

Seven Decades of Combined Caregiving

Pelican Valley's Karen Sjostrom & Cindy Mostue have uncommonly long careers, caring for thousands, as Certified Nursing Assistants.

Behind every great business always stand great employees. Pelican Valley Health Center has always taken pride in the longevity of their employees. The average tenure of their staff is around eight years, an impressive number in the long term care industry. Pelican Valley currently has many 25 year and 35 year employees on staff. However, two employee anniversaries are attracting some attention, not just because of the length but because of the work they do. Karen Sjostrom and Cindy Mostue are currently Pelican Valley's longest serving Certified Nursing Assistants. Karen is celebrating 36 years, Cindy 35 years. Karen began in 1979, Cindy began at Pelican Valley in 1980. "Between the two of us, we have 71 years of experience!," joked Karen.

Being a Certified Nursing Assistant, or CNA, can be a challenging career. It is physically challenging but also emotionally challenging. "You get to laugh and cry with the residents and their families. Some don't have family so really, you become their family," said Karen.

When Cindy Mostue and Karen Sjostrom began their careers at Pelican Valley Health Center, the nursing home wasn't their first job in town. "I worked at the turkey plant for seven days," said Karen. "I did about a month," added Cindy. Both wanted a career that had more interaction with people and they said they had more friends who worked at Pelican Valley. Health care wasn't a totally new field to them, they both worked as CNAs in the area before moving to Pelican Rapids.

When Karen began her career in 1979 and Cindy in 1980, the nursing home was a much different place. “We didn’t have the briefs like we have today, we didn’t have gloves or lifts. The kitchen would send trays down to the rooms,” said Karen. “It used to be so institutional, there were no decorations, the walls in the dining room were cinder block,” added Cindy. Today, the nursing home has a more home like atmosphere with decorations, colorful, painted walls and meals are enjoyed in the dining room instead of rooms.

Some of the biggest changes the two have witnessed have involved the changes from an institutionalized setting to a more welcoming, home like atmosphere. “When I started, a lot of residents used to be in bed most of the time. Now we have therapy and we can work with them to get better and stronger,” said Cindy. Cindy has spent the majority of her 35 years as a restorative CNA, working directly with residents to do exercises that build strength as well as working to maintain strength. “I just love to watch them get stronger,” she said. Cindy takes her role seriously and wants to see each resident improve and gain strength. Sometimes, some take a bit more motivating than others to continue working. “Some didn’t care for their exercises. Oh, I have had a lot of names over the years, like Sarge. When they see me coming for their exercises, they know we’re going to work hard.”

As to what separates Pelican Valley from other nursing homes, Karen and Cindy had the same reasons: it’s all about the people who live and work there. “I just like the smaller setting, you know everyone,” said Cindy. “Sometimes, you don’t even see your family as much as you see the people you work with,” Karen added. The nursing home has ranged from a 46 bed facility and now is licensed for 36 beds. “A bigger place,

you just don't get to know everyone. We know everyone here, we know all our people, that's huge," said Cindy.

So what are their favorite parts about their jobs? It all came down to the residents and the relationships they've formed. "Meeting all the families, the residents. I know more people than my husband does," said Karen. "I've taken care of a lot of relatives, a lot of people we used to work with and a lot of my teachers," said Cindy. When asked how many people they've cared for over the years, neither was completely sure. "It's probably thousands," said Karen.

Both Cindy and Karen have left lifelong impressions on those they have cared for and worked with. "Many years ago, we had a younger man living here. Cindy really went above and beyond for him. She made his last days on this earth better," said Laura Hagen, who has also worked at Pelican Valley for 35 years. "We had another resident a while ago who was very young and he had younger children. Cindy did so many nice things for him and his children, of course she wanted to be anonymous. Cindy always goes out of her way and does the most for the people who have the least," added Laura. Karen has always been someone the nursing home can count on, no matter what. "Karen cares for the residents like they're her own family, she is always willing to help out, train new staff or just be there for our residents, Karen is simply amazing," said Director of Nursing Chandra Eaton. While many of Pelican Valley's staff get personal compliments from residents and families for the work they do, Cindy and Karen's names always seem to come up the most. "I have so much respect for the work Karen and Cindy do and am amazed at how many years they have diligently served our residents," said Executive Director Barbara Axness. "Those two are

some of the biggest reasons why our facility is so amazing and why we have such a strong reputation for providing quality care.”

When asked why both of them have stayed for more than three decades, they both had the same response. “It’s still the people. The residents are great and the people I work with keep me laughing, I just like it here,” said Karen.



Cindy Mostue



Karen Sjostrom