hlavaty will never forget.

“Sometimes you see cancer patients who have a huge hurdle to overcome. You know in your head that their chance of survival is only 10-15 percent,” says Dr. Hlavaty. “And all of a sudden, you get blessed with a miracle. They survive. You see them five years later. And you think – that’s incredible. You realize there’s always hope.”

Always in his heart

Somehow, Dr. Hlavaty always knew he wanted to become a doctor. In his office, you see a picture of him holding a stethoscope years ago when he was in kindergarten.

“It’s always been deep in my heart,” remembers Dr. Hlavaty. “Later, as a student I enjoyed math, physics and biology.”

In medical school he realized that he could put those skills to good use as a radiation oncologist.

And now, Dr. Hlavaty has been treating cancer patients here in North Platte for 23 years. He’s grateful to practice the profession he loves in a small town where people know each other.

“I was in the grocery store the other night, and a patient came up and hugged me and said thank you very much,” remembers Dr. Hlavaty. “I realized who she was, and I was very happy to see her.”

Impacting life in the community too

Dr. Hlavaty enjoyed raising his family in North Platte and wants to give back.

“I’m grateful, and I would like to help make this community an even better place to live,” says Dr. Hlavaty. “It’s easy for physicians to get wrapped up in their own world, meaning medicine is their only life. But you try to look at life beyond that.”

Take a walk on the Lake Maloney trail system, and you’ll see that Dr. Hlavaty enjoys making a big impact on people’s lives in the community, as well as in the hospital.

He actively supports the Lake Maloney trail system. He also donated a unique bench for walkers to use along the way – not a plain metal or wooden bench, but a hand-carved bench with special meaning.

“I commissioned a piece for people to enjoy on the trail. The sculptor took an enormous log from a tree in our yard and created a beautiful bench,” explains Dr. Hlavaty. “It’s carved out of a log that’s 1400-1500 pounds.”

The bench features two carvings – an American flag and an American eagle.

“We wanted something that symbolizes our nation. We’re grateful to live in the greatest country in the world, one of the few places where you can really change your life circumstances,” says Dr. Hlavaty. “You can start from nothing, work hard and realize your dreams.”

Dr. Hlavaty invites the community to use the unique bench on the Lake Maloney trails and enjoy the scenery too.

On the health care front, Dr. Hlavaty is active with the Mid-Nebraska Community Foundation. Through a special fund, the organization helped to purchase automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) for ambulances. These devices send an electric shock to the heart to help restore a normal rhythm if the heart suddenly stops beating or has an abnormal rhythm.

Dr. Hlavaty also works with the Great Plains Health Care Foundation, which is raising funds for a new emergency department.

No doubt, as a doctor and volunteer, Dr. Hlavaty enjoys a busy life.

“Yes, but I wouldn’t have it any other way.”



Your health is our mission.

At Great Plains Health, local residents can access more than 30 specialties, including:

- Anesthesiology
- Cardiology
- Dermatology
- Emergency medicine
- Endocrinology
- Family medicine
- General surgery
- Infectious disease
- Internal medicine
- Medical oncology/hematology
- Nephrology
- Neurology
- Obstetrics and gynecology
- Oncology
- Ophthalmology
- Oral surgery
- Orthopaedic spine surgery
- Orthopaedic surgery
- Otolaryngology (ear, nose and throat)
- Pain management
- Pathology
- Pediatrics
- Physical medicine and rehabilitation
- Podiatry
- Psychiatry
- Pulmonology
- Radiation oncology
- Radiology
- Rheumatology
- Sleep medicine
- Urology
- Vascular

Outreach locations: care close to home.

