

Dameron brothers in it for the long run

By **Lori Gilbert**
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Dameron Hospital prides itself on the closeness of its staff, and speaks of "The Dameron Family."

If that's legitimate, then Frank and Lupe Guillen are more than brothers employed by the 96-year-old hospital. They're the collective patriarch.

Recently honored for more than 45 years of service, Lupe, 66, was hired Aug. 28, 1961, and Frank, 67, was hired Dec. 1, 1962. They follow in the footsteps of their retired brother, Peter, who worked at Dameron for 40 years, and sister Patrice Bilar, who was employed for 39.

No other current Dameron employee has been there for more than 35 years, and a new service pin, awarded in five-year intervals to Dameron employees, had to be designed for the brothers.

It's a thing of beauty, gold with diamonds in each of the four corners. The brothers display it with pride, and although humble and nonchalant about their achievement, they relish the acknowledgment of their service.

"I just like the people I work with and the patients in the hospital," said Frank, who has spent his entire career in housekeeping. "I could talk to them and maybe comfort them a little bit."

Lupe, who started in housekeeping, then moved to food services, said, "It's what you see and what you do. It's working as a team."

Their current supervisors laud their performances.

"Everybody loves (Lupe), in the department or outside it," said Noni McCraw, assistant director of food services. "He's easy going, gentle. He's very dependable and takes great pride in his job."

His duties range from cleaning pots and pans and sweeping and mopping floors to helping prepare patient food trays and setting up rooms for meetings.

"Frank will do anything you ask him to do without complaining. He does things no one else will do," said Jeremy McIlvain, director of housekeeping.

He now handles infectious waste and breaks down cardboard as part of the hospital's "green" effort, among other tasks.

"He's like the grandpa," McIlvain said. "He gives you advice. He gives it to me, to brand new folks. He's a thoughtful person. If I present him a challenge in the department, he'll think about it and figure out what to do."

He's always been ingenious on the job.

Early in his career, Frank discovered that the best way to clean windows was to climb outside the second-floor windows and stand on a slim brick ledge underneath them.

"Sheriffs and police would show up and see me and yell, 'Don't jump,' " he remembered with a laugh. "I'd yell back, 'Don't worry. I won't.' "

Lupe didn't do windows, but there wasn't much else he wouldn't have done, or continue to do for Dameron.

Maybe the most endearing contribution of the Guillens has been what they've given from their hearts. Both tell of visiting with patients when they'd clean their rooms. They tried to calm their fears if they were headed to surgery, or simply kept them company when no family members were near.

The two plan to keep working until their health no longer allows it. It's something almost ingrained in them.

Raised by a single mother after their father committed suicide when they were small boys, they learned early the rewards of work.

"When I was young my mom gave me girls tennis shoes and suspenders," Frank remembered. "I didn't like them, so I started out cutting grass and pulling weeds. I made \$7 and bought a pair of shoes. I made \$5 more and bought a belt. My brother got mad, and a few months later, he bought himself a belt."

The boys also worked in the fields to raise money, getting up at 4 a.m. to start that hard labor.

"Nobody was going to give me anything," Frank learned. "If I wanted something I had to work for it."

He's never stopped. Nor has Lupe, and Dameron is thankful they have no immediate plans to stop.

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