

Q&A: New head of hospital foundation looks to future

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Betsy Frantz, who recently was tapped to lead the Virginia Hospital Center Foundation, peruses an idea board in her office in Arlington.

Betsy Frantz has spent recent months settling in as head of the Virginia Hospital Center Foundation, a position she took after serving for 20 years as founding CEO and president of the Leadership Center for Excellence (formerly Leadership Arlington).

Although Virginia Hospital Center has had a philanthropic arm since its founding as Arlington Hospital in the 1940s, the current foundation dates back about 10 years.

The Sun Gazette sat down with Frantz and got her take on the new position.

How far back does your connection to Virginia Hospital Center go?

I've been a resident in Arlington for 35 years, living almost across the street from the hospital. Jim Cole, the hospital's CEO, is a member of the Leadership Arlington Class of 2000, and the hospital has had an applicant almost every year from its leadership. They also have had participants in the young-professionals program. It's been an opportunity to get to know incredible people that are a part of the hospital.

Why do you think this is a good fit?

My whole life, I've served the community – and there are different ways to serve the community. My work with the foundation is allowing me the privilege to connect philanthropic donors and corporations to outstanding health care. That leads to saving lives! What an exciting thought: serving the community through the saving of lives.

Having an exceptional hospital truly matters to the health of our community. The hospital currently is in the process of transforming the way it approaches best serving the patient. The future of health care requires a game-changing approach to health care that includes creating a physical campus to serve generations to come, as well as the use of technology to care for patients.

To my great joy I have discovered the hospital truly is as kind on the inside as it appears on the outside. It's 100-percent focused on the patient. The foundation is an opportunity to support excellent patient care while serving the greater community.

The foundation has had something of a low profile. Is the goal to change that?

Its potential is yet to be realized. The past 10 years of the foundation have been spent establishing the infrastructure and supporting the needs of the hospital. Now it's time to be more active in the community.

We want to invite the community in to learn more about the hospital as well as become a part of the future health-care needs of the community.

We are in that "adolescent phase." We can become what the community and the hospital need us to be through educating the public on what a healthy community is, connecting people and collaborating with others. There are endless possibilities when we all share the same vision of a strong, healthy community.

How can the foundation have an impact without duplicating services already provided by other organizations?

I consider this "Foundation 2.0." A strong and healthy hospital adds to a strong and healthy community.

The only way to do this is through partnerships. The community is always better served through partnerships with a diverse set of perspectives at the table.

I don't see the foundation's efforts as a competition with other organizations; I see it as a collaboration. I don't envision any duplication of efforts, because we plan to constantly be in conversation with our community.

We're not a grant-making organization, as many perceive the work of foundations. The foundation has the ability to support in other ways. I would consider us a connector, a convener and an educator. For example: we have a great auditorium and top medical professionals available to create some wonderful community conversations in the health arena.

It's a treat for me to marry my two worlds. Through my former work with the Leadership Center for Excellence, I have been privileged to know key leaders in our community. In my current work, I know many of these leaders are poised to join forces with the foundation to take health care and the hospital to the next level.

We are able to start the foundation's next phase with a blank slate. There aren't any barriers to a blank slate – it is filled with innovation and possibilities.