

## Reviving the Candy Striper Program

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Community Memorial Hospital has been working with the Upstate Institute of [Colgate University](#) to revive, update and expand the Candy Stripers program of yore.

Diane Bialczak, RN, hospital in-service coordinator and staff educator, sees this new version, which is being called Junior Volunteers, as a way for high school students to explore health-care careers while serving the community.

"This program will allow students to see firsthand what health care is all about," says Bialczak, a former Candy Striper. "My hope is the Junior Volunteers will be exposed to the compassion of health care and see the rewards of this work. I want them to learn that they can help."

Junior Volunteers will take on a variety of jobs at Community Memorial Hospital, from patient interaction to paperwork. The participants will undergo an orientation period, be outfitted with uniforms and work about four hours a week.

Part of the impetus for creating the program has been the success of the annual summer MASH camp at the hospital. Sponsored by the Central New York Area Health Education Center, the camp provides hands-on experience for teenagers, who have the opportunity to explore emergency medicine, surgery and patient care.

"I know from the MASHers the experience sparks an interest in health care and I certainly feel an ongoing program could benefit high school students and the hospital," says Bialczak.

A member of the Upstate Institute Community Board, she turned to the [Colgate](#) resource for help in organizing and marketing the Junior Volunteers. Four [Colgate](#) student interns have been assigned to the project. Jake Kleinman, Charley Tharp, Tara McDevitt and Margaret Mysliwicz, under the direction of Julie Dudrick, have conducted research and created a PowerPoint presentation to present at area schools.

Hamilton, Madison, Morrisville-Eaton and Sherburne-Earlville schools were chosen sites to launch the recruitment effort for the first crop of Junior Volunteers.

Kleinman, an emergency medical technician with the Southern Madison County Ambulance Corps, has a special interest in the program.

"I have had the opportunity to work in the health care system in Madison County with some very talented individuals and would like to see a strong health care community continue. The biggest benefit of the Junior Volunteer program is that high school students will get a real look into possible lifelong endeavors. For the majority of teenagers the opportunity to see what really goes on in the health care professions is not out there. Many people think that the career choices just entail doctors and nurses, but the truth is that there is much more. This program will provide both a glimpse of behind the scenes of hospital life along with a fun working environment," he said.

"Everybody knows about the shortage of health care workers. The youth of today are the future of health care," states Bialczak. "I am optimistic that by inviting high school students into our hospital and allowing them to appreciate first hand the rewards of healthcare, that they will consider it as a career choice."

Kleinman agrees. "Health care is more than putting in stitches, prescribing medications or wearing a long, white coat. There are real patient interactions with opportunities every day to make sure someone goes home with a smile. The Junior Volunteers will have the chance to fine tune many important life skills such as personal interactions, critical thinking and workplace management. This program is real and it is more

than medicine."

Bialczak said, "There are many career and employment opportunities and not just for the most academic students. We want kids who are interested in interacting in a professional environment. Community Memorial Hospital has high standards of care and we are looking to young people to take on important jobs. The Junior Volunteers program can be a springboard into a career in health care where the options are limitless."