“I won’t ever be done learning. There is something new to learn every year, and I am always interested in trying something different,” Scott Hoffman.

Walking the halls of a hospital can be lonely and frightening for patients and their families and friends. That’s the reason Alumnus Scott Hoffman ’08 works hard to make the hospital grounds at the Portland [Oregon] VA Medical Center a place of restoration and respite for those who need it.

Hoffman is the gardener for the medical center after transferring from his role as the gardener for the Williamette National Cemetery in Portland. Moving from the 250-acre cemetery to the much smaller grounds of the medical center gives Hoffman the opportunity to redesign much of the landscape for the thousands who see it every year.

“The 28 acre landscape at the VA Medical Center is 30-years old, and I am here to reshape it and add color,” Hoffman said. “I have only been in this position since June, but I have already been planning landscape projects that will incorporate color and add to the beauty of these grounds.”

He didn’t discover his interest in horticulture until late in high school. After serving in the Air Force, where he met his wife Kari, he knew he wanted to pursue a degree in the field. “I had not heard of the University of Minnesota Crookston until I started looking for a horticulture program,” Hoffman explains. “When I read the description and knew I would earn a U of M degree, I decided it was the best fit. Plus, the program hit all the important topics in horticulture, which is exactly what I wanted.”

When it came time for Hoffman’s internship, he was chosen by Disney World for the Epcot Plant Science internship where he was responsible for one of the four greenhouses. “I worked in the greenhouse where the focus was plants from the temperate region,” he recalls. “We had to keep them pristine because they are part of an exhibit for the guests. All the plants are part of an edible landscape. “

When the Hoffmans relocated to Vancouver, Wash., they moved from hardiness zone 3 to zone 8 and with that move came learning about new varieties of plants and flowers hardy to that zone. “I won’t ever be done learning,” he says. “There is something new
to learn every year, and I am always interested in trying something different. I enjoy everything from planting to pruning and especially like the artistry that goes into making a landscape work.”

After he graduated from the U of M Crookston, Hoffman went to work for Mount Saint Benedict managing the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) garden. When Kari accepted a position with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), they moved and he spent the first four months looking for a job before being hired by a family-run garden center. He enjoyed working in the nursery and with the customers in sales as well as assisting with plant health care.

When Hoffman accepted the position at Williamette, he took on the responsibilities for landscape maintenance, plant and tree care, and the designing and installation of landscapes. He particularly liked designing the cemetery’s front gate. “I used a flag as the center of my design and the inspiration for it came from the garden at the entrance to campus,” Hoffman says. Working for the VA Medical Center will give Hoffman even more opportunity for designing landscapes that will be a part of the healing process for many.

“When I left the military, I wanted to continue my federal service and the one job I really wanted was to work for the government as a gardener,” Hoffman says. “I am living my dream right now.”