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## New surgeon on a wonderful ride

Doug Flanagan/Post-Register  
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*Thomas Steffens is the new head of surgery at Quincy Valley Medical Center.*

Last fall, Rhonda Ramm, the Quincy Valley Medical Center's Sage View Clinic nurse practitioner, participated in a charity bicycle ride in Idaho to raise money for multiple sclerosis.

While there, she recognized one of her fellow bicyclists from a brief, chance encounter in an operating room a couple of years prior, a surgeon named Thomas Steffens. Ramm immediately struck up a conversation with him.

Ramm said hello to Steffens and asked him if he had ever heard of Quincy. Since Steffens had been working in Moses Lake for the Wenatchee Valley Medical Center as a general surgeon for the past 13 years, he laughed and said, "Of course."

ADVERTISEMENT Ramm told him there may be a need in the near future for a surgeon at Quincy Valley Medical Center. Intrigued, Steffens shot Ramm a quizzical look and said, "Really?"

After the race, Ramm stayed in contact with Steffens about the job, and soon thereafter Steffens found himself in the office of QVMC administrator Mehdi Merred interviewing for the position. (Steffens actually had a contract in place to work for a hospital in Seaside, Ore., at that time, but the contract wasn't set to become official until he started working there.)

The fact that Steffens has been working since November as the hospital's new general surgeon can definitely be traced back to Ramm, but it is also due in part to another person.

"I have a hunting buddy, Jerry Lester," Steffens said. "He's got multiple sclerosis. That's why I went on that ride. I suppose if it wasn't for him, I might not be here."

The Quincy hospital is certainly glad he is here, and he's excited to be here as well.

"I love it here," he said. "This is a wonderful opportunity to see the impact of a single surgeon on a community. If a surgeon is working in a big institution, he or she can feel like a cog in a wheel, and you're not going to see the impact that you're making."

"(The fact that the hospital's surgery department is relatively new) is a great thing. I have the perfect opportunity here for this stage in my career. I've got a number of years of skill and judgment. I know when to operate and when not to operate."

Born in Grand Junction, Colo., Steffens completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Colorado, majoring in microbiology. He received his D.O. degree from the Chicago College of Osteopathic Medicine in 1981.

After completing rotating internships and going into general practice, Steffens entered the surgical residency program at Brighton Medical Center, where his last two years were served as a captain in the United States Air Force. Steffens spent a total of five years as a USAF surgeon and was honorably discharged at the rank of major.

Steffens began his civilian surgical practice in Poulsbo, where he spent five years. He then relocated to Moses Lake, where he spent 13 years as a general surgeon and endoscopist with the Wenatchee Valley Medical Center. He is board certified by the American Osteopathic Board of Surgery and is a fellow in the American College of Osteopathic Surgeons.

"The fact that he's board certified was a big reason (why we wanted him here)," Merred said. "That's a huge element. He's got years of experience. Plus, he's from the area, so he has the understanding of what it takes to practice rural medicine. Also, he's got recognition and a reputation, so we can benefit from the referrals that he gets. We never settle for less than the best quality we can find. Also, our philosophy with surgery here is to take a cautious approach; we're not out to be cowboys of the West or reinvent the wheel. We prefer a standard, easy, minimal-risk approach, and (Steffens) fits that profile."

Merred pointed to the fact that the hospital recorded its greatest number of surgeries in November — the same month Steffens began work — as a good sign for Steffens and the future of the surgical department.

"We're not so interested in volume, but we really want quality of care," Merred said. "We're on the same page in terms of developing the surgical program, emphasizing comfort, quality of care and attention to detail. We have a great opportunity here because of our size to provide a top-notch quality care surgical program. A patient can come here with symptoms on a Monday, make an appointment for surgery on Tuesday and have the procedure done on a Wednesday. At bigger places, you'd have to wait."

Steffens' philosophies sound similar to his new employer's ideas.

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"We want to develop a spa-like experience," he said. "We want to treat you better than anyplace else. Because we're smaller, we have the chance to provide the right amount of time and attention to each person. I really like it here; it's a family atmosphere. It feels as if we're all equals here."

Steffens, the father of four boys, has a wide range of interests that all revolve around wheels of one kind or another. "My hobbies are road cycling, Harley-Davidson motorcycles and Porsches. I wanted a Porsche from the time I was 13 and I told myself I was going to get one before I was 40. I got one when I was 39," he said with a laugh. "Being a surgeon fits my personality — adrenaline and precision. So do my hobbies."

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