

Carter BloodCare Donor Center Series

This June 2021 article is the first in a monthly series highlighting each of Carter BloodCare's donor centers, their teams, and their commitment to serving their communities by fulfilling the mission to save lives by making transfusion possible.

Preston Valley Donor Center Team Keeps North Dallas Collections Flowing Smoothly

Giving blood is personal mission for frequent neighborhood donors

As the saying goes, one key to success is location, location, location, and Carter BloodCare's Preston Valley Donor Center is in prime territory.

On the busy southwest corner of I-635/LBJ Freeway and Preston Road in North Dallas, the Preston Valley location typically processes 20 to 30 donors a day, with a weekly average of more than 120 donors.

The more important drivers of success, however, are the people who power the donor center.

"The way we take care of our donors and the welcoming environment created by our staff make a big difference," said Site Supervisor Laura Hernandez. "Everybody is very respectful toward one another and to our donors."

Staffing the North Dallas center with Hernandez are Phlebotomists 2 Julie Jiwani and Evelyn Yates, and Phlebotomists 1 Naidelin Acuna, Sarah Bothwell and Carla Leyva.

"We work great as a team," Hernandez said. "I can be taking care of a donor and another team member steps up and helps me. I don't even have to ask. What really describes us best is 'teamwork.'"



Phlebotomist 1 Naidelin Acuna processes donations at Carter BloodCare's Preston Valley Donor Center.

Blood donation: An act that bears repeating

The center, which opened its current facility in 2017, houses six donor beds for blood product collection, with two screening booths for general donations and one booth devoted to clinical apheresis.

“Sometimes we have all our beds running on Saturdays, which is great and exciting. Mondays and Wednesdays can be our slower days, but Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays are typically a bit busier for us,” Hernandez said.

Most of those visitors who keep the process flowing are repeat donors.

While the center sees many walk-ins, the majority of platelet, whole blood and therapeutic donors aren’t first-timers.

“A lot of our donors have been giving for years,” Hernandez said. “They live in the neighborhood or they work around the area and come in at lunch.”

The center provides free access to Wi-Fi, computer tablets and portable DVD players to make donating even more convenient for local professionals trying to maximize their lunch breaks.

Being sandwiched between a Brazilian steakhouse and a western wear store provides a handy point of reference for new visitors to the Preston Valley Donor Center.

“Sometimes donors call and ask us, ‘Where are y’all located?’ and it’s easy to tell them we’re right next door to Boot Barn off LBJ Freeway and Preston,” Hernandez said.

“They’re pretty good about trying to help a nonprofit,” she added, noting that neighboring businesses and restaurants in the open-air shopping center have assisted with donor awareness and outreach.

Of course, having a popular bakery only two doors down also has its sweet perks, for donors and center staff alike.

“Some of our frequent donors go to the bakery first to get some goodies, then they come in and say, ‘Oh, I brought y’all something,’” Hernandez said. “One platelet donor always goes over there before he donates. He says, ‘I just appreciate y’all so much for doing this.’ It’s very nice of him, but we’re even more grateful he’s a consistent donor.”



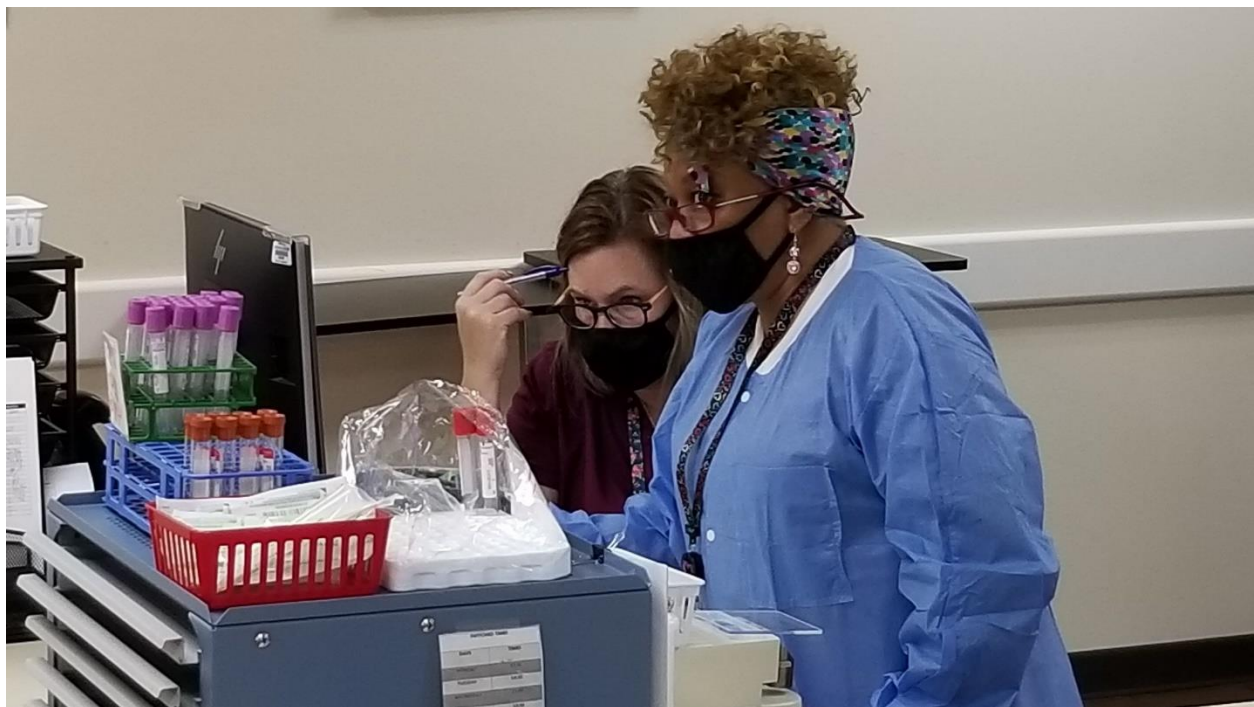
Laura Hernandez is site supervisor for the Preston Valley location.

Post-pandemic, the need for blood is greater than ever

That dedication and commitment from repeat donors has taken on even more importance, as Carter BloodCare continues to navigate a critical blood supply shortage.

The effects of the 15-month-long pandemic continue to ripple across the entire U.S. blood system, leading hospitals to make crucial decisions on which patients can receive much-needed blood and blood products.

“Just yesterday, a donor asked me, ‘Are you running low? Because every time [Carter BloodCare] calls me, that’s what they tell me,’” Hernandez said. “I do tell them, ‘Yes, we are low,’ because now that everybody’s out and about, they’re not actively thinking about making blood donations.”



Phlebotomist 1 Sarah Bothwell and Phlebotomist 2 Evelyn Yates are part of the dedicated team making the Carter BloodCare mission possible.

The traditional dip in summer giving further clouds a grim seasonal forecast.

“During the pandemic, we saw donors come in who were just ready to get out and get away from home. Even when it was raining, we were seeing donors coming in here,” Hernandez said.

“But now, everybody’s trying to take vacations, the kids are out of school, and that’s typically when we don’t see very many donors,” she said.

The critical need for blood, however, does not stop or take time off. If anything, it has become more relentless than ever.

That's an issue the Preston Valley team tries to emphasize with the community every day.

"We really try to educate all our donors on the importance of giving blood and becoming repeat donors, especially platelets," Hernandez said. "What I tell my donors here is, We just don't ever know if or when we're ever going to be on the receiving end. You want to do your part to make sure there's blood for everyone. Maybe a family member is in the hospital and they're in need of blood; that unit you donate can make all the difference."

Donors make it personal by giving to help others

Making a lifesaving difference is the main incentive for donors and it's often a deeply personal decision.

A longtime Carter BloodCare donor before joining the organization in 2013, Hernandez lost a family member to leukemia, which, she said, brought home the importance of donating.

She shared the story of one longtime platelet donor who faithfully comes to the center every two weeks to give in memory of his late wife.

Another donates whole blood every two months in honor of her late father and his dedication to helping others by giving blood.

"I think a lot of it has to do with our role models," Hernandez said. "Who do we look up to? Obviously, if it's our parents, we're following in their footsteps. They were donating blood, so we learn it must be really important, and that behavior carries on and affects so many lives."

The personal stories are different, but they share a united commitment to giving back to the community.

"When they tell me why they're donating, I do say, 'Thank you so much for coming in. You're doing a great thing,' because you are. You're saving three lives when you donate," Hernandez said.

"We share, you know?" added Yates, who has worked on the Carter BloodCare team for eight years. "They tell me their stories, I tell them a little bit of mine. You just kind of bond."

One donor in particular stood out for Leyva and the importance of her work as a phlebotomist.

"She came in to donate for her baby and that's pretty touching," Leyva said. "Knowing she came in to help her baby made me realize the impact that giving blood has."

It personifies Carter BloodCare's mission to save lives by making transfusion possible.

"I look at it like this: God gave me this job," said Yates. "Here, you're helping others, you're serving others."

For the dedicated team at the Preston Valley Donor Center, the true key to success is a powerfully personal one.

“We all chose to do this,” Hernandez said. “We’re here to make a difference. We’re saving lives.”

Details:

Carter BloodCare
Preston Valley Donor Center
[12829 Preston Road, Ste. 427](#)
Dallas, TX 75230
972-980-9210

Hours of operation:

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Monday – Friday | 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. |
| Saturday | 8 a.m. – 2 p.m. |
| Sunday | Closed |

The Carter BloodCare team at our Preston Valley Donor Center would love to see you and your friends for your next lifesaving donation to help local patients in need. To find additional donor centers near you, visit carterbloodcare.org or call/text 800-366-2834 for an appointment.

