

Questioning the Locals | Barb Piper

get to know your neighbors!

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WHO: Barb Piper, 63

WHAT: Director of Maternity at Sacred Heart Hospital

LIVES: Putnam Heights, Eau Claire

IN THE CITY FOR: 55 years

You might know Barb from seeing her walking around town or shopping for clothes, but there's very good odds she's known you for years – and you don't even know it! It sounds creepy, but it's just that Barb was a long-time nurse at Sacred Heart who has seen about 30,000 newborns. She graduated from North and UWEC, married her high school sweetheart Mitch 42 years ago (they were prom king and queen), has four children and four grandchildren, and is an active community member serving on boards for Grace Lutheran Foundation, Community Table, and ICHAT. So the next time you're walking down the street with friends and see Barb, think about the odds that she saw one of you as an infant. Crazy, isn't it?

What place in town considers you a “regular?” Grand Ave Café or Coffee Grounds or just walking around town (we try to get in a three-mile walk every day).

What is one of the best cultural experiences you’ve ever had locally? The Chippewa Valley Symphony performances

What’s your favorite local festival? We like them all, but what we have enjoyed since we have grandchildren is bringing them to the Northern Wisconsin State Fair every July.

What is your favorite piece of local trivia? That Hank Aaron played baseball here

On your death bed, you get one meal from a local restaurant, what would it be? I’ll take my Last Supper as bread and wine.

Describe your last encounter with the police department. Last year, being in an unfamiliar neighborhood and trying to get to a wedding that I was a part of, I wasn’t paying attention to the speed. I have never had a ticket in my 47 years of driving, so I almost freaked out seeing the police lights. He must have felt sorry for me and only gave me a warning even though I was 17 miles over the limit. I didn’t cry or anything, but did apologize and then thanked him profusely. I look for speed limit signs closer now.

Water Street or Downtown? Downtown, as it is finally becoming alive (like it was when I was young)

Be honest: Borders or the Library? Borders. You can get coffee and treats there if you don’t want to buy a book.

What book, TV show, or movie would you recommend to the members of our city council? The movie *Chicago*, because they had a lot of jail issues, too. But can the council members dance?

What Oakwood Mall store do you find yourself frequenting most often? Macy’s and Younkers are tied. I like shopping for clothes and I can’t wait for the great sales that both places have.

What sort of economic development would you like to see in our area? We do need a performance center for big star events.

If you could add one store, restaurant, or shop, what would it be? We have everything we need right here or close by.

Who is the greatest Wisconsinite of all time? Father Edmund Klimek. Everyone loves him and he makes Sacred Heart Hospital the place that it is.

If you could rename Eau Claire, what would it be? Paris, because I would like to say that I live there.

Who would win in a fight: the Gerber baby or the Nirvana Nevermind album baby? Gerber – if it is a fight over who is cuter.

So how many local births and babies have you personally overseen? I attended about 2,000 births but I have seen/cared for about 30,000 newborns.

What's your best I-think-I-know-you-because-I-birthered-you moment when you run into someone years later? A middle-aged couple was standing outside the nursery when I was in there talking to the nurses. I asked if I could help them. They said that they were waiting for me to come out to the hall, because I helped deliver their baby some 30 years earlier and they never forgot me because I helped save their baby's life. Now that "baby" was in our department having her own baby. It was very heartwarming. I have run into many people at the mall who stop me to say that I was with them for their baby's birth. I find it amazing that they can even recognize me after 20, 30, or even 40 years.

So future parents can know, what is the precise moment when the magic of childbirth occurs? The whole thing is magic.

After so many births, is the magic of that moment less and less for you? Never! Each one is as exciting as the one before. Some would bring tears to my eyes for no particular reason. A very neat thing that I have often thought about is that I get to be the first person (or group of people) in the whole wide world who sees this new person for the first time ever.

If you could tell us one Dr. Benjamin Spock wisdom nugget, what would it be? Laugh a lot. I didn't realize how much laughter there is in our home until our daughter came home from college and told us that she loved being home to hear all the laughing going on and how much fun we have.