

## CAREGIVERS THAT LOST THEIR JOBS, LEAVE WITH DIGNITY AND POISE INTACT



The 30<sup>th</sup> of June was a sad day for 40 caregivers at the Behavioral Health Center, located at 1900 Columbus Ave. The Center had new owners, but for these 40 workers, it meant that they would have to say goodbye to their jobs. McLaren took over the management of the 28-bed in-patient mental health unit which was up to that time, managed under a contract with a third party company, HealthSource Saginaw. At the stroke of midnight, these caregivers walked out of the portals of their workplace for the last time. They were given an emotional send-off by their erstwhile colleagues, who met them in the parking lot, holding candles and softly playing the violin song, made popular by the movie "Titanic." Moviegoers the world over have never forgotten the solemn notes of the violin playing in the background as the grand ship sinks. The parting was sad and tearful. They exchanged hugs and even though they were uncertain about their future, there was no bitterness or rancor. They left with a lot of dignity and poise, assured in their knowledge that the work that they had done here was right and proper. "The third shift crew came out to let us know we weren't alone," said a former caregiver, 38 years old, who worked for two years at the facility. "If we were going down, we all were going down together." The clinic's former managers HealthSource said that McLaren was responsible for the loss of jobs and said that their claim that HealthSource Saginaw's contract contains a constraint that prevents them from hiring any HealthSource employee, for a period of one year is unfounded. The employees had an inkling that the change in management could lead to a loss of their jobs. Their suspicions strengthened when an employee found their jobs posted on the website of the new owners. Three weeks prior to taking over, McLaren officials, told the employees, what they hoped that would not hear, that they would have to leave and that they would not be employed by the clinic anymore. The work of a caregiver at the Behavioral Health Center was to make mental health assessments, monitor the patients in every room and bed and take appropriate action if a patient is showing symptoms of some sort of anguish, feeding them, bathing them and assisting them with group therapy sessions. The new staff members, in an effort to learn the nuances of the work, tailed the former employees during the last week of June, which was intrusive at times and even noticeable to the patients. "Patients were acting up, telling us it was OK and trying to protect us while we were protecting them," the caregiver said. "I want what is best for the patients, but my biggest fear is the transition — the new staff will provide the best care possible, but learning how to do so takes time." However, McLaren officials said that the transition occurred without problems and that the new staff would adapt without any hassles. "The transition to the new staff went smoothly," said McLaren Bay-Region spokesman Kurt Miller. The sacked caregivers will now face new unforeseen problems. A former caregiver applied for a position that will require her to travel longer distances. She does not have a car and earlier used public transportation. She is worried that she will have to spend more time travelling and the increased costs will eat into her pay packet. Yet another 63-year old worker feels that it will take some time to adapt to new surrounding, when they do manage to land a job. She said that after 6 years at the Center, a new job would feel different. She further said that she was employed by HealthSource for a per diem position with a one-day per month minimum obligation. A 40 hours pay and benefits job, would be considerably different, she felt. "HealthSource encouraged all of us to apply — it isn't what I want, but it's something," the mental health worker said. "I made sure this position didn't have a no-compete clause; I really hope one day I can return to McLaren." Both the employees are not letting themselves feel disconsolate or downhearted. They say that they will continue to offer their services in the healthcare field. The worst is over, they say, until times change we are going to be optimistic and have fun. "Leaving the unit felt like a funeral — the new people came in to see our caskets because we were dying and this was the showing," said the 38-year old former caregiver. "We filed in a single file line like the casket was in front of us and we were walking behind, but I love what I do and I am going to do it again."