

# THE TRADITION OF CARING

“The more things  
change, the more  
they stay the same.”

– *Alphonse Karr, from Les Guêpes, 1849*

When Karr wrote these words, the University of Evansville was five years away from being founded, and it would take 105 years before its nursing program would be established. Nevertheless, these words have proven to be prophetic for they accurately describe the field of nursing and the way the University prepares students for successful careers in the profession.

As the University community embarks upon the school's sesquicentennial celebration, its nursing faculty, students and alumni are preparing to celebrate a milestone of their own – the nursing program's 50th birthday. Nursing *has* changed, our graduates are a testimony to that. They have drawn upon their education to forge interesting and diverse career paths, some far outside the scope of what is considered traditional nursing.

## Guided by Concern

Linda E. White, president and chief executive officer of Deaconess Hospital in Evansville, is one of those graduates. Her career, however, began outside the scope of health care. Armed with a degree in mathematics, her first professional position was in computer programming. Before long something became clear to White – she had a deep concern for people and she wanted that concern to play an integral role in her professional life. So, she enrolled in the Deaconess School of Nursing.

White entered the nursing ranks at Deaconess Hospital and found she could use both her mathematics and her nursing skills as a nurse analyst. She evaluated nursing activities to determine the best, most efficient ways to deliver patient care.



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LINDA E. WHITE '76, M '83

*President and Chief Executive Officer of Deaconess Hospital*

# NURSING CELEBRATES 50 YEARS

Driven to do more, she coupled her work with more education at the University of Evansville, earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 1976 and a Master of Business Administration in 1983. She went on to fill such positions as director of medical/surgical nursing, vice president of nursing and chief operating officer before assuming the hospital's top post in February 2002.

Hers is a career path that has been varied and interesting. It illustrates how the nursing profession has changed and the array of opportunities that exist for nurses today. "Nursing is an open-ended profession," said White. "The opportunities are endless. Here within our city I know nurses who are business owners, faculty members, researchers, nurse midwives, nurse anesthetists and certified public accountants."

While the scope of her career has been dynamic, the focus for White has never changed. Each decision, each action and each task of her professional life has been steeped in one important commitment – caring for people. Her office is proof positive. Its shelves are brimming with photographs of smiling patients. Her desk is buried by stacks of letters from patients and family members, their messages poignant and heartfelt. She keeps those photos and letters close at hand. They represent something intangible, yet unmistakable, and she refers to them when important decisions are made. "Every decision is ultimately about quality care and concern for others. It is because I am a nurse that I am so acutely aware of this," White proudly proclaims.

## Beyond Traditional Roles

Jane Allen, chair of the University of Evansville's Department of Nursing and Health Sciences, concurs. "Linda exemplifies how our profession has changed. Nurses today go far beyond traditional roles, yet they are deeply rooted in the value of good, quality care." She

pulls out a file from her desk to further illustrate her point. "This is my Nicole file," she enthusiastically explains. The nearly two inch file with "Nicole" on its tab contains documents, application materials, recommendations and correspondence about Nicole Matheson, a 2001 University of Evansville nursing graduate. Matheson received a coveted Fulbright Fellowship and is currently studying transcultural nursing in Thailand.

The file also contains a number of faxes and printed e-mails, which is how Matheson communicates and corresponds with Allen and the department. It is a far cry from something else that Allen retrieved from her desk – a weathered, yellowed 1953-54 desk calendar belonging to the late Mildred Boeke, the department's first director. Her entries were in longhand and in pencil, a profound contrast to Matheson's electronic communication.

The file and the calendar are symbolic of both the advancements in the nursing profession and the tenets that have remained constant. Boeke's early leadership set the tone for something the department continues to embrace in its teaching today – the paramount importance of quality patient care by its nursing graduates. Matheson fully appreciates this, delivering quality care to people in an area of the world where it is in short supply. So does White, leading Deaconess Hospital's 2,500 employees to provide the same quality care to Evansville patients.

Both Matheson and White exemplify the progress and positive change that the profession has experienced. They also represent that which has remained steadfast and the reason the University of Evansville's Department of Nursing and Health Sciences is jubilantly celebrating its first 50 years.

Mildred Boeke's 1954-55 desk calendar

