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## MERCY PALS PROGRAM

### Allen Elementary School

### Canton, Ohio

Since 1997, Mercy Medical Center and Allen Elementary School have partnered together to provide community service by hospital employees and by students. The employees of Mercy Medical volunteer their vacation and lunch hours to work with students and families, and the Allen students engage in community service for hospital patients and employees. The program, known as Mercy PALS (Partners with Allen and Lathrop Schools), aims to “make a greater commitment to the Southeast community through the children.”

At the beginning of each school year, representatives from Allen and Lathrop Schools, along with representatives from Mercy Medical Center, meet to develop the plan for the year. At the planning session, the team evaluates programs from previous years and explores new ideas. Then, the team writes out its one-year action plan that details each project activity, the dates, and the responsibilities for school and hospital staff.

Activities provided by the hospital for the students and families have included: glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol testing for parents during parent-teacher conference nights; annual Mercy PALS days at each school where all classrooms have a hospital staff member spend an hour with them sharing their careers, hobbies, or experiences; and proficiency test snacks that provide students

healthy nutrition prior to taking standardized tests. In exchange, the elementary school students have participated in activities to benefit the hospital, including: making tray favors and placemats for patients each fall and spring; displaying art projects in the hospital’s special Mercy PALS Art Gallery; and performing at hospital celebrations and luncheons.

Kindergarten through fifth grade students and their families have benefited from this collaborative partnership. Monthly reading days at the hospital engage students and hospital staff in the joys of reading. Hospital guest speakers have brought science to life for students by showing them how to listen to their own heartbeat with a stethoscope, among other activities. Parents have learned valuable information about healthcare, HMO’s, and Medicaid from hospital representatives.

In recognition of this collaborative partnership, the Canton Chamber of Commerce presented Mercy PALS with an award of appreciation in 2001. The Mercy PALS program has created a deeper mutual appreciation between members of the school and hospital communities in the Southeast Canton neighborhoods. Students have learned that community service is self-rewarding.

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