

BONNIE BEULLA:

Grandmother, Gardener & Hunter

It's an understatement to say that Michigan chapter president Bonnie Beulla has packed a lot into her life. In fact, she took multi-tasking to a whole new level back in the late 80s and early 90s, when she was studying for her bachelor's degree in healthcare administration. As a full-time health care professional and mother, she knew she'd need to be creative if she wanted to fit in an annual trip to a motorcycle campground in Interlochen, Michigan with her husband Leonard. So, to make sure she got her homework done, she'd take her textbooks along – but not to study while camping; instead, she'd read the books, marking salient passages with a yellow highlighter, on the back of Leonard's Harley Davidson. Beulla thinks she probably got looks from strangers as they drove through country roads – but she's not sure, she was so engrossed in her books.

Tending an abundant garden

Although she retired in 2017, after 25 years as the Director of Nursing at Marwood Nursing and Rehab in Port Huron, Michigan, Beulla is still multi-tasking. Now, when she watches TV, for instance, she will snap green beans, or she'll toss in a load of laundry, then head out to pull weeds in her immense garden. She plants eight 75-foot rows with almost every vegetable you would find in a large supermarket: zucchini, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, swiss chard, cucumbers, carrots, beets, green beans, corn, eggplant, onions, tomatoes, not to mention 32 hills of potatoes.

Last year, her harvest included 107 winter squashes (she grows four varieties) and seven crates of apples and pears – the Beullas have three pear and five apple trees as well as a large row of raspberry and blackberry bushes. She freezes many of her vegetables and cans tomatoes, dilly beans (which taste like dill pickles), pickles, relish and salsa plus a variety of jams. She also turns some of her apples into apple crisps and apple bars, using recipes from an Amish cookbook, and bakes friendship cakes and banana bread, which she often gives to Marwood staff. (One of the amazing things about Beulla is that she managed to tend to this huge garden even while working full-time as a DON!)

Sharing food is a big part of Beulla and Leonard's life. "We can feed a lot of people on short notice," she says, adding that they sometimes host wedding receptions for children of friends. On Labor Day they usually put on a cookout for a crowd that may number more than one hundred people.

Wild turkeys and other critters

Along with gardening and spending time with her four grandchildren, hunting is one of her passions. Although Beulla's father was a hunter, it was her husband, whom she's been married to for 46 years, who encouraged her to take up the sport nearly 40 years ago. After taking her out trap shooting and watching her shoot clay pigeons "like crazy" with his gun, Leonard knew it was time to

buy his wife her own gun.

Although Beulla enjoys the social element of hunting, she also appreciates the peace and quiet of being alone in her deer shack. (When she was a DON, she'd take her phone with her when she was hunting but usually didn't get called "unless it was life or death.") Typically, she will set herself up in her shack with a cup of tea or hot cocoa and watch for deer and other critters. "You have an adrenaline surge when you see something, but mostly it's just quiet.... It's very tranquil in the woods. I've got squirrels running around, there are turkeys and birds – [it's] very relaxing until you see the deer – then you get a little accelerated," she says, adding that the first deer she shot was a four-point buck.

A nice mix of duties

Beulla began her 45-year nursing career in high school, where she worked as a nurse's aide in long-term care. After nursing school, she worked as a hospital nurse, before joining Marwood in 1991, where she reviewed and updated care plans for the 252-bed facility. "I would go in and hang up my coat and jump into it and have a quick lunch in my office and work as I ate and go into it until the afternoon until I got what I needed to get done that day," she says. A year later she was promoted to DON. "It was a nice opportunity for me," says Beulla, who enjoyed the mix of managerial duties and direct patient care as well as the chance to participate in healthy activity programs like a country fair, where she would bring in baskets of home-grown veggies.

"You always have your headache days, and I think that is the same in any business, whether it's healthcare or IT... But in healthcare, you have a bad day when a resident dies and their family sobs in your arms. I think the fact that you can wrap your arms around them, hold them and tell them that it's going to be okay is a blessing," she says, acknowledging that this type of human contact has been made difficult since the pandemic. "You see the snippets on the television ... [about] how the respiratory therapist or nurse held the patient's hand while they passed, and they could hear the family sobbing over the phone because they couldn't be there. It's very difficult for any healthcare worker – it doesn't matter if you're the doc, the respiratory therapist, the nurse, the housekeeper, the dietary staff, the maintenance guy – in long-term care, everybody is part of the team that strives to... bring a little sunshine into their existence."

Beulla, who has been a member of MI-NADONA for 27 years, expects she will retire from the association when her term as president ends. "They're an A+ group of people to work with, and when I finally do retire I'm going to miss each and every one of them," she says. Her advice to new DONS is to join the Michigan chapter of NADONA and network with others in the profession. "New DONS are a gift from heaven," she says. "They're brave, they're courageous, and, sometimes, they don't know enough to be afraid, but they're always willing to jump in and work hard." ☕

