Sandy Buchanan — a rags to riches story

"The rags part of that is true — literally," smiles Facilities Manager Sandy Buchanan of her humble Lincoln Hospital beginnings. "I started here as a janitor in 1988."

That was back when janitors were separate from housekeepers in more ways than one.

"The janitors were men and they cleaned the hallways. The housekeepers were women and they did the rooms. The men made $1 per hour more than the women," recalls Sandy with a laugh. "The supervisor at the time was so upset by this that she made the janitors clean all the toilets."

Sandy was the hospital's first woman janitor. Brought up to work hard and take pride in her tasks, Sandy soon shattered the unwritten gender barrier by lifting many large, heavy buckets of water and dumping them into an impossibly high sink.

"I did that for a year, then I applied for the housekeeping supervisor job and got it." And what was the first thing she did?

"I cross trained everybody so that there was no difference between housekeepers and janitors and everyone was paid the same."

The blending went well. So well that one year later, laundry and safety were added to her duties. "By year four, maintenance was put under me and they added dietary at year 10," she laughs of her responsibilities.

So what does the Facilities Manager do?

"Most of my time is spent on maintenance of the hospital district's five buildings and on safety programs. I'm involved in a lot of quality improvement writing policies and procedures, budgeting, and I research and oversee projects," she says. In short, it's Sandy's job to 'make it happen.'

"We currently have 42 facilities projects on the outstanding projects list." The Acute Care Nurses Station is finished, but the Pharmacy and DNS office are still at the top, followed by the Comfort Room.

So what does a former janitor know about blueprints, schematics, change-orders and small works rosters?

"I've always said there is nothing that a Facilities Manager does that you can't learn from being a wife and mother," grins Sandy. "You just have to be practical, resourceful and know how to read the owner's manuals."

Sandy proved this theory true early in her career when the heating system broke down. She talked to the maintenance chief about the equipment, read the manual, used some common sense about how heat and cold worked and called her father, an electrician, for some advice.

"I figured out that the air dryer that took the moisture out of the pneumatic lines had broken. The excess moisture caused the system, which was on the roof, to freeze."

Chalk one up to hard work and common sense.

Despite the many daily victories, even Sandy was challenged by the facilities remodel of 1999.

"We brought the entire facility up to state and federal codes. It was a huge undertaking," says Sandy less than wistfully. "During the project, one of our nurses called the Acute Care wing 'Bosnia North.' It was a very appropriate name too."

The remodel took everything Sandy had — even her health.

"I was hospitalized with stress-induced asthma," she recalls. "My biggest regret is that I missed by daughter's senior year of high school. I lived here."

But being able to sacrifice for the good of others is something Sandy believes in. This is where the 'riches' part comes in.

"I very much believe in the mission of Lincoln Hospital. Good people work here. We really are your 'Neighbors for Life' as it says on our logo. We take care of people from the time they're babies until the end of their lives and we do it by not only caring for the physical, but the personal needs of our patients."

Sandy knows this from her own experience.

"Cheryl Nelson and I worked so hard on the Family Room. Never did I imagine that my sister would die unexpectedly and my own family would need that room so very much," says Sandy. "Facility improvements really do make a difference in people's lives."