

Miller Memorial woman goes Above and Beyond



Tofil recently won the Above and Beyond award for her work at Miller Memorial.

French / Journal

By Steven Scarpa
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MERIDEN — Anna Tofil has trouble refusing people anything they ask for, a positive attribute given her job.

"I never say no. I can't say no," she said.

Tofil, a 49-year-old city resident, works as a certified nursing assistant for Miller Memorial Community, a nursing home at 360 Broad St. Specifically, she works in the short-term rehabilitation wing of the facility, helping a group of 10 people heal from broken hips, knee replacements and back surgery.

While her job description is fairly broad, cooking for the people in her care is not part of it. At least until a couple of months ago.

"I had a woman who had a fractured hip. She had to be here, but wanted to go home to have her Polish food," said Jan-

ice Thiede, director of nurses and Tofil's supervisor. "Anna, on her day off, went home and made her pierogies just to make her happy."

"I didn't even think about it," said Tofil, who lived in a farm town outside Warsaw, Poland, until 1992.

But it appears that she did. The woman lived an independent lifestyle and had never been to a doctor before her accident, Tofil said. Despite everyone's best efforts, the woman was having some difficulty adjusting to her treatment, crying a lot. Tofil's small act of kindness made her comfortable and feeling a little more at home.

The bigger picture is that Tofil's actions enabled her to feel as if she could continue to stay at the center and heal properly.

For her benevolence (and culinary expertise) Tofil was given the Miller Memorial Community's "Above and Beyond Award."

Tofil's action reflects what Thiede calls a culture change at the community. A little over a year ago, Miller followed the old model of nursing home care, which was structured along the

line of hospital service. Residents all follow the same structured routine. That has changed, Thiede said.

Residents are encouraged to keep their own schedule and request whatever they need in effort to make Miller more of a home. Tofil's actions are completely in keeping with that new mindset. "Anna treats her residents like family," Thiede said.

Tofil started working at Miller six years ago after a brief tenure working at a factory in Britain. "I went to the factory and did an assembly job. I lost my job because it went to Mexico," Tofil said.

With only a cursory knowledge of English at that point, Tofil had to reinvent herself. She began taking classes to learn English but it was hard to balance her family life with her work. "If you come here with three children, you can't go to school, you have to work," Tofil said with a strong trace of her native accent.

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She was encouraged to go back to bookkeeping, the job she did back in Poland. But she wanted something different, a way to work with people in a substantive way. "I think I made a good decision. I always like to take care of people," she said.

Tofil began working the overnight shift at Miller, learning English as she went along. "I think I learned a lot in here,"

she said.

Two years later, Thiede decided to bring Tofil with her during the day shift, a move both have been pleased with. "Like so many of the CNAs here, Anna doesn't hesitate to give. It is inborn in her," Thiede said.

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