COVID-19 forced many holiday traditions to be cancelled this year, and HUP’s well-loved annual tree decorating competition on patient care units was almost one of them. Indeed, volunteers couldn’t drop off the artificial trees on the units and members of the Abrahamson Christmas and Easter Committee—who normally judge the decorations—were not allowed on the floors due to current limitations on the number of visitors.

But HUP senior leaders “were emphatic about keeping the tradition going,” said David Cribb, director of Volunteer Services. With the help of staff from Physical Plant and Materials Management, the trees were assembled and distributed to the units. And staff made sure that the joyous spirit was clearly present, with a variety of themes in their decorations. For example, one allowed a peek into the world of health care discoveries—with decorations of test tubes, rubber gloves, and wreaths of wristbands—and yet another had a Mummer’s theme that included real-life Mummer’s costumes and a special Mummer’s performance via Blue Jeans.

To choose this year’s top three units of those that entered, HUP employees voted online. These are the winners.

**WISHES FOR 2021**

**The Number One Pick**

With all that 2020 brought, most people were looking forward to 2021. And that was the theme of Silverstein 8’s winning entry: “It’s time for a New Year.” Their tree decorations brought the celebration to life: a floating champagne bottle with a garland of bubbles, mini champagne-filled tree ornaments, party hats/crowns, a sequined tree skirt, a fireworks scene setter background and a countdown clock tree topper.

“Each year we welcome new babies into the world, and this year we wanted to welcome them with hope for a better year ahead... It’s time for a New Year!” said Christine Jaslar, BSN, of the Women’s Health Lactation Team.

**BUDDY THE ELF Spreads Christmas Cheer**

Silverstein 10 chose the spirit of Buddy the Elf (from the movie “Elf”) to spread the joy of the holidays. The entire team created a fantasy environment that brought the “whimsy, pure heartedness and cheer” to the floor, noted the poem they wrote to describe their theme. “Something to replenish our souls from a difficult year.”

Topped with an elf hat, the tree’s elf ornaments, gumdrop trees, balls, nutcrackers, and snowflakes helped make the floor “happy, joyful and feeling more like ourself,” as did a wall of personalized “cocoa mug” cutouts created by staff. And happy to oblige for a photo-op moment was Buddy the elf!

**RECOGNIZING Health Care Heroes**

Rhoads 6 chose the theme of “Health Care Heroes” to focus not only on their own staff but also the thousands of health care workers who lost their lives to COVID-19. “We believe that all of our staff members are real life super heroes,” said Nina Solis, BSN. “Many of us have volunteered to work as COVID-19 nurses since March of this year, in addition to caring for our normal oncology patients.”

Thank you to all the units that went above and beyond to make the holidays happier for patients and staff.

**HONORING HEALTH CARE HEROES**

In addition to tree ornaments and a poster of photo of their own “super hero staff,” the Rhoads 6 staff created a poster honoring “Fallen Health Care Heroes Lost to COVID-19” which Solis said includes just a “fraction of the names of health care workers who have tragically lost their lives while working in this pandemic.”

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I Got the Shot
For many reasons, Meghan Lane-Fall, MD, of Anesthesiology and ICU, was one of the first front-line employees at HUP to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in December. “First, I’m a scientist who knows that this is our best chance to turn the corner on the pandemic,” she said. “Black people have too often been denied cutting edge science and I’m determined to be at the front of the line this time!”

Also, “I have people to care for and want to make sure that I am in the best shape to look out for them,” she continued. “I don’t have time to be sidelined by COVID.”

— Meghan Lane-Fall
ANESTHESIOLOGY AND ICU
HUP Pantry Provides Holiday Meals with All the Trimmings!

For many, this year's holiday season did not bring much to celebrate. This was especially true for those without enough to eat.

The HUP Pantry opened in May 2020 to help supplement the diets of HUP employees facing food insecurity as a result of economic hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic that may affect their families. Each of the bags they hand out contains enough, non-perishable items to feed a family of four for one day. “It’s such an important program,” said Sofia Carreno, MSN, Nursing Professional Development specialist — Community Engagement. “People have lost income, neighborhood grocery stores have closed … the need hasn’t slowed down.” Indeed, since its inception, the pantry has given out nearly 3,300 bags of food. Donations have also included pet food, baby food, and personal hygiene products.

But the Pantry team wanted to make both Thanksgiving and the holiday season especially joyous, and thanks to many donations, they succeeded.

Debbie Driscoll, MD, SVP for CPUP, and John Sestito, executive director of CPUP, spearheaded a collection with CPUP employees that resulted in enough money to purchase 300 turkey-ouchees! And social worker Patri Meahan’s daughter, Lauren, held a bake-along fundraiser in her business — BINZ Bakes — which resulted in a $1,000 donation.

The Board of Women Visitors made another donation, as did the Abrahamson Christmas and Easter Committees, which is under the umbrella of the BWV. With COVID preventing several of the annual hospital activities this group usually funds (such as bringing musicians and Santas to spread holiday cheer and deliver small items to patients in the hospital), members of the Abrahamson Committee decided to instread donate $2,000 to the HUP Pantry.

In partnership with the HUP Magnet Department and Family Caregiver Centre, Rachael Coyle, MSN, nurse manager of Rhodes 1, worked with her local representative’s office in South Philadelphia, to oversee a coat drive for the Nationalities Service Centre, a local nonprofit that helps immigrants and refugees. “The idea stemmed from a preexisting awareness of the challenges of prioritizing warm clothing for those who face financial challenges and the increasing hurdles that they may face in light of the COVID-19 pandemic,” she said. They collected over 300 coats, for all ages and sizes.

And, as they’ve done for over 12 years, the Nursing Network Center collected clothing, gift cards, and “many, many toys,” for the Lutheran Settlement House/Jane Addams Place. Overseen by Center director, Heather Ross, the holiday drive brought in at least a car load, said Brenda Bradford, nursing resource specialist in the NNC. “Our nursing staff here at HUP are always so generous, even in the midst of a pandemic,” she said. “Hopefully we made some of the children of West Philadelphia very happy.”

For the holiday meals, Carreno asked for seasonal items, like cans of soups, gravy, cranberry sauce, and yams, plus stuffing and desserts. And their requests were more than answered! Carreno and over 40 volunteers packed and handed out almost $50 bags for Thanksgiving and the holiday distributions.

Most of the donations to the pantry must be nonperishable, but, starting in October, employees coming to the pantry could also expect some fresh veggies with their non-perishables, thanks to the Penn Food Farm and Stacy Pundock, a MPH student at the Perelman School of Medicine. The Penn Food Farm, which is part of the Penn Food and Wellness Collaborative, is an expansion of the Penn Park Orchard, located by the Penn tennis courts on the other side of the train tracks from HUP. As a part of her capstone project, Pundock’s goal is to address the nutritional component of food insecurity by providing fresh produce from the farm in addition to the bags distributed at the pantry.

Every Wednesday around 6 a.m., Pundock and Carreno drove to the urban farm to pick up boxes of produce, including kale, arugula, spring mix, scallions, carrots, turnips and beets, and drop them off at the hospital’s main entrance. So far, the pantry has given out almost 330 bundles of produce. “People need fresh food and veggies to boost the immune system during the pandemic,” Pundock said.

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Many of the recipients of the food pantry have commented that the produce is the best part about using the pantry,” Carreno said.

While the holidays have passed, the need for the pantry has not. Carreno said she’s hoping to be able to keep the pantry up and running and would like to expand program to patients who screen high for food insecurity. “This can be so powerful when people get together,” she said. “We’ll do as much as we can.”