

by Jackie Perrone

Barbara Willm

Trailblazer Barbara Willm has led medical professionals down paths that previously had not even existed, but later turned into superhighways. She identifies a need, figures out a way to meet it, invents a name for the program, and Presto! New services for a growing community arise.

Now this experienced medico is retiring after 35 years at Lexington Medical Center and looking back on some of the amazing things she was a part of there. It's a gratifying reflection.

"I started life in Walhalla, SC," she says, "arrived in Columbia in time for high school at the old Columbia High, and then on to earn a B.S. in Nursing at the University of South Carolina. For three years I worked in Florence, where I met a techie named Dale Willm assigned to the Operating Room."

She continues, "Then I landed a job at Richland Hospital, where they trained me for the O.R., and I spent five years there. When there was an opening at Lexington Medical in the O.R., I made the move."

Barbara began her LexMed work at the new Urgent Care facility in Irmo, the first in the Columbia area, and when the director there moved on to other responsibilities, she took over the position.

"Later, we opened a facility in Swansea. We came up with the name Community Medical Center, opening sites rapidly in Gilbert, Batesburg-Leesville, Chapin, West Columbia, and Lexington. LexMed was needed everywhere, and we found a way to make it happen."

The pathway took another turn when LexMed established Community Relations and Development for the Lexington Medical Center Foundation, with Barbara Willm as Vice-President. "I wrote my own job description," she says. "We wanted to serve patients wherever they were, fundraise for medical needs, and let everyone know we were here to help them."

Barbara has served on many boards, including chambers of commerce, medical clinics, and Midlands Technical College Foundation. She has been chairman of most of them and has received awards such as Key to the City (Greater Irmo), Woman of Distinction (Girl Scouts), and Lifetime Achievement (Greater Irmo and Cayce-West-Columbia). Her colleagues have called her mentor, coach, leader, and inspiration to the entire community.

Her husband Dale is newly retired after a lustrous career at Johnson Controls. They have two children: daughter Hallie, an attorney, and son Rob, on staff at Nephron, and one grandson. ■

