

New Care Center Administrator  
by Leesa K. Bartu

"To be able to provide good care and fill that need for the aging population of the area," is what Melanie Ruhl plans to continue to do as the new Provisional Administrator at Exeter Care Center.

Ruhl, an Exeter native, has been the business office manager at the Care Center since January 2002. She was a recent graduate of Doane College with a BA in Business Management when she took the position.

After working closely with the last administrator, Peg Becker, Ruhl decided that the administrator position was something that she was interested in, "I have enjoyed working with the residents here and the staff here and being part of the community . . .working somewhere that has been such a fixture in our community for so long."

Taking on the role of administrator was a big leap. She had to take five core classes in long-term care, which she has completed, online in the last year and a half. The online courses required a lot of interaction with patients at the care facility. Ruhl had to do projects and papers that involved interviews and discussions with the residents.

Once those courses were complete she obtained her provisional license from the State Department of Health and Human Services. Under the provisional program she has to complete 640 hours with a preceptor. This person, from Central City, who works with Ruhl, "is a like a mentor for me," said Ruhl.

So far Ruhl has completed 120 hours of the program. Her provisional license expires in April 2008 and she will have to sit for her boards, a three hour test with 90 questions, to obtain her full license.

To top all of this off, Ruhl and Darwin Schluter, who live in Friend, are adding to their family. Their baby is scheduled to come on December 28th. The baby will join brothers Breckan Schluter, and Zach and Kyle Jensen.

During her short maternity leave Ruhl will continue to make herself available to the staff at the care center. After three weeks she will come back part time for twenty hours and then after six weeks will return to full time work.

Ruhl has lots of ideas for improving life for residents at the care center. She hopes to "Implement a residents' history into their day to day activities at the care center. Maybe they prefer to plant a flower garden, or watch the birds or butterflies. It would be individualized patient care based on the life they led before they came here.

Sometimes residents are unhappy when they come to a nursing home because they feel they have given up or lost a part of who they were. We want to try to find out who they were before they got here and try to help them continue to live that life with just a little help."

Ruhl and her staff plan to continue with the changes that have been made in the last few years. Residents enjoy the "homey" feel of each of the common areas. Meals are more of a buffet, with residents making their own meal choices and hosting special events like social hours with their own families and ice cream treats.

Another area that Ruhl wants to continue to enhance is the outdoor seating area. Eventually she hopes to have space so residents and family members can eat outside together.

The greatest challenge to Ruhl in getting all of this done will be "learning to juggle the different duties of the position and still

provide training and support in my previous role as business office manager. One of the charge nurses, Lori Hoffschneider, will be the new business office manager.

Through all of this Ruhl recognizes that "Communication is the most important thing. Keeping employees aware of changes in policies and procedures they need to comply with and continuing to provide a high quality of care. We have to keep everyone on the same page."

Ruhl plans to take her role as Administrator very seriously. She delegates all of the nursing decisions to the new Director of Nursing Nikki Rea, but anything else she takes responsibility for.

Most important to Ruhl and her staff are the residents, "It is very fulfilling to know you helped make a resident's life better while making a transition in their life. Just being able to help them maintain their life and continue to have interaction with their family. Just because their address changed doesn't mean they changed. They may have more healthcare needs but they are still human beings."