College of Nursing – Then and Now

On Sunday, May 16, 1976, the College of Nursing’s first annual pinning ceremony took place in the Sancta Alberta Chapel. The first graduating class consisted of a dedicated group of 25 female students. This year marks the 40th anniversary of that milestone for Lewis University’s College of Nursing and Health Professions.

The College of Nursing (CON) expanded into the College of Nursing and Health Professions (CONHP) and now has much more to offer its students than it did 40 years ago. “Students in the department now are offered state-of-the-art simulation labs, enhanced clinical experiences, web-based learning experiences, computer testing, enhanced classroom technology and active organizations such as the Student Nurses Association (SNA) and Men Entering Nursing (MEN),” said Chair and Professor of the College of Nursing and Health Professions Dr. Peggy Rice.

The department has added several programs, tracks and concentrations in the last few decades.

According to Dr. Rice, the CONHP plans to keep expanding for future Flyers. Some of their goals include integrating a school nurse concentration into the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) curriculum, adding programs to the Health Professions curriculum and considering a Master of Public Health (MPH) program.

“If I look back at the CONHP in another 40 years, I would be pleased to know the college had met its goals of providing nurses who are well respected for their nursing practice in whatever setting they choose, trusted and respected by patients/clients and sought after by employers,” added Dr. Rice.

Katherine Heniff, listed in the program as Katherine Sajdak, is one of the students among the graduating class of 1976. Read her story on page 2.
Alumni Spotlight: Katherine Heniff

Born in Chicago, Heniff now has lived in Michigan for the last 33 years. She attended Thornton Community College for her freshman year. There, she met her husband, David, and got married in 1978. She is the mother of three sons – David, Michael and Joseph – and is now a proud grandmother.

This year marks 40 years as a nurse for Heniff. In total, she has 28 years of Obstetrical Nursing experience and 12 years of Out-Patient Surgical Nursing experience under her belt.

“I have loved every position I ever held over the years,” said Heniff. “I have always thought of being a nurse as a rewarding career like a gift from God, almost a calling.”

Her very first position was at St. Margaret Hospital in Hammond, Indiana in Labor and Delivery. After seven years and being transferred to Kalamazoo, Michigan, her love for Obstetrical Nursing brought her to a new position at the Family Birthing Center at Borgess Hospital. There, she cared for women while they labored and delivered their newborns. After another seven years, and another transfer, she began as a staff nurse for four years on the midnight shift and then was promoted to Assistant Nurse Manager for the next 10 years. After 28 years of OB Nursing/Management, Heniff decided to learn something new. She left OB to become the Team Leader for an out-patient surgery center in Troy, Michigan. It was the first time she was caring for male patients and children.

“I look back and reflect how many wonderful people I have met and cared for over the years,” said Heniff. “It was not easy to move our family around so I could seek new positions, but I truly feel I am a richer person for it. The experiences I had have given me wonderful memories and everlasting friendships.”

Heniff always wanted to study nursing in college. After attending a local junior college for her freshman year, her psychology instructor encouraged her to transfer to a four year college to earn a degree. So the search began.

She heard that Lewis College had recently opened enrollment to the female population and knew an old friend who was attending. She fell in love with the campus and everything it had to offer. The small size of the private college, location and the Catholic values in their teachings at Lewis drew really drew her in.

There were no computers so taking notes in long hand was the norm for students back then. They had one lab for practical learning and traveled to various neighborhood hospitals around the Lockport area. Uniforms consisted of blue dresses with white polished shoes.

Heniff remembers her original nursing class to be over 50 students. She recalled a fear among majority of the nursing students that they would graduate from a non-accredited college program. “I remember in our junior year, nursing students began to transfer to other nursing programs,” added Heniff. “I did not want to leave Lewis. I had patience and faith Lewis would succeed in their accreditation.”

She remained in the program and was part of Lewis University’s first College of Nursing graduating class in 1976.

“It is such a thrill to be part of the first graduating class!” exclaimed Heniff. “Our opinion counted. We were the trail blazers for future classes.”

Heniff wishes all current nursing students a rewarding career in which they enjoy caring for their patients. She encouraged students to face the challenges ahead, because it is worth it in the end.
Support Lewis Nursing Students
Did you know that you can direct your annual gift to the College of Nursing and Health Professions? Your gift can be directed towards the department or one of our many existing annual or endowed scholarships. A full list of the scholarships can be found at alumni.lewisu.edu/scholarships

To make a gift now, visit: alumni.lewisu.edu/GiveNow.

Get Involved

The Lewis University Nursing Alumni Network (LU-NAN) provides networking and professional development opportunities for nursing alumni. If you would like to get involved with LU-NAN, please contact the Office of Alumni Relations at alumni@lewisu.edu or (815) 588-7542. See all current alumni volunteer opportunities at alumni.lewisu.edu/volunteer.

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LU-NAN
launched a student-alumni mentoring program This provided graduating seniors an opportunity to speak with an alumnus that recently went through a similar transition into the nursing industry. The program pairs a current graduating senior with a recent graduate from the College of Nursing and Health Professions. The program was established by the Networking Committee from LU-NAN. If you would like to learn more about this program, please contact the Office of Alumni Relations at alumni@lewisu.edu or (815) 588-7542.

Mentoring Program Launches

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