

FAMILY ATMOSPHERE IS STILL A LARGE PART OF QCH



Caralan Dams, Manager of Food Services, has been immersed in the Queensway Carleton Hospital's Food Services department since she first started working at QCH 23 years ago. "We moved here from Calgary, and within weeks there was a part time position for a Supervisor in the cafeteria. It looked interesting to me so I applied. We were brand new to Ottawa."

Over the next 23 years, Dams made many memories, friends, and built a career she is proud of. "The proudest moment was when SOHFi (Simply Outstanding Hospital Food Initiative), our food delivery system, went live. It had been a lot of hard work." SOHFi has been praised across the country since its inception in 2011, giving QCH its stellar reputation for hospital food. The system has even been integrated into the new Myers Automotive Acute Care of the Elderly Unit, which boasts its own SOHFi kitchen on the Unit.

"I have so many funny staff stories," Dams says, laughing as she recalls some of them from over the years. Many of them come from the various staff appreciation events that Queensway Carleton Hospital hosts. "I remember events like the Sizzling Summer Days here at QCH. There was just something about seeing two hundred people gathering under the tents together and relaxing, enjoying the food and playing volleyball." The people who work at the hospital have always enjoyed these events, like the 40th Anniversary Family Fun Day that was in August. "We have a great sense of community here."

Dams' genuine love for the hospital and the staff shone through when asked if anyone had gone out of their way to make her feel comfortable when she started working here. "Oh the whole hospital did. It was a real family atmosphere. Everyone was very welcoming."

"I've been given the latitude to use my strengths, whether it is my creativity or my vision, I've always been supported to do what I want to do with the department. I've never felt, 'Oh, I have to run this by someone.' It's just been this atmosphere where I could help grow our department to be this wonderful place and I've been supported 100%," she says, in response to her favourite aspect of being a member of the QCH team. "I've always been supported by the senior leadership, and been encouraged to be the best that I can be. I've been given the creative license to think outside the box and do different things with this department." Her creativity in the kitchen has been noticed quite a few times over the years, from her creation of

SOHFi to the way she ties in the food to the events at the hospital. At the ACE Unit opening last month for example, she made cookies in the shapes of aces.

“I think I have the perfect career, and there hasn’t been a day in 23 years that I’ve come to work, and couldn’t wait to go home. I just feel like every day brings something new and challenging; every day is exciting. You’re recognized all the time for the work you do here,” she says. “I’ve been so blessed to be here, and am thankful everyday that I applied.”

There is something she wants people to know about Queensway Carleton Hospital. “I feel that the new people who are coming to work at this hospital are really happy to be here and are embracing our culture.” QCH has always been considered a community hospital since it opened in 1976. This feeling is still being embraced by the staff today, who happily support their hospital. “While we are expanding, our culture has stayed the same.”

The word Caralan Dams chose to describe the hospital’s culture? “Caring.” Through the way the employees support one another, be they from the same department or not. The caring culture of QCH was something Dams noticed within the first year she started. Her colleagues in the Food Services department were quite helpful and supportive from the beginning, something she will always be grateful for.



Caralan Dams in one of the SOHFi Kitchens at QCH