



L to R: Zoila Cadenas, environmental services; Stephen Kishineff, MD; Bailey Wojcik, RN; Debbie Buffham, RN; Rene Bianca, respiratory therapist; Barbara Simek, MD; Angelique Campen, MD

# THE HEROES OF SAINT JOE'S

The Emergency Department of Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center

WRITTEN BY LAURA L. WATTS | PHOTOGRAPHED BY SHANE O'DONNELL

“I think it’s important to acknowledge that this is taking a tremendous mental toll on all of us. I don’t think we should pretend it’s easy—it’s not. This work is very difficult.”

These words from Debbie Buffham, nursing director in the Emergency Department of Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center in Burbank, echo the sentiments of medical professionals on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Every day the hospital’s doctors, nurses and medical staff save lives and restore patients to health—regardless of how stressful and confusing these unprecedented times may feel.

“COVID-19 is unlike anything we’ve seen, so there have been a lot of unknowns,” says Debbie.

“It’s been frustrating,” agrees emergency room physician Angelique Campen, MD. “Usually doctors know the answers; we don’t

have all the answers about this virus. We didn’t have any data, no frame of reference. We are coming up with solutions as we go.”

Throughout this pandemic, the staff at Providence Saint Joe’s has provided exceptional, cutting-edge medical care for their patients—leading to heartwarming, inspirational stories of hope and many miraculous recoveries. As the nurses are caring for the patients, they are also caring for the families that cannot be with their loved ones.

“To help our nurses, patients and families process grief, we send a card home to the patient’s family,” shares Debbie. “Our nurses write what the last moments were like—that their loved one’s hand was held during their final breath.”

In turn, the community has provided an outpouring of support for the hospital. Its

#HeroesatSaintJoes fund has raised nearly \$300,000; its retired-physicians network has raised \$80,000 so far; and the Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation gave the hospital \$100,000. Dr. Henry Wolfe, a former army officer and physician from Toluca Lake, recently turned 100 and walked 100 laps around his apartment complex as a fundraiser for Providence Saint Joe’s—generating more than \$17,000 to date. You can add to these efforts by visiting [give.providence.org/CA/SaintJoseph-COVID-19](https://give.providence.org/CA/SaintJoseph-COVID-19).

Through it all, the heroes of Saint Joe’s Emergency Department see the silver lining in the cloud of this pandemic. “I have learned so much—about people, teams, and about the tremendous need for us all to come together,” Debbie says. “We will be different—and better—after this experience.”