

I AM ST. HELENA HOSPITAL

Jim Vye: Secret Agent

Who knew? One of our mild-mannered Security department employees has a background as an FBI agent!

Jim Vye of the Security department actually worked for the Federal Bureau of Investigation for 24 exciting years! But, long before that, at the tender age of 14, and before he even had a social security number, Jim washed pots and pans right here at St. Helena Hospital.

Jim was born in Montana, and his family moved around a lot while he was growing up. One of those moves brought them to the Napa Valley, and Jim worked at SHH doing dishes and delivering meals to patients for about a year and a half. He recalls that we had people who operated the elevators, and that patients often asked him to “crank up” their beds. He attended PUC Prep for a while, but then the family moved again and Jim eventually attended Southern Adventist University in Tennessee as a history major.

He was drafted into the Army Medical Service Corps and was sent to Korea, Germany and Vietnam. While in Germany, he was married to his American sweetheart, Faye. They have two grown children; David, who now lives in Yountville, and Stephanie, who lives in San Diego.

Jim returned to the U.S. and was working as a human resources officer for the Army when he got into conversation with some FBI agents. He applied for work with the FBI and with Portland Adventist Medical Center at the same time, and was offered jobs by both—he chose the FBI.

Jim did “general criminal work” and undercover work, and at one time handled organized crime investigation in Reno. He also did surveillance flying in a Cessna 182. He recalls one time when he was assigned to purchase three stolen semi trucks as part of a sting operation. He did not know how to drive the trucks and had to learn overnight. He asked a truck driver to show him how, and the next day he made the purchase successfully. Then, while driving one of the trucks, he somehow locked it up and slid sideways through a red light. Luckily, no one else was crossing the intersection, because Jim didn’t even have a Class A license!

Another interesting case he mentioned was when he was assigned to accompany the father of a kid-napped child to drop off ransom money. The kidnapper was eventually caught.

In remembering his career with the FBI, Jim says, “There is nothing I would rather have done. Whether it was a good day or a bad one, it was always interesting.”

After 24 years with the FBI, Jim accompanied a friend on a five-day sailing trip from Richmond to Portland, Oregon. It was so much fun that he decided that he should retire and enjoy life more. He and Faye had taken vacations in the Napa Valley, and decided that it was the place they wanted to be. Seven years ago they moved to Yountville. He heard about a per-diem job in Security here at the hospital and decided to do it. Before long he was part-time, and then full-time.

Jim loves working here, and says, “I’ll stay here until Tom Butler fires me. Our department does much more than security departments in other organizations, and they don’t get the recognition they deserve. I’d pit them against any security department anywhere.”

