



## SPREADING OUR STORIES

# Saint Elizabeth's Rich Brew

BY JO MILLER

Saint Elizabeth  
Regional Medical  
Center, Lincoln, Neb.

ers. We would give them tools and resources and help them find answers to challenging questions that arose.

We put out a call for volunteers house-wide, hoping at least 10 to 12 would come forward. Each would be expected to attend quarterly training sessions and engage monthly with their departments, sharing information, brief games and thought-provoking messages.

Amazingly, dozens volunteered. Now, two years later, we have 60 diversity ambassadors who have, by numerous accounts, successfully heightened cultural awareness and increased cross-cultural conversations throughout our medical center.

In the quarterly training sessions, guest speakers toss out cultural tidbits and share an alluring blend of information and ideas. The ambassadors have their own intranet web pages, where they can easily access monthly materials, upcoming events, community resource links, and more.

This year we have added a commitment form to be signed by the ambassadors, which allows them to earn a small financial incentive at the end of the year if their commitment has been met and verified by their director and the council. These incentives will be paid from Saint Elizabeth's mission integration budget. This fund also covers the cost of language interpreters. As a result, no individual department budget is stressed by those costs and the medical center can continue to provide the most culturally competent health care possible to our rich curry of patients.

It's wonderful when dreams come true.

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As diversity in Lincoln, Neb., grew beyond previously imaginable proportions, our 15-person diversity council at Saint Elizabeth Regional Medical Center in Lincoln, Neb., had a dream. We envisioned "ambassadors" spreading the messages of diversity and cultural competence throughout our medical center.

**Background:** Once recognized (if at all) for its high-quality beef and hard-hitting football, Lincoln is often considered the "middle of nowhere." Today, though, Lincoln ranks consistently among the top 15 U.S. cities for new refugee arrivals, people escaping oppression and war in their homeland. Mary Pipher, in her 2003 book *The Middle of Everywhere: The World's Refugees Come to Our Town* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) noted that little Lincoln (population approximately 250,000) is becoming "a rich curry of peoples." That rich curry is now a mélange of more than 26 languages, for which our medical center provides thousands of hours of interpretation each year. Our top five most spoken foreign languages are: Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Russian, and Kurdish, but the exotic bouquet of tongues spoken by our patients includes Burmese, Urdu, Nuer, Ukrainian, Bosnian, Chinese, Farsi, Tagalog, and many more.

**Our Challenge:** To be culturally competent, relating effectively with our diverse populations of patients, visitors and employees.

**Our Solution:** Find those ambassadors. Make that dream come true.

We took a collective deep breath, dug in, shaped and re-shaped our plan. Each diversity ambassador would become the point person, responding to questions and providing information related to cultural competence for co-work-