

Guardians of Our Health: 1960-1990

A community's health care was placed in the capable hands of a newly recruited town physician, Dr. Karl R. Peterson, in 1960, but he couldn't have done it without a team of ten ladies over a span of almost three decades to whom we are dedicating this greenspace. They were part of a loyal crew and, whether nurses or office staffers, they, as guardians of our health, pitched in throughout more than 25 years of his practice and a few years beyond with Peterson's successor, PhysicianCare P.C.

Peterson, fondly known as "Doc Pete," and his wife, Barbara, came to Wyalusing in the summer of 1960 with four young children, ages one to 4 1/2 — three girls and a boy. Their first decade or so in Wyalusing would produce four more Petersons — three boys, including twins, and a girl. His first delivery as Wyalusing's doctor — twins Ted and Terry Cobb in that order — occurred on July 28, 1960. Most of an estimated 2,600 newborns he delivered were brought into this world at Towanda Memorial Hospital, an independent community hospital now part of the Guthrie Healthcare System. The Missouri native graduated from the University of Pittsburgh Medical School and, following his internships at Pittsburgh hospitals, entered three years of military service, which included attending the U.S. Military Services School at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. His specialty at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point prior to coming to Wyalusing was obstetrics.

House Calls Part of Job...

Aside from busily delivering babies at a pace of about 100 a year, Doc Pete was a general practitioner — a family doctor who practiced out of three different offices all within 100 yards of this location over the years. He made house calls long after most physicians did not include this service. After his passing three weeks before his 66th birthday in July 1996, his family found an old

map in his car marking the locations of patients to whom he had provided medical care in their homes. He was often summoned to emergency calls, including patients on their deathbeds, which was often as emotional for him as it was to the families who called for him during those times of crisis.

"We had a lot of respect for him," said Rose Repsher, who joined the staff in 1967 and was responsible for patient records, appointments, and billing, as well as pitching in where needed. The latter was true with all the staff, starting with the late Madalynn Wurzler, an experienced LPN who was his first employee when he started his practice in 1960. Rose Repsher worked 21 years—19 years with Doc Pete in his practice and about two in the Wyalusing office of Dr. Lawrence Tama's PhysicianCare PC, which as of this writing has offices in Towanda and Wysox but no longer in Wyalusing. Guthrie continues to have a clinic in Wyalusing open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays for scheduled appointments.

Others came to join "Doc's Flock," as they were characterized in a July 27, 1989 article (see accompanying photo) in the Rocket-Courier when the recently retired physician hosted a get-together to show his gratitude to his loyal staffers over the years. They were comprised of a mixture of nurses, receptionists and record keepers who remained cheerfully efficient—even when interrupted by unscheduled acute medical issues. Aside from Rose Repsher and Madalynn Wurzler, the office staff over the years included Pat Milne, staff, 25 years (starting in 1963); Mary Ann Raffin, RN, 23 years (starting in 1963); Marian Miller, RN, 19 years (starting in 1967); Shirley Norconk, staff, seven years (starting in 1967); Cindy Cole, LPN, five years (starting in 1984); Maxine Potts, staff, three years (starting in 1960); Marge Huffman, LPN, two years (starting in 1984), and Kathy Peterson Trowbridge, staff, who, beginning in 1974, filled in as needed until her father retired as a physician.

Our Pioneering Physicians

Physicians abounded in Bradford County in the decades immediately preceding and following the turn of the 20th Century. The number of them registered in the county Register's Office, from Alba to Wyalusing, exceeded 200 over that span.

Most physicians, a.k.a. country doctors, in that era were General Practitioners (GPs) in a time where surgeons and specialists were rare and when patients were treated in their homes via house calls. There were at least six pioneering physicians claiming residence in the immediate Wyalusing area during that time: John W. Chamberlain, Porter H. Summer, Benjamin Strunk, Solomer Struk, H. Le Ray Fitch and D.C. Scoville. There were also physicians practicing in Camptown, Stevensville, New Albany, Wilmot, Stevensville, Sugar Run, Terrytown, Herrickville and Tuscarora Township. Medicine is an ancient practice with its share of what Historian H. C. Bradsby called "hoodoo doctors" who relied on blood-letting, tonics, charms and other unscientific treatments. But in the mid-1800's a county medical society moved toward the process of registering physicians requiring that "they should be graduates (of an accredited medical school) or licensed by some medical board or in honorable practice 15 years."

The emergence of hospitals in the region where specialists and surgeons were available decades before Dr. Peterson came to town changed the face of health care during what became known as the "Primary Care Transformation."

"I have a lot of good memories," said Marian Miller, a Registered Nurse (RN) of her almost two decades with Doc Pete.

From Doctor to Mayor...

Doc Pete was felled by a stroke in 1986 after more than 25 years in private practice and, after his recovery, returned for about a year-and-a-half to assist in patient care at the PhysicianCare office with Dr. Mohammad Noori, a specialist in internal medicine hired by Dr. Tama.

Wyalusing's PhysicianCare office at 107 Taylor Avenue would permanently close in another two decades.

Nearly thirty years after bringing his medical practice to Wyalusing and devoting almost 26 of those years as the only doctor in town, Doc Pete gained another title in 1989 — Mayor of Wyalusing — for about seven years until his death in 1996. Within another decade of his passing, a town doctor who lives and practices in Wyalusing was only a memory.



Doc and His Flock Party at Hotel

Doctor Karl Peterson hosted a nostalgic get-together at the Hotel Wyalusing Sunday afternoon to show his gratitude for those who have worked with him over the years. Shown with "Doc Pete" (from left) are Rose Repsher, Kathy Peterson Trowbridge, Pat Milne, Shirley Norconk, Cindy Cole, Marion Miller and Mary Ann Raffin. Peterson credits this team with making his practice in Wyalusing both successful and enjoyable over the past 25 years.



Shown in April of 2024 were former staffers — guardians of our health — who worked with Dr. Karl R. Peterson over almost three decades of health care in Wyalusing. Shown (seated from left) are Rose Repsher, Pat Milne, Mary Ann Raffin and Marian Miller. Standing are Marge Huffman, Cindy Cole and Kathy Peterson Trowbridge.