

HSP Success Story

Patience Pays Off For Columbia Memorial Hospital In Its Search For A Director of Finance

The search: Director of Finance

The organization: Columbia Memorial Hospital, Astoria, OR

Primary organization contact: Brandon Parker, CFO,
Vice President of Finance

Candidate selected: Julie Stewart

Challenge

Columbia Memorial Hospital is small but mighty, a beacon of healthcare for the residents of Astoria, Oregon. The 25-bed critical access facility is the fastest growing hospital in Oregon with a major \$300 million construction project underway to meet the growing healthcare needs of its service area. Situated near the mouth of the Columbia River where it empties into the Pacific Ocean in the far northwest corner of the state, Astoria is both picturesque and rural. When the organization found itself in need of a Director of Finance, the hospital leadership knew it would be challenged to find a highly qualified professional that would be a good fit for the organization.

Solution

Brandon Parker, the hospital's Chief Financial Officer and Vice President of Finance, knew Ivan Bartolome, HealthSearch Partners' President and CEO. He appreciated Bartolome's highly personal and effective approach to search. So, he was confident in his decision to engage HealthSearch Partners (HSP) to help the hospital find its next Director of Finance.

"Columbia Memorial has worked with a number of firms on various searches," Parker says.

"When we weren't having any success with those firms for the Director of Finance, we decided to engage a firm for a retained search. It came down to two firms and one said it wasn't interested in taking on the engagement because finance executives were hard to find. In addition, they mentioned our rather remote location and the fact that we are a critical access hospital. So, I contacted Ivan who was optimistic and realistic. He said HSP could help us find the ideal candidate. He also counseled us to have patience as the search was likely to span several months."

HSP began the search engagement by meeting in-person with several key individuals associated with Columbia Memorial Hospital to gain a thorough understanding and in-depth insight into the organization, expectations for the candidates, and other qualities needed to succeed.

"Doug Duffield, HSP's Senior Vice President, and I met with Brandon and his team. That helped us understand the primary requirements he had when it came to selecting a candidate to fill the Director of Finance role," Bartolome explains. "He had several criteria that were important to him. First, knowledge of, and experience working with, a critical access hospital was key."



Columbia Memorial Hospital, Astoria, OR

Columbia Memorial Hospital (CMH) is a full-service, not-for-profit hospital located where the Columbia River meets the Pacific Ocean. It is the fastest growing rural hospital in the state of Oregon and has been serving the healthcare needs of families living in the North Coast and Lower Columbia region since 1880. The Hospital is building a \$300 million expansion. CMH was one of the first Planetree-certified hospitals in the world. It is a Level IV trauma center, with 750 employees and more than 15 clinics, many of which are part of its CMH-Oregon Health & Science University collaboration.

He also wanted a leader who had a successful track record of managing multiple departments and a focus on labor productivity. He also wanted someone who would be a good fit for his leadership team, who he described as ‘high functioning and focused on getting a lot done quickly.’ Of course, he also wanted a finance professional who could lead and shape the hospital’s finance function.”

Bartolome’s prediction of an extended timeframe for the search proved to be true. After several months, a candidate emerged that seemed to meet many of Parker’s requirements. “Julie Stewart had already been a CFO,” Parker notes. “She also had experience in several areas where I needed immediate help – completing an RFP for a new accounting system and reviewing and recommending a new contracting tool to help us calculate our net patient revenue, and more. She really checked some of my biggest boxes.”

Results

Stewart zeroed in on the Director of Finance opportunity at Columbia Memorial. Bartolome acted quickly for an initial conversation. What followed was what Stewart calls “a very collaborative relationship.”

Before joining Columbia Memorial, Stewart had been CFO for two small healthcare organizations in Washington state and Oregon. “Initially, I was very hesitant to pursue the opportunity at Columbia Memorial,” Stewart admits. “But Ivan encouraged me to be open and meet with the folks at the hospital. He was so calming, reassuring and personable, I said sure, and it was the best decision I could have made. The opportunity to work with Brandon Parker was really what sealed the deal for me.”

Stewart calls working with HSP as a candidate one of the best experiences she has had. “I was interested in the position at Columbia Memorial because it was in healthcare, on the Oregon coast, and near my kids and friends. The entire time I worked with HSP was professional and transparent. I would work with them again in a minute.”

Parker says Stewart stood out because her experience matched his needs. “She had already been a CFO, so she had the executive experience I was looking for,” he explains. “She was ready to hit the ground running from day one.”

Both Parker and Stewart appreciated the quick, professional response and timely, ongoing communication Bartolome provided to them as the search progressed. “I appreciated having a relationship with him where I felt I could reach him at any time,” Parker says. “He always notified me about candidates that had surfaced and about where HSP was in the search process. I trusted HSP and knew they understood the kind of candidate I was looking for.”

“HSP is one of the elite search firms as far as I’m concerned,” Stewart says. “Their commitment and follow through on ongoing communication is impeccable. That’s extremely important when you are looking for a new position.”



Successful Searches, Satisfied Clients

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Julie Stewart
Director of Finance