



HEART OF GOLD

State President and Educator Exudes Passion for Community Service

By Kelli Smith

Jessica Hunter, CMA (AAMA), 2025-2026 AAMA state society president of Idaho, has had a passion for community—and community service—for as long as she can remember. “Ever since I was young, we’ve always been involved in charity stuff, whether it be church, community groups, or anything like that. My family has always participated in giving back to the community,” says Hunter.

Hunter’s upbringing was challenging. Her mom was a single mother of five children, and they struggled to make ends meet financially. “We relied a lot on help from the community, and I cannot tell you how impactful that was to get things—Thanksgiving dinner, Christmas dinner, even Christmas presents, or anything like that from the community,” says Hunter. “And so, charity work kind of really started way back then.”

Hunter’s medical assisting career path has proven insightful on how medical assisting and community service can go hand in hand in an immediate, person-to-person way.

When Hunter worked in pediatric

oncology, she’d often see families struggle financially and emotionally through their children’s cancer treatment.

“That cancer is expensive,” explains Hunter. “It is outrageously expensive for those treatments, and they’re doing anything and everything they can to try and keep their family intact ... and keep their children as healthy as they can. And that oftentimes means that one or both parents cannot work due to the amount of care that they have to provide for these kids.

“That’s where it kind of linked with me. Like, wait a second, I see it: I’m a medical assistant. I deal with these people all the time, and they’re sharing their stories with us on a daily basis. And who better to hear it than medical assistants, because we’re doing those intakes, building those bridges, and really communicating strongly with our community. So, we really know what their needs [are],” says Hunter.

So, Hunter began providing free meals at her husband’s restaurant to families of those who were undergoing cancer treatment. She wanted these families to be able to forget their worries for an evening and enjoy a free meal together.

“When you have that much debt and that many bills and that many concerns, the least of your worries is a night out with the family doing something fun, and oftentimes, going out to eat or anything like that is just a luxury at that point. So, it was kind of a fun thing to be able to do for couples and for families and to let them get out of the house for a minute,” she explains.

“All of us can do something [for others],” adds Hunter, whatever situation we’re in or the recipient is in. “I can’t tell you how many times I go through McDonald’s ... or I’m at the coffee shop and pay for the person behind me,” she explains. “I don’t know these people, but when it happens to me, it just lights me up, and I feel special for the day.”

GOOD INFLUENCES

Part of Hunter’s immense passion for the medical assisting field stems from her involvement in the AAMA. Her medical assisting educator was an advocate for the organization, which led Hunter to become an AAMA member in 2012. But that educator’s influence wouldn’t stop there.

After nearly a decade in oncology, Hunter began transitioning into education.

Her former medical assisting educator was retiring and showed Hunter the ropes. First, Hunter taught a phlebotomy course as an adjunct educator until a full-time position opened up. She went for it.

“I’ve been there just over six years at the College of Eastern Idaho,” says Hunter, “and I absolutely love teaching. I love seeing the new students and getting them inspired, and education is kind of creative. It’s fun, and I like that part of it.”

Naturally, as part of her role, she hosts at least one charitable event per year with her students. This year, they collected toys for Toys for Tots, in which the medical assisting students gathered over 1,000 toys for children in the community.

In 2025, they held a successful coat drive to provide warmth to individuals and families in need during the harsh winter months. In total, they collected over 150 coats and delivered them to the Idaho Falls Area Humanitarian Center, which provides resources such as food, clothing, and shelter to people in the region who are experiencing homelessness and financial hardship.

“My car was completely full,” recalls Hunter. “The students just were rock stars, and that kind of ... plants that little seed. So, when they go out into their [practices], and they see whatever the need is, they jump in and take ownership over it.”

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Hunter hopes the impact these charitable events have on her community and her students continues. To that end, Hunter urges her students to combine collective action and a medical assisting–dedicated community through joining the AAMA.

“They’re all members of the AAMA before they leave [the program],” she says.

“They all know about the community, and that’s why it’s so important for them to attend the state conference ... not only for the CEUs, but more so for the community. Because you get to see what’s out there; you get to see what other groups are doing.”

This year, Hunter hopes to bring some of her students to the AAMA Annual Conference. “That’s how we’re going to get more people into the AAMA. We show them how amazing their community is, and then they just want to do more. And that’s what happened to me. I went to that first [conference,] and then I was like, ‘Oh my gosh. I never want to not go again.’” she recalls.

Hunter further drives home the value of the AAMA community by encouraging her students to apply for AAMA scholarships, such as the Maxine Williams Scholarship, during her classes. “I made every single one of them apply,” she explains. Thanks to AAMA scholarships funded by the AAMA’s medical assisting community, students can experience a concrete, firsthand example of this community’s pay-it-forward nature.

LIFE LESSONS

Hunter emphasizes the key role that medical assistants play in the well-being of their communities: “We can’t change our community or our situation if we’re not aware of what’s going on. And as medical assistants, we are placed in the key center of our communities by being in our [practices], ... [so] you can see those deficits and where [patients are] at and advocate for them.”

If Hunter’s students can take away one thing from her medical assisting philosophy, it is this: “If you’ve made the choice to be a health care worker, you’ve made the choice to help your community,” she concludes. ♦



STUDENTS: ENTER THE EXCEL AWARDS

Educators, are your students involved in community service? Encourage them to apply for a new AAMA Excel Award category: the Medical Assistant Student Group Excellence in Community Service Award!

This award recognizes the best student group in health-related community service programs (e.g., health awareness walks or events, blood drives, and food drives). Submit entries via the AAMA website.

