

## editor's notes

Sarah Squires, editor-in-chief, Winona Post

# Long-term care deserves our support

It was 20 years ago on a cool autumn night, and I'd just been called in to work at a nursing home in the suburbs of St. Cloud. They were short staffed, and I was on a call list of people they could reach out to to see if I could help out. It was my first overnight on an unfamiliar wing, so I stuck close to the aides who knew the residents. Even with me coming in, we were down a person and we had to hustle, unlikely to get a break before the sun came up. As we worked our way down the corridor doing rounds, one of my coworkers said she could tell one of the residents was near death. You could hear fluid in his lungs rattle as he strained to breathe, even from the hallway. "Can we call his family?" I asked. They won't make it in time, the veteran aides told me. They live across the country.

I had never been with a resident when they died before, and I didn't know him, but for the rest of the night, whenever I could spare a moment, I hurried down that hallway. I sat by his bed. I held his hand, shyly in silence at first. Later, after I had spotted a photo of he and his wife on the nightstand, a tiny gold cross pendant around her neck, I prayed with him. I told him it was OK to let go, I told him people he loved were waiting for him in heaven. After my shift ended, I resumed my spot at his bedside, and as the sun peeked across the horizon, the man I'd just met the night before passed away beside me. My shift was over, and they still needed help and asked if I could stay and work a double. I said no. Instead, I filled a basin with warm soapy water and washed his body. I cleaned an electric razor and gave him a shave. I wanted to make sure when his family said goodbye he looked his best.

I was 20 years old.

I was just a kid, but I did the most important work of my life that night. And although I was just a kid, I knew way back then a fact that's staring Minnesotans in the face today: The state's long-term care facilities are not properly funded. Being underfunded means that staffing levels are not adequate, and it means that one of the most important jobs in the world — caring for the elderly people we love — is all that much harder. Financial support for nursing homes was insufficient before this pandemic, and now we're finding that our care facilities, already stretched too far, are ill equipped to handle the added stress and work that comes with handling infectious disease control during a COVID outbreak.

It is heartbreaking. Reading Chris Rogers' reporting on the way

that the health care professionals have grappled with the outbreak at Sauer broke my heart, but it also made me angry. I'm angry about the way the state of Minnesota has responded, with reprimands rather than desperately needed assistance. I'm angry that it's taken this long — hundreds of elderly people have died, hundreds of long-term care workers have gotten sick, been forced to work around the clock — for the state to develop a plan to actually get needed boots on the ground to help them. I'm angry that for decades our system has been asked to do with less and less, that long-term care workers are some of the least paid health care workers in the country, and today, they are expected to bare the brunt of the hardships of this pandemic.

But I am hopeful. I am inspired in knowing that our community has risen up in support of our long-term care facilities in so many ways, despite the awful gaffes we've seen at the state level. I am inspired by the workers who are undoubtedly going above and beyond a normal workday to give care and love and support for their residents. And I'm hopeful that something fundamental will change as we recover from COVID-19: that long-term care facilities will be properly supported, staffed, appreciated, and recognized for the important work they do. We have more and more elderly people nearing the time of life when they will need assisted living, and we have got to prepare for that and overhaul the way these facilities are funded and supported. This is not a problem that will subside when we close the chapter on the time of the coronavirus. This is a crisis that has exposed a broken system, one that's only worked thus far because of the people who give tirelessly as caregivers, the ones who keep working after they've punched out on the time clock, who visit the residents they love on their own time because their workdays are too busy to do everything it takes.

I am hopeful that things will change, and I hope you will join me in supporting and lauding the work that people in long-term care do for our loved ones. They deserve and need us to stand together with them.



## letters

## May is time to laud health care workers

From: Carol Ehlinger  
Executive Director  
Saint Anne of Winona

Each year in May, we celebrate National Nurses Week, National Skilled Nursing Care Week and National Hospital Week, but this year, these observances take on special meaning. It is an ideal time to recognize our health care workers who are the cornerstones of our communities during this time of great need.

Every day, our 280 Saint Anne of Winona employees work tirelessly and selflessly to protect the safety, health and wellness of those entrusted to our care. I am inspired by the extraordinary efforts shown by all of our staff in caring for our residents, who are like family to us and a special part of our lives.

Our employees have gone above and beyond in finding meaningful, creative ways to connect with and care for our residents. For example, one of our spiritual care directors takes her guitar and walks the halls, singing to residents. Our recreation department is always creating ways for residents to engage — like Bingo or chair yoga broadcast over a dedicated channel. Staff takes resident for walks outside. Our culinary staff delivers three delicious meals a day to residents in their rooms. Our nursing staff continually checks the physical and emotional health of the residents, including increases in one-on-one visits. That's just a start. All of their contributions large and small have brightened our residents' days, and provided caring hearts and comfort during this unprecedented situation.

We thank our hospitals, clinics and their staff for their leadership and partnership as we work together to provide the highest quality care for older adults in our community.

If you have a family member, friend, neighbor or acquaintance who is a health care hero, reach out to them today and thank them for making a difference. We are grateful for their service, sacrifice and commitment to helping us stay healthy and safe.

If you have a friend or loved one residing in a senior care community, we encourage you to contact them via mail, email, phone, or video chat and let them know you care.

Coronavirus has changed everyday life, but it has not changed the dedication and compassion shown by our caregivers — in fact, it has only strengthened it. Saint Anne of Winona is proud to serve our local community. Our team stands ready to support the safe transition of your loved one to long-term care, short-term care and rehabilitation, and senior living services. We remain committed to providing life-enhancing care for our neighbors in need, as well as meaningful employment opportunities during this critical time.

Thank you for your support.

## letters

## Miller: Broadway road diet is a bad idea

From: Jerry Miller  
Winona

On July 20, 2015, the City Council had an informational session to discuss options regarding the Broadway traffic corridor study completed by Stantec.

On August 3, 2015, the council directed staff not to pursue the road diet. Instead, direction was given to upgrade the pedestrian crossing signage to current standards. This would also include adding pedestrian pavement crossing markings along the route as well as two relocatable pedestrian activated flashing signs to be located at Liberty and Washington streets and a relocatable radar speed limit sign temporarily installed along Broadway. This resolution, 2015-82, was

passed with a unanimous vote.

Fast forward to October 2, 2017. On staff's recommendation, council approved a resolution to move ahead with the road diet plan to go from four lanes to three lanes in order to apply for a state grant. This was approved by 4-3 vote. In 2018 another vote to apply for federal funds based on the road diet plan was also approved.

Today, four-plus years later, and days before another important vote, the staff and council are finally asking for input. This decision will influence the downtown area as well as the entire city for many years to come.

In my humble opinion, the decision in 2015 was the right one. The council can work with the community on developing

ways to continually improve pedestrian safety as new ideas develop. Our community is very good at being innovative in how we solve problems.

Receiving money from state or federal governments should not be the only consideration when determining how to proceed with this project or others. This money is not truly "free" and usually has strings attached.

I do not support the Broadway road diet program and urge everyone to read Cliff Black's letter to the editor in the Winona Post "Solution in search of a problem" (May 6, 2020, edition). He is right on.

P.S. Seventh Street is already a bike route with very little traffic and very safe.

## Re-configuring Broadway will make it safer for drivers, pedestrians

From: Pamela Eyden  
Winona

I am strongly in favor of re-configuring Broadway as a three-lane street with a central turn lane because it would improve the safety of Broadway for both drivers and pedestrians. Few people remember that Broadway was originally a two-lane street with wide boulevards and big trees. It was torn

up and turned into a four-lane road back in the 1960s, when the city anticipated a lot of industrial development and business in the East and West ends that never came about.

So now drivers have gotten used to a big, wide, wild-west kind of feeling there. It's never crowded with vehicles. It carries no more traffic than Fifth Street. But it is an intimidating barrier for people who want to walk downtown, shop, meet friends, go

to arts events and Levee Park. We have a chance to correct that and pull the city together again.

One more point, to clarify the project's budget: The city applied for and got two grants to improve safety on Broadway: a \$1 million federal AID grant and a \$900,000 TAP grant. The remaining funds will come from the state Municipal State Aid account.

## Winona needs more senior housing like Cedar Brook

From: Barbara Ramer  
Winona

Kudos to Michelle Alexander, George Borzyskowski and Allen Thurley for voting yes on the Cedar Brook project. Thank you for seeing the need for affordable housing in a cooperative setting. It is obvious that you gave this considerable thought as to what is needed in Winona — affordable housing for senior citizens. For the last 18 years I have lived next to college housing and now that I'm retiring a senior cooperative is the perfect solution for my housing needs. While it

is true that there is senior living available on Mankato Avenue, this housing is rental and very expensive.

One of the objections I heard from various people was why isn't this being built in Winona? Winona does not have three acres of affordable land within the city limits. The entire purpose of the cooperative is to provide seniors with one-level, owner occupied affordable housing.

Bradford Development, a Mankato-based company has built Willow Brook (Winona) along with cooperatives in Black River Falls, Mankato, Northfield and Owatonna.

For further information check out their website at <http://www.bradforddevelopment.net/seniorcooperative>.

There are 42 deposits/reservations for a 36-unit development. Some of these are from people who want to move to Winona because Cedar Brook is exactly what they are looking for. There truly is a shortage of this type of housing.

I sincerely hope that the City Council and Bradford Development will revisit this issue. In particular, I would hope that the disputes between neighbors and the landowner could be settled to enable this project to go forward.

## Find a creative way to celebrate Memorial Day

From: Jon Grossardt  
Winona

Memorial Day pans — just to get out ahead of things, I'll make a suggestion. I suspect that many communities either are planning to or already have cancelled their traditional Memorial Day recognition activities/cere-

monies. If that is the case in your community, why not show your own appreciation for our country's fallen? Make a Cross, Star of David, or other religious symbol and place it prominently in your front yard. Make a sign acknowledging the fallen. Make some other mini-monument and display it reverently along with the American flag. Buy

small American flags and hand them out to passers-by who are walking their dogs (in a safe manner, of course). There is nothing that says this has to be an all-day process, it can be done for an hour or two if so desired.

In other words — don't let the current situation destroy our traditions. Find a way to preserve them.



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