

COLIN VEZINA

GIVING BACK *never gets old*

story by Lindsay Smylie Smith

NBRHC celebrates National Volunteer Week April 19-25, 2026

Colin Vezina is a familiar face for many patients and visitors to North Bay Regional Health Centre (NBRHC). The 92-year-old volunteer has logged more than 3000 hours of service since January 2008 – although unofficially his volunteering for the hospital dates back to the '90s.

Each April, NBRHC recognizes their volunteers during National Volunteer Week, the nationwide celebration led by Volunteer Canada. This year's theme is *Ignite Volunteerism* and aims to inspire Canadians to reconnect with their communities through acts of service, civic action and mutual support.

Those are some of the exact words Vezina uses when asked to describe what inspires him to volunteer. He says he feels a 'duty' to serve his community, and helping people at the hospital is one of the ways he does that. "I have a deep sense of community, and community service," he explains.

Policy prevented Vezina from volunteering during his long tenure as Editor of the North Bay Nugget. "Editors were forbidden from joining any community groups or organizations," he explains. "That ensured there was no suggestion of bias or favouritism."

After he retired in 1990, he jumped at the opportunity to get involved in his community and joined the Rotary Club; as a Navy veteran he was involved with the Legion; he sat on the Police Services Board and of course, began volunteering at the hospital.

"Colin is one of the approximately 150 volunteers who make a meaningful difference at our hospital every day," says Kim McElroy, Director, Communications & Strategic Partnerships. "Their gift of time helps support our day-to-day operations and the care and comfort we provide to patients and their families."



Top: Vezina with fellow long-service volunteers Bernadette Gagne (left) and Joanne Comerford; Vezina with other volunteers at an NBRHC volunteer recognition event (above).

Most importantly, volunteers help create a welcoming atmosphere across the hospital. “For example, our wayfinding volunteers, also known as Ambassadors, are some of the first people patients and visitors see when entering the facility,” McElroy says.

During his time as an Ambassador, Vezina estimates **he’s helped thousands of people** find their way in the health centre.

The Ambassador role was created to coincide with the opening of the new hospital in 2011, to help ease the stress for patients and visitors. Vezina, together with his late wife Noreen, were some of the very first NBRHC Ambassadors. During his time as an Ambassador, Vezina estimates he’s helped thousands of people find their way in the health centre. “Our job was to be a kind and reassuring presence to help put people at ease,” he says. “We would always start by asking a simple ‘how can I help you?’ and go from there.”



Colin and Noreen Vezina were among the first NBRHC Ambassadors. Here they are receiving 1,000 volunteer hour pins together in 2018.

McElroy says most people are surprised to learn that the hospital has more than 15 program areas where volunteers provide support on a daily basis. For Vezina, after his time as an Ambassador, he helped patients and visitors in the Orthopedic Clinic, the Emergency Department, and most recently at the Foundation.

McElroy says one of the biggest motivations for NBRHC volunteers is to make a meaningful contribution to the hospital and the community. “Like Colin, some of our volunteers decide to start volunteering after retirement to get out of the house and give back. Others like our youth volunteers are looking to gain hands-on experience to see if a career in health care is right for them.”

The Health Centre is always looking for people who want to give their time and be part of a caring team. No health care experience is required because the Volunteer Department works closely with individuals to match them with roles that align with their interests and availability.



Vezina helping to promote volunteering at NBRHC at a Seniors' Fair in 2025



McElroy explains volunteer opportunities change on an ongoing basis. "Right now, we are accepting applications for our patient visiting roles, including those with special skills like playing an instrument or yoga, as well as for fundraising programs such as the Gift Shop and selling break open tickets."

If a person is interested in volunteering at the hospital, they can submit a completed volunteer application package to the Volunteer Department. From there it will be reviewed and experience, skills and availability along with current volunteer needs will be taken into account.



"I'm planning to **volunteer until I'm 100!**"

Colin Vezina, 92-year-old NBRHC volunteer

As for Vezina, he says he has no plans of slowing down his volunteer duties, and he actually has a specific goal in mind: "I'm planning to volunteer until I'm 100!" he says with a laugh.

For more information about the volunteer intake process and requirements, visit the volunteer section of the NBRHC website www.nbrhc.on.ca/join-our-team/volunteers/



Top: Vezina (second from left) poses with the NBRHC Foundation. Above: Vezina with NBRHC President & CEO Paul Heinrich in April 2026.