

Monique Vander Giessen comes to Waverly, Iowa

The first HCI Annapurna Exchange took place May 10 through May 21, 2010 between the Netherlands and the United States. Monique Vander Giessen arrived on May 10 from Gouda, Netherlands to begin a 10 day stay at Bartels Lutheran Retirement Community in Waverly, IA. Monique is a Facilities Services Manager at a care facility and manages catering services (dietary), the client kitchen, restaurant, grand café and reception. Monique stayed at the retirement complex of Bartels Lutheran Retirement Community. She spent time with Team Leaders of Nutrition Services, Environmental Services, Maintenance and the Consultant Dietitian. Monique also spent a day with Robin Gaines VP of Support Service/Assistant Administrator reviewing operations, regulations, policies and procedures. During her visit Monique was able to attend several meetings including the facilities' safety meeting, resident care conference and the general session meeting of the retirement residents. She ate her supper meal with the residents of the facilities' assisted living. Several site visits were also scheduled while Monique was a guest at Bartels Lutheran Retirement Community including a trip to ACT headquarters where Sharyl Cartmill presented the history and process of developing the certification exam for the Dietary Managers Association. Time was also spent touring a vendor, Hawkeye Foodservice located in Iowa City. There was also time for some fun activities which included a trip to the Mississippi River, a drive through Amish country, a shopping trip in a small Iowa town as well as shopping at the Mall of America and visits to homes of facility staff.

Monique found many of our policies and procedures the same or similar as in the Netherlands. During the Safety meeting discussion of how to stop employees from parking in areas not for them was on the agenda. She stated she had attended a similar meeting about staff parking where they were not to park about two weeks before she left the Netherlands. The committee members thought it was funny that parking is apparently an international problem! During her visits with the Team Leaders and our tours it was determined our countries do many things in similar ways. For instance they also have a care plan meeting with families and residents. Their way of ordering food and supplies is very similar to ours and so are their vendors. Some of the things we found that were different were the amount of room we have at Bartels Lutheran Retirement Community. This is different from the facility Monique works at as they do not have as many common areas, as much outside land for the residents to enjoy and they have some four beds wards. Much of this has to do with the size of the facility and because they are in a town with limited land. In American facilities we usually call our residents by their given name not their surname. In the Netherlands residents are referred to by Mr. or Mrs. and their surname as a form of respect. We also found that our levels of care are very similar. Monique's facility has independent living, short term care, and long term care. The meals served at her facility come from a central kitchen and are re-thermalized at meal time. At this time there are a lot of changes happening in the health care industry in the Netherlands. Much of it has to do with the cost of running the facilities. This is why many of the facilities have food prepared by a central kitchen. Monique had many questions about health care reform in the United States. For answers to her questions we

met with our Social Worker. After the meeting Monique and I decided that the health care systems in both of our countries are very confusing and hard to understand. She thought she would be able to answer some of the misunderstandings people in her country have about our health care system.

The second week Monique was in our facility was the week we were celebrating Older Americans Week. The activities during the week involved both staff and the residents and were chosen to encourage each group to work together. Monique was able to see team building as it was happening. One of the projects was a home coming parade which was a great example of residents and staff working together. There was a lot of laughter happening that week in our facility.

Having Monique here at Bartels Lutheran Retirement Community was a great experience for our residents, Team Leaders and staff. Everyone involved enjoyed hearing about Monique and about her experiences. She spent her evenings having supper with our assisted living residents. They felt they were privileged to have her with them for the meal. One of these residents was at Monique's door the morning she left and sang a song for her. Bartels staff had many questions about food preparation, types of food, and meal service. These questions led to great dialogue and a sharing of skills, experiences, and techniques. There was a lot of sharing happening through the weeks she was with us. It seems the differences between our two countries are related more to differences in culture. Monique, for instances, was amazed at how large our personal homes are and how much space there is between houses and farms. This is understandable when you look at the amount of area America covers compared to the Netherlands.

The Annapurna exchange program helped Bartels' staff to see that things are very similar in other countries. I was a wonderful chance for staff to realize that every facility has many of the same problems and concerns. DMA members recognize the value of networking with each other to solve problems. The Annapurna exchange program gave Bartels' staff another dimension of networking and problem solving. Being able to network and help each other solve problems is one of the advantages of HCI. Having the ability to go to or host someone from another country is just another advantage of being able to learn from each other. Bartels' managers and staff encourage everyone to think about either becoming a host facility or being the exchange person in the Annapurna Exchange program.

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