

# FROM PATIENT TO EMPLOYEE



**A Day in the Life**  
Bob Hunter, at work in the kitchen, stayed on as an employee after his discharge from Fairview Commons

In 2001, Bob Hunter was living under a cloud. Just 30 years old, he weighed almost 500 pounds, had lost his house, and was unemployed. He was also ignoring all the signs and symptoms of diabetes. "I knew I had a family history of diabetes, and I knew the symptoms. I just chose to ignore them," Hunter said. Ignoring those signs landed him in the hospital. In a diabetic coma, Hunter was on a ventilator and in renal failure. After waking from his coma and being weaned off the ventilator, Hunter was faced with the hard work of rehab.

## A Challenging Patient

In February 2002, Hunter was admitted to Fairview Commons in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. He would, as he readily admits, be a challenge for

the staff. First, he had several medical problems: his weight, diabetes, and wounds. Second, Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy had to get him walking again and performing activities of daily living on his own.

And then, there was his attitude. Hunter was young and lacked any family, friends, or community support. He recalls his first few months at Fairview Commons like this: "I was not exactly your ideal patient. I was physically and mentally down. I felt that the staff was doing things like restricting my diet or making me do my own care just to be mean to me. But they never gave up on me. Physical Therapy got me walking again, and Dietary/Nursing helped me understand my diabetes and get it under control. I had resisted any mental health help in the past,

but again the staff encouraged me not to ignore this, as it was a part of my overall good health."

## Starting a New Life

By October 2003, Hunter was physically and mentally ready to be discharged. But he needed money to get started, a place to live, and a job.

By this time, Hunter had a network of friends on-line and at Fairview Commons. He asked his Internet friends for help, and they sent him \$4,000 to get started.

But he still needed a place to live and a job. Then, a staff member saw an ad in a local paper for a small apartment. She contacted the landlord and explained Hunter's situation. The landlord agreed to meet him. That meeting resulted in a convenient downtown apartment. "I still needed to furnish my apartment, and I wasn't sure how I was going to do that," Hunter elaborated. "But each day the staff at Fairview Commons would bring me things like toaster ovens, towels, silverware, etc. It seemed like every time I left my room, I would come back and something else that I needed was sitting on my bed!" Now all he needed was a job.

## Working and Giving Back

Today, Hunter works in the dietary department at Fairview Commons. At 275 pounds, he understands better than anyone the challenge of losing weight. He also understands the necessity of changing diet to improve the likelihood of a long life and good health. He feels that he can give back something working at the facility. "I will often go talk with patients who are difficult or down. I tell them, 'I know where you are, because I have been there too. Things will get better.'"

Today, many of the staff at Fairview Commons count Hunter as a friend. If you tell them how lucky Hunter is to have so many friends, they'll tell you that they are the lucky ones to have him as *their* friend. Hunter says his philosophy for a good life is simple: "If you are good to people and give freely of yourself, it will come back to you." Looks like he was right!▲