

'He truly cares about the people'

Dr. John Wood retires for the second time

By WILL SCOTT
Record-Eagle staff writer

NORTHPORT — After 40 years in internal medicine, John Wood retired with his wife to their vacation home overlooking Lake Michigan.

Then one day he stopped by Leelanau Memorial Hospital on a social visit, which quickly became a job interview. The medical director at the extended-care center had resigned for health reasons, and they needed someone.

"I decided to do it for a couple months," Wood said.

Ten years later, this past February, Wood retired again — this time for good, he said.

That unintended extension of his medical career made Wood one of 96 Michigan physicians who were recently honored for 50 years of medical practice.

For all but the first of his 10 years at Leelanau Memorial, Wood was strictly an administrator, but he never stopped being a doctor, admissions and marketing coordinator Diane Porter said.

"He made himself such an integral part of not only the lives of the people who live here, but the lives of those who visited," Porter said. "He cares about not only the medical stuff but the psycho-social part of their care. He truly cares about the people he's involved with."

"I think he really does encompass all the qualities that make an outstanding physician."

Porter also said "Woody," as Wood is affectionately known, has never stopped learning about advances in medicine.

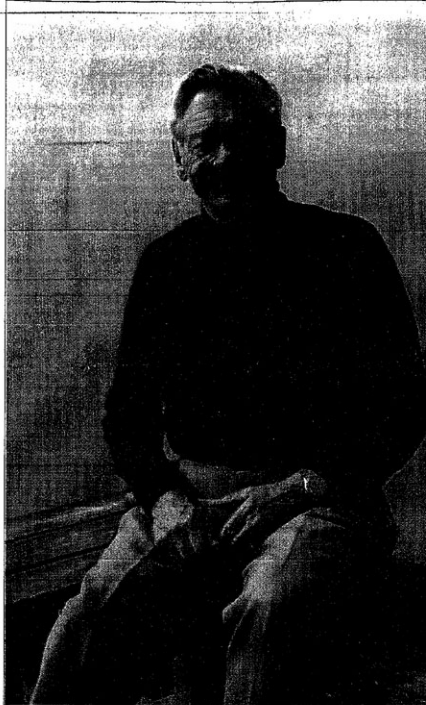
"He was continually updating himself," she said. "He has stayed on top of everything that goes on in the medical profession."

He shared what he learned in once-a-month reviews of medical literature open to anyone on the hospital staff.

Nurses and others would take their lunch trays to a conference room and listen to Wood hold forth on the newest findings, whether it was in geriatrics, infectious diseases or anxiety.

He'd also hold pop quizzes, rewarding correct

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Dr. John Wood will serve on the Leelanau Memorial Hospital's board of directors.

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answers with Hershey's Kiss.

"I got a Hershey's Kiss probably twice, except for the times he'd sneak one to me even when I had the wrong answer," Porter said.

"But they were usually trick questions," she added. Nobody could win with him."

Wood grew up in New England and attended Colby College in Maine and Yale University before attending the Vermont College of Medicine.

After three years as a resident in internal medicine at a small hospital in Connecticut, he joined the Air Force, and became medical director at a base in Dahrhan, Saudi Arabia.

When he returned home he and his wife, Norma, loaded up their car and their young son and headed west. They ended up in Mount Pleasant.

Despite its flat terrain and lack of open water, the New Englanders adapted and thrived. Norma, a concert pianist, got involved with the fledgling music program at Central Michigan University, and they raised three children.

Wood helped develop an adult fitness program at CMU and became medical director of a cardiac rehabilitation program. He also helped start a health program for corporate executives.

The Woods planned a retirement in New England until they discovered Leelanau County. They bought a lot on a bluff overlooking the Fox Islands and eventually built a home there.

Wood plans to spend a lot more time on his hobbies, including sailing and photography, and he and his wife will devote more time to Trinity Lutheran Church.

Still, he won't be a stranger at Leelanau Memorial. He's now a member of the board of directors, and he plans to continue his monthly medical-literature reviews.

And he'll still be a doctor — technically.

When his medical license came up for renewal this past winter, he couldn't bring himself to let it lapse. He paid his dues for another six years, although he's sure it was a largely ceremonial act.

"I'm 75 years old, so I doubt if I'm going to be very active," he said.