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eventually drew Weldon to join the Sisters of Mercy, which is based in Belmont. She joined in 1951. Since then, she's held a number of different administrative and ministerial positions in a variety of locales.

Weldon worked at St. Joseph's Hospital in 1997 before it merged with and was sold to Mission Hospitals, then returned to Asheville in 1999 to continue the Sisters of Mercy's work.

Today, Weldon is an advocate for the group's mission and values, a staff and patient chaplain and director of volunteers.

"Sister Maria Goretti has really been kind of a mentor and guide to me since I've been here," said Tim Johnston, CEO of Sisters of Mercy.

Johnston was familiar with the Sisters of Mercy as an administrator with St. Joseph's Hospital beginning in 1987.

Johnston stayed with the hospital through the merger, when he went on staff at Mission. He joined Sisters of Mercy again in late 2005.

"Those were formative years. When I had the opportunity to come back and work with them and help assure that this mission continues, I thought it was a worthwhile thing to do with this part of my

life," he said. "Sister Maria Goretti was the first person I talked to."

Dignity and respect

Weldon's hesitant to weigh in on debates about what ails America's health care system in general, or about the specifics of health care reform.

Sisters of Mercy does aim for systemic change, though, and Weldon said the group will speak up when it feels it needs to.

"It's just very challenging times, and I support and appreciate the efforts being made to make health care more available to more people," Weldon said. "And Sisters of Mercy in general supports that, but realizes there's a lot more to be done that hopefully will evolve over some years."

Meantime, Weldon said she's focused on her mission of compassion and servitude.

"We try, in a caring way, to let people know, even though some days are very busy, that that patient in front of me right now is the most important person around," Weldon said.

"That's what we want to demonstrate to people who come to us — that they're not just another patient coming in with a laceration or a broken bone or whatever — but that we're here to treat them as though they're a person of Jesus Christ and they're entitled to be treated with dignity and respect."



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Sister Maria Goretti Weldon has served 60 years with Sisters of Mercy in Asheville.

TIMELINE

■ **1900:** On Nov. 23, a trio of nuns — Sisters Mary Gertrude, Mercedes and Mary Loretta — open the 18-bed St. Joseph's Sanitarium on French Broad Avenue to treat tuberculosis patients.

■ **1905:** An expanded St. Joseph's Sanitarium moves to Starnes Avenue, with Asheville native Sister Mary Scholastica Keenan as administrator.

■ **1909:** The Sisters of Mercy purchase 22 hillside acres on Biltmore Avenue, where they gradually expand the sanitarium's capacity to 95 beds by 1924.

■ **1938:** After the discovery of new treatments for tuberculosis, including home care, the sisters convert St. Joseph's to a general hospital.

■ **1952:** Loretta Hall is built behind the hospital to provide

medical staff meeting rooms and living quarters for the sisters, who had occupied part of a floor at St. Joseph's.

■ **1958:** Extensive hospital renovations include the opening of the Madonna Wing, increasing capacity to 183 patients and 30 newborns.

■ **1974:** Under the leadership of Sister Mary James Scholl, a modernized 10-story, 284-bed St. Joseph's Hospital opens north of the Madonna Wing.

■ **1975:** The old hospital is torn down and Madonna Wing renovations are completed. A new home for the sisters is built behind St. Joseph's and MAHEC leases Loretta Hall as a family practice center.

■ **1983:** Construction of a five-story south wing begins

at St. Joseph's.

■ **1985:** St. Joseph's Health Services Corp. buys Western Emergency Medical Center in Skyland to launch the first of its Urgent Care Centers in Buncombe County.

■ **1987:** St. Joseph's Hospital Foundation is established.

■ **1998:** St. Joseph's merges with Memorial Mission Hospital. Proceeds from the \$81.6 million sale of St. Joseph's continue to benefit WNC through a Sisters of Mercy foundation.

■ **2005:** With a staff of more than 300, about two-thirds of whom are devoted to behavioral health, Sisters of Mercy celebrates 105 years of healing in Western North Carolina.

■ The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas is an international community of Roman Catholic women who have vowed to serve people who suffer from poverty, sickness and lack of education, with a special concern for women and children.

■ Catherine McAuley established the first House of Mercy in Ireland in 1827. And in 1831, she founded the Sisters of Mercy as a new congregation of religious women in Dublin.

■ In the late 1800s, the Sisters of Mercy came to Asheville to open a school; they stayed for one year.

■ In 1900, three sisters returned to Asheville from Belmont, the headquarters of Sisters of Mercy of North Carolina, opening an 18-bed tuberculosis sanitarium on French Broad Avenue.

■ Over the decades, many sisters served the people of Western North Carolina at St. Joseph's Hospital, in schools and in a number of other ministries.

Source: Sisters of Mercy Services Corp.

VAMPIRES: No video games, fancy coffee

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played a single video game. I watched Pong when it was first re-

house from little Lego bricks but have not put one together. I've stepped on them, pried one out of a dog's mouth,

caffeinate, but with Diet Coke instead.

GPS: Haven't used one. Someday when the satellites go dark, there will

social & local