



Clinic

Fall 2025

Connection

'Casual for the Cause' 2025 Gala Raises Record Funds



Attendees raise their paddles to raise money for the 'Cause'

On September 6, more than 330 attendees showed up for LAFC's annual "Casual for the Cause" Gala at Ingleside Hotel. It was a "Country Chic" themed evening. The Gala's 2025 sponsors were Diamond Spur Sponsor Aurora Health Care and Golden Horseshoe Sponsor ProHealth Care.

Guests were greeted by Terry and Lisa Holahan, this year's Gala hosts. Activities included silent and live auctions, a "minute to win it" game, and a wine and bourbon pull. Guests enjoyed dinner, a compelling patient story, and the ability to raise paddles to "fund a need" for the Clinic. The Holahans encouraged the crowd to donate at the \$50 level by matching up to 50 bids at that level. When the auctioneer challenged the crowd, they responded back enthusiastically with 93 paddles raised. We are pleased to report the "fund a need" portion of the night's donations nearly doubled last year's.

Thank you to ALL OF YOU who participated in so many ways. With your help, LAFC was able to raise over \$280,000, with money still coming in. That is about 11 percent of the operating budget for 2025. Audra O'Connell, executive director of the Clinic

said, "Thanks to our fabulous volunteer Gala committee, our sponsors, our wonderful hosts, Terry and Lisa, and all the Gala attendees, we were able to raise more money than ever to continue to provide services to our community. We are so grateful for the many people that came together to make this Gala so successful."

Special thanks to Gala team members, starting with our Chairs, Liz Silkey and Julie

Antonneau, and the rest of the team; Haley Antonneau, Jenny Berglin, Panny Bongardt, Chris Both, Nancy Bradt, Judy Christiansen, Mary Dowdle, Sara Konecke, Cynthia Michael, Pat Mikula, Sigi Miller, Jody Nolan, Shae Pavlic, Deb Prunty, Shaina Rihn Zidar, Mary Rode, Michael Rode, Beth Silkey, Maureen Stapleton, Patti Swift, Bonnie Terrill, and Megan Welsh.

Tackling a 'Silent Killer' – LAFC's Blood Pressure Improvement Program

High blood pressure – medically known as hypertension – can be a killer. It can also be complicated to diagnose and treat. But a project underway at the Lake Area Free Clinic is tackling those issues.

Dr. Helen Box, a semi-retired family practitioner, joined the LAFC staff last year. With a \$5,000 grant from AmeriCares (a health care and relief-focused foundation), she launched a study to make sure doctors are correctly identifying and treating high blood pressure.

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Patient Profile

"I Have Been Given a New Life"

Miguel was in a serious medically compromised state. He was unable to work or perform day-to-day activities. Eventually, he ended up in the hospital emergency department and was diagnosed with significant heart disease. Upon discharge, he was referred to LAFC. Care for Miguel was complex and required close coordination between case managers, specialty providers, including a cardiologist and a nephrologist, and other medical staff team members.

LAFC was able to provide him with all of his necessary medications, free of charge, and provide him with transportation. With the help of the Hispanic Resource Center, Miguel was able to get the medical equipment that he needed to be able to go home. He was connected to Aurora for physical therapy services.

Clinic Connection recently caught up with Miguel who is back at work and feeling well. He said, "Thank you to God! The health care I received was excellent! I have my medication and my health situation is under control. Without this Clinic I wouldn't be here. I would have died. I have been reborn and given a new life."

Anne, his primary case manager at LAFC said, "Many of our patients express gratitude for the care they receive, but Miguel has shown an intense level of appreciation, with his very limited resources. He even offered to share his lunch with us. I have never been more proud of being a nurse, caring for this community, being able to save a life, getting him back to work and back to doing the things that give him purpose."

LAFC's Blood Pressure Improvement Program

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Hypertension is the most common diagnosis at the Clinic, affecting nearly one-third of all patients. It often has no symptoms, but it can increase the risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney failure.

"Anything 130/80 or higher is too high," says Dr. Box. The methods for taking a patient's blood pressure (BP) can have a big impact. She says patients are often nervous at first, so providers should let them relax before taking their blood pressure. Then, if the reading is higher than 130/80, she says it should be standard procedure to do a second blood pressure reading a few minutes later. Ten percent of LAFC patients had lower readings when their pressure was taken a second time.

Explains Dr. Box, "Providers can't just assume that the patient is having a bad day, they need to take action." That action could be much more than getting an accurate BP reading. It can also include handing out blood pressure monitors that patients can use at home. Grant money has paid for dozens of those already.

Even the cuffs on blood pressure machines can be an issue. They often don't fit properly, so providers need to make sure the cuffs are the right size. But the trickiest question is medication. Says Dr. Box, "It's not uncommon for a patient to be on three or even four blood pressure medications at the same time, so it's a team effort to keep

reassessing what a patient is taking and make sure they're actually taking it."

Her program stresses that high blood pressure is always 'top of mind' at the Clinic – even providing heart-shaped red sticky notes to attach to the paperwork of patients with readings higher than 130/80, so they're not accidentally overlooked. Since the program began, 10 percent more of LAFC patients now have their blood pressure under control. By carefully monitoring medications and continuing to educate patients about diet, exercise, smoking and other lifestyle changes, Dr. Box hopes to see even more improvement in the near future.



A Conversation with LAFC Volunteer Medical Director Jay Pludeman

“Being a member of the team – it’s a good feeling”

Family medicine physician, Dr. Jay Pludeman, celebrated his fourth year as LAFC’s volunteer medical director in May of this year. Dr. Pludeman also works at Sixteenth Street Community Health Centers (primarily out of the south side of Milwaukee, with one day a week at the Waukesha facility). [Dr. Pludeman’s wife, Anna Pludeman, serves as LAFC’s medical clinic manager.]

When and how did you come to be involved with the Clinic?

“Back in 2009, as part of my residency, I designed my own elective rotation to do at the Lake Area Free Clinic. My focus in residency was community health, so I spent four weeks volunteering a few days a week at the Clinic seeing patients. I was approached in 2021 to interview for the medical director position [to succeed Dr. Peter Geiss].”

What were your first impressions/observations of the Clinic?

“A free clinic might be stereotyped as offering a substandard quality of care. But when you get to LAFC, you see quickly there’s a very high standard of care going on here. The Free Clinic is very efficiently and professionally run with well-curated resources and lists of volunteers – clinicians, nurses and nutritionists, physical therapists and other specialists. It just kind of blows you away and makes you want to dive in and contribute. It says a lot about people’s commitment to the Clinic – their desire to meet people’s needs. There is this magical power of the volunteers and all the resources that anyone can tap into.”

Is there anything you have done at LAFC that you’ve been able to incorporate in your position at Sixteenth Community Health Centers?

“A lot of the reasons I think I’m successful and that I enjoy the Free Clinic work, is because I brought a lot to the Free Clinic as well. It’s kind of gone both ways. When I’m volunteering there, I realize these patients all essentially need a few basic things to start with – to build that relationship or to receive care. They need a good listener, that’s even more emphasized when patients are at the Free Clinic and are probably more reluctant to receive care. You just have to be patient with them, listen to them, meet them where they’re at, be culturally competent. I speak Spanish, so that really helps.”



*LAFC Medical Director,
Jay Pludeman, MD*

Can you recount a patient story that particularly resonated with you?

“There is a huge group of patients who rely on us for chronic care. They are near and dear to us because we get to know them and see them every three months or so for medication refills and diabetes visits and things like that. We care for patients that have lived in Waukesha County their entire lives, as well as residents that have arrived more recently from abroad, and have nowhere else to turn for health care. Two years ago, a college student from Europe wasn’t feeling well and had no insurance. She had a big tumor in her chest and we got her in to see a cardiothoracic specialist. Just imagine someone studying abroad and getting a horrible diagnosis and no one to turn to and then they find us. Another young man had congenital cataracts and we got him to see the ophthalmologist and get surgery to get his sight back.”

The Clinic is looking for volunteer doctors and nurses. What do you think potential volunteer clinicians should know?

“The draw for me and I would think for most others, is getting back to being a member of the team. The strength of the team-based care at Lake Area Free Clinic – from phone triage to the front desk staff, to the nurse team, interpreters, providers, etc. – it’s a good feeling. Oftentimes in health care, as a provider, you feel like there are a lot of non-patient care demands, and it can be stressful. But really at LAFC, you have short shifts and set hours, and you are able to rely on the rest of the team for support – all the afterhours work is managed by our excellent staff. You get to focus on the patient’s needs and the treatment, and what’s best for the patient in that moment. No one has a timer or is counting your patient visits – there are no financial incentives involved.

“There are so many resources. The staff and everyone there want to make this a pleasant experience for the patients and the volunteers. They’re very flexible, understanding and upbeat. And they support and celebrate everyone – recognize birthdays and supply snacks and treats. There is always camaraderie – they want the patients to be well cared for, and they want the providers to feel special.”



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**Our Mission is
to improve the
overall health of
those in need**

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*Mark Your
Calendars*

- ✓ **Saturday, December 6th - 4:00 - 7:00 PM**
Christmas on the Isthmus
*Stroll the Isthmus on North Main Street
before, during and after the Oconomowoc
Christmas Parade*
- ✓ **Friday, January 30th - Doors Open at 6 PM**
LAFC Trivia Night
*Test your knowledge at Lake Country Lutheran High
School to benefit LAFC. Registration will begin
December 1.*

Clinic Dental Manager Recognized by WCTC



Tina Nissen, the LAFC Dental Clinic Manager, is a Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) alumnus. She was recently recognized by WCTC for her years in public service.



Did You Know?

If you are 70 ½ or older, consider making a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) to Lake Area Free Clinic from your IRA. When you transfer directly to us from your IRA, you avoid income tax and it counts toward your required minimum distribution if one is due.