

Thunder Bay branch: Providing top-notch care – rain, snow or shine



Bayshore Home Health's Thunder Bay branch is an unstoppable force when it comes to providing excellent health care – not even snowstorms can prevent its hard-working team from helping clients in need.

Bayshore acquired the branch, which serves Thunder Bay and the surrounding area, in September of 2000. It offers home support and nursing to clients of the North West Community Care Access Centre, insurance companies, Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and Veterans Affairs Canada, in addition to serving private clients. The branch also offers foot care, flu clinics, drug testing and pre-employment physicals for people who work in construction, transportation and other fields.

"Our competition is, for the most part, other big home care agencies. What sets us apart is that we never refuse anybody," says Susan Fraser, Area Director of the branch. "On Fridays, when we get referrals for weekend care on short notice, we get the most difficult cases because people know that we never say 'no.' We meet requests for care to the best of our ability and I would say we go the extra mile."

The busy branch served more than 1,800 clients in 2008. It has approximately 130 employees, including 14 administrative staff. Fraser says that although the branch has grown significantly in a short time, it has retained its family-like, supportive culture. This is essential when every day brings new challenges. "There's no such thing as a typical day! Anything could happen."

When winter blows in between December and April, the branch must deal with the substantial obstacles presented by the weather – on average, the city is blanketed by 213 centimetres of snow each year. "The temperature can go from 5 above to minus 40, and we don't stop seeing clients because it's minus 40," says Fraser. "Sometimes I have to drive around in a four-wheel drive or get our employees' cars boosted. Or we have to use snow vehicles, but very seldom do our nurses not go out. Clients come first. We're hardy people in Thunder Bay."

The branch's employees are generous, too. They contribute their time and energy to raise funds for Hospice Northwest,

located in Thunder Bay. It provides trained volunteers to support people who are ill in the home, hospitals and long-term care facilities, at no cost. Help is also available to family members, friends and people who have experienced the death of a loved one.

Not surprisingly, the hospice is a cause that the branch is eager to champion. "Our annual event is the Butterfly Boogie, an evening of dining and dancing that's held at the Canadian Coliseum during Hospice Week in May," says Fraser. In 2008, the branch raised close to \$9,000. In 2009, it collected \$10,600, and close to 800 people attended the event. The branch also participates in the Alzheimer Coffee Break, which raises money to support the programs and services of the Alzheimer Society of Canada.

Staff appreciation is also a priority at the branch, which holds family picnics, holiday parties and awards ceremonies for its employees. It also has a sweet tradition called "Persian Fridays." Fraser explains that a Persian is an oval-shaped bun with berry-flavoured pink icing, and it's only made in Thunder Bay. (A local bakery is said to have invented it in the 1930s, and the recipe is still a secret.) "We have coffee and Persians when the staff come in to get their schedules."

Fraser says the secret to her branch's success is the staff's determination to provide care when it's needed most. "It's got to do with the people and their dedication. The office staff are very devoted, and we have phenomenal people out in the field," she says. "It goes back to not turning anyone away. If the staff weren't so dedicated, we couldn't do that. Nor could we if the staff weren't so well prepared and capable. We just have a very good team! We have a very client-focussed and compassionate group of people – they are in this industry because they care about people – and I think clients benefit a great deal from having them out there and part of the community."

For more information, please contact sfraser@bayshore.ca.

Back row, left to right:
Tashia Smith-Ennis, Arlene Tyska, Tammy Benvenuto, Kari Ann Maenpaa, Sandy Leveille, Amanda Mclean and Tammy LaPlante, Jennifer Berlinquette. Middle Row, left to right: Maureen Prairie, Sandy Lychowyd, Janet Derkatch and Mandy Kennedy. Seated: Susan Fraser. Missing from photo: Caron Moffett and Lorna Sutherland.



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