Char Livell — Serving 20 to life and loving it!

To say that Dietary Manager Char Livell loves her job is a bit of an understatement.

"I can't imagine not being here," she says, brow furrowed. "The other day someone told me about a job opportunity at another hospital and I just couldn't fathom wanting to go somewhere else."

Reason number one for staying here?

"The food is awesome! We have great cooks," she says unabashedly.

Reason number two?

"I've always been impressed with the support I get from management. Over the 20+ years I've been here, I've met many dietary managers from all over the nation. Not one has felt that they have the respect and support from management that I do. I love telling them that I have the best job in the world because I get to go back to Lincoln Hospital!"

Although Char grew up here in Davenport (she's one of the legendary Campbell clan), she never considered working at Lincoln Hospital. "I was a bartending for Ernie Lawson. His mother worked here and told me I should apply, so I did and was hired immediately by Mr. Kembel as a dietary aide."

That was 1982. By 1986, Char had worked every position including cook and was finishing up classes to become a Certified Dietary Manager. When long-time Lead Cook Irma Paul retired, Char took over the department. "Mr. Kembel had great faith in me."

Armed with fresh ideas, Char set about making changes that would benefit the patients and residents alike.

"Back then, the residents didn't have any choice of meals," she recalls. "They were given a tray with whatever we had made on it and that was dinner."

And it didn't sit well with Char.

"This is their home — not prison. They should have choices in what they want to eat and although something may not be healthy for them, if they want it, this may be their last home so they should have it," she says, noting she agrees with the Eden Philosophy. "Residents should be able to make their own decisions on the daily life and life revolves around food. This is home and at home we get choices."

Currently, the LTC residents are served dinner in a restaurant-like atmosphere where they have choices about their meals. Char is planning to take that a step further with a "Resident Centered Meal Plan." Not only will there be more choices of food items, but times folks want to eat.

"Instead of telling them they're going to eat breakfast at 8 a.m., we're going to let them choose when they want to get up." From 6:30-9 a.m., a continental breakfast will be available in the 29er Diner. "We'll have hot and cold cereal, juice, milk, coffee and a fresh baked item each day."

Brunch will be served at 10:30 in the dining rooms, followed by a 1 p.m. snack centered around an activity in the 29er. "Dinner will start at 4:30 and will be more traditional, then before bed, they will have another significant snack which will include a protein."

The meal plan not only gives plenty of food choices, but residents gain control over when they want to eat and/or get up in the morning.

"I first saw this concept at the hospital in Chewelah. I was so impressed with the relaxed, home-like atmosphere. I knew we had to do it here," says Char, always looking for ways to make life better for the residents.

But this change doesn't come without difficulty. Not only are the NA-Cs and nursing staff impacted, but housekeeping and dietary will see big changes.

"I'm excited because I'll get to tear down my whole department and how we do things, and put it back together again to be more efficient," says Char.

This is a feat in itself. Not only will Dietary be preparing and serving 5 meals for LTC, but will still serve three totally different meals a day in Acute Care and run the Lunch Box.

"It's a big job, but I've got a great staff. Hopefully, the residents will be impacted the most."