

Media Release

27 September 2023 – For immediate release

FOUR DECADES OF HARD WORK...AND HIGH TEA WITH THE ROYALS!

You'd be forgiven for thinking a job in the kitchen is all bubbling pots and dirty dishes.

But Jennifer Whitton has somehow managed to find the glamorous side of catering, enjoying afternoons sipping tea with Princesses - and even the Queen!

After 45 years working in the kitchen at the State Hospital at Carstairs, Lanarkshire, the Catering Supervisor is set to hang up her apron for the last time as she embarks on retirement.

And Jennifer, who was recently honoured for her dedication to the job with a Long Service Award, says she will never forget her time at the NHS Hospital.

"It has been a fantastic job and a great place to work," Jennifer said. "When I started all those years ago, I had no idea how long I would stay – or that I would have the chance to meet so many fantastic people and even royalty!

"In fact, I have met Princess Anne, Princess Diana and even the Queen through my work at the Hospital.

"These are definitely up there with some of the memorable moments."

Jennifer first joined the State Hospital as a cook on 4 December 1978, after spending a short time in Aulds the Bakers in Lanark.

More than four decades on, Jennifer is still here on the 6am shift come rain, hail or shine to ensure the Hospital's patients and staff are catered for.

"I still remember there was a day of really heavy snow and nobody could get into the Hospital," she said.

"I made it, but there were only three of us in the kitchen to get the breakfast, lunch and dinner out. Thankfully we managed, but that was a very busy day!"

Jennifer has remained on the payroll at the Hospital through a whole host of global milestones, such as the birth of the Internet, the falling of the Berlin Wall, the introduction of the iPhone, and, most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic.

She also seen the redevelopment of the Hospital from the former site to the current new build in 2012.

But it is the changing nature of the job that has kept her there for so long.

“No two days have been the same,” she said. “I think that is why I have enjoyed it so much.”

Highlights have included brushing shoulders with Royalty during the visit of Her Royal Highness, the Princess Royal in October 2012 to mark the opening of the newly redeveloped site, working on the day Princess Diana came to the State Hospital to meet staff and patients in 1994 and sipping tea with the later Queen Elizabeth II at the Royal Garden Party at Holyrood in 2005.

Celebrities aside, she says she is lucky enough to have worked with such a great team in the Catering department and will miss them very much in her retirement – although it sounds like she will have plenty to do.

“I’m planning to switch off and relax,” Jennifer said. “I’ll mostly be found working in the garden or my greenhouse, and spending more time cooking and baking at home.

“It will be lovely to rest – and have a long lie! - but I certainly will miss it.”

Karen McCaffrey, Director of Nursing and Operations at the State Hospital, said: “On behalf of the State Hospital I would like to thank Jennifer for her tremendous contribution over the past 45 years. It is lovely to hear her reflect on her career here with such positivity and pride.

“Jennifer will be sorely missed but we all wish her the very best in her retirement.”

ENDS

The State Hospital

1. Has 140 high-secure beds for male patients (12 specifically for patients with a learning disability), requiring specialist care that matches individual needs, in conditions of maximum security. There are an additional four beds for emergency use. It is unique because it has the dual responsibility of caring for very ill, detained patients under mental health law and other related legislation whilst protecting them, the public and staff from harm. It is a national resource for Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Hospital aims to rehabilitate patients ensuring safe transfer to appropriate lower levels of security, and hosts the Forensic Mental Health Services Managed Care Network.

2. Ensures that staff governance standards are adhered to in that staff are well informed, appropriately trained, involved in decisions that affect them, treated fairly and consistently, and provided with a safe and improved working environment.
3. Acknowledges that staff are our greatest asset, and expresses sincere thanks to all departing staff members for their valuable contribution made over the years.

www.tsh.scot.nhs.uk

Media Contact

Tracey Watt, PR & Digital Communications Officer, State Hospital

Telephone: 01555 842221

Email: tracey.watt3@nhs.scot