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A photograph of a female nurse with brown hair in a ponytail, wearing pink scrubs and a stethoscope. She is gently holding a baby in light blue clothing. The nurse is looking down at the baby with a smile. The background is a plain, light color.

NURSES

the heart of health care

It's hard to imagine a world without nurses. Whether caring for patients in hospitals, schools, nursing homes, hospice facilities, or private homes, nurses are an essential thread in the fabric of health care. At some point in our lives, nearly all of us will depend on a nurse — and in that moment, the care they provide can make all the difference.

Nurses provide far more than medical assistance. They bring compassion, strength and an unshakable commitment to their patients' well-being. Whether holding a hand in a moment of fear, advocating for a patient's needs, or offering comfort to a worried family, nurses are there — often going above and beyond the call of duty.

Each year National Nurses Week is celebrated from May 6 through May 12, concluding on the birthday of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing. This week serves as a national reminder to recognize and appreciate the tireless work nurses do every day.

Here in Montana, nurses are deeply woven into our communities. They serve not just as health care professionals but as trusted neighbors, mentors and friends. Their work on the front lines of care and public health is invaluable.

This year, we're proud to spotlight 10 outstanding nurses nominated by the very people they serve. These professionals were recognized for their clinical excellence and embodying qualities such as empathy, patience, and unwavering dedication. From rural clinics to bustling emergency rooms, these individuals represent the very best of the nursing profession.

Selecting just 10 nurses was no easy task — but each nomination painted a picture of someone who has touched lives, brought comfort and made a lasting impact. Their stories are a testament to the powerful role nurses play in our lives.

This special section, "Nurses: The Heart of Health Care," is dedicated to them — and all nurses across Montana and the nation. During National Nurses Week, we honor their contributions, celebrate their compassion, and thank them for caring for us when we need it most.

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Celebrating Nurses Week: A Heartfelt Thank You

As we celebrate Nurses Week, we take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to the incredible nurses who dedicate their lives to caring for others. Your unwavering commitment, compassion, and expertise make a profound difference in the lives of patients and their families every day.

Nurses are the backbone of our healthcare system, providing essential care and support in countless ways. From administering medications and treatments to offering a comforting presence during difficult times, your contributions are invaluable. You work tirelessly, often under challenging circumstances, to ensure the well-being of those in your care.

This week, we honor and celebrate you. We recognize the sacrifices you make, the long hours you work, and the emotional strength you exhibit. Your dedication to your profession is truly inspiring, and we are grateful for the positive impact you have on our community.

To all the nurses, thank you for your hard work, your compassion, and your unwavering dedication. You are heroes, and we are privileged to have you as part of our healthcare team. Happy Nurses Week!

Sincerely,



Janet Harris,

*DNP, MBA, RN, CENP
VP, Chief Nursing Officer
Intermountain Health,
Peaks Region St. Vincent
Regional Hospital*



Dania Block,

*MSN, RN, NEA-BC
Chief Nursing
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LUPITA BORJA RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON

Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

From Lupita Borja's humble beginnings in Powell, WY, to becoming a cardiac telemetry nurse at St. Vincent's, she's always been driven by one simple goal: to help people in their most vulnerable moments. But beyond her professional accomplishments, Borja's story is also one of personal growth, resilience and a deep commitment to her family.

"My path to nursing began long before I graduated," Borja said. "There's a family video of me in kindergarten, and when someone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I said a nurse. And as I grew older, I never changed my mind."

What solidified her dream was not just the academic pursuit of nursing, but the personal experiences that showed her what it meant to care for someone. She saw how nurses cared for her family during medical emergencies.

"It wasn't just about the medical part — it was about how they showed up for us," Borja said.

After working as a certified nursing assistant for six years, Borja returned to school to earn her medical assistant degree, furthering her medical knowledge and skill set. In 2024, after completing her first year in nursing school, she earned her licensed practical nurse certification. Her continued commitment to her career culminated in her current role as a registered nurse, and she plans to further her education by obtaining a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) from Montana State University – Billings, a goal she plans to achieve by the summer of 2026.

"Becoming a cardiovascular intensive care unit nurse is my ultimate goal," Borja said. "I wanted to start small with cardiac telemetry because I think it's better to build a solid foundation. I'm a new nurse, so once I gain more experience and complete my BSN, I'll be ready to transition into the CVICU."

Borja's determination to excel at both work and school while being a present and single mother is a reflection of her work ethic. A daughter of immigrant parents, she recalls having to pull weeds for her dad in the bean and alfalfa fields when she was only five years old.

"I hated it," Borja said. "I can remember complaining about it and my mom would tell us that if we didn't like it, then to work harder — try harder in school ... and so I did and continue to do so. It stuck with me through nursing school and every tough moment. It reminds me where I come from and why I work so hard."

Her work and life experiences have taught her to ask questions, be a constant learner, keep her head down and remain focused.

Whether she's monitoring a patient after a heart attack or preparing them for open-heart surgery, Borja's dedication to her patient's physical and emotional well-being is evident in

everything she does. Her patients often describe her as a calm, reassuring presence during difficult moments.

"I try to treat every patient like family," Borja said. "That means taking the time to listen, explaining things clearly, and showing up in small ways, like offering a warm blanket or holding a hand. I believe compassion lives in the little things."



"I try to treat every patient like family."

Lupita Borja



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view nurses'
honoree
video

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STATS

EMPLOYER: Intermountain Health, St. Vincent Regional Hospital

NURSING PROGRAM: Northwest College

FOCUS: Cardiac telemetry

YEARS OF SERVICE: 10 months



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KIRSTEN CURTIS

BSN, RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON

Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

From a young age, Kirsten Curtis knew she wanted to be a nurse. At just six years old, she dreamed of caring for others, despite having no family history in the medical field. Today, as a dedicated labor and delivery nurse, she plays an integral role in one of the most significant moments of a person's life — the birth of a child.

Curtis' career began in neurology and medical-surgical nursing, followed by experiences in surgical units, the emergency room and post-anesthesia care. While she appreciated each specialty, she longed for a deep passion in her work. It wasn't until she transitioned to labor and delivery that she found her true calling.

"The sacred nature of birth and the profound impact of welcoming new life into the world resonated deeply with me, and I've never looked back," Curtis said.

As a labor and delivery nurse, Curtis' daily routine varies depending on her assignment. In triage, she evaluates multiple patients experiencing contractions or other pregnancy-related concerns. However, if she's caring for a woman in active labor, the staff is limited to caring for one patient, which provides one-on-one attention throughout the entire birthing process.

"I stay with my patients no matter what type of delivery they have until they go to postpartum," Curtis said. "If complications arise or additional procedures are needed — I'm still there, right by their side providing medical and emotional support."

For Curtis, the best part of her job is witnessing the miracle of birth. She finds immense joy in seeing the mom's hard work pay off after almost 10 months.

"There is something magical about

watching a baby be born," Curtis said. "And besides, who doesn't love a great birthday party? Witnessing a mom hold her baby for the first time is beautiful and a miracle. I always wonder what they'll look like or who they'll grow up to be."

However, the role also comes with challenges. Labor and delivery nurses experience the happiest and the most heartbreaking moments with their patients. Curtis shared that one of the most difficult aspects of nursing is maintaining healthy boundaries and emotional balance.

"It's nearly impossible to forget," Curtis said. "While I do my best to move forward, I always take home a little piece of their story no matter what. There's always a part of me that remembers ... it leaves a small imprint on my heart."

To Curtis, a nurse is much more than a medical professional. She shared that a nurse is a patient's advocate, someone who pays attention to every detail and ensures that each individual is treated holistically ... without judgment.

"Trust is key," Curtis said. "Delivering a baby is a vulnerable place. I try to connect with my patients immediately to make them feel comfortable and at ease."

Outside of work, Curtis considers her greatest accomplishment her family. As the mother of two young boys, she understands firsthand the beauty and chaos of parenthood. This personal experience allows her to connect with her patients on an even deeper level, especially those welcoming baby boys into the world.

Curtis knows that each new day brings hope and renewal. She focuses on guiding her patients through their birthing experience and making an impact for the most wonderful time in a patient's life.



STATS

EMPLOYER: Intermountain Health, St. Vincent Regional Hospital

NURSING PROGRAM: City College at Montana State University – Billings and Western Governors University

FOCUS: Labor and delivery

YEARS OF SERVICE: 9



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**"There is something magical
about watching a baby be born."**

Kirsten Curtis



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SHARLOTTE HARKINS RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON
Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

With a heart for service, a deep-rooted faith, and over 16 years of nursing experience, Charlotte Harkin's career is built on offering support and compassion to women in some of their most challenging moments.

Harkins' journey into nursing began long before she entered a hospital or clinic. She grew up on a cattle and sheep ranch, which led to a strong sense of responsibility. The experience of caring for animals, tending to their health, and nurturing them through difficult times had a profound impact on her.

"I always wanted to help animals, and that eventually led me to people," Harkins said.

This same nurturing spirit led Harkins to pursue a career in health care. Inspired by her mother, who worked as an EMT, and an aunt who was a nurse, her path to nursing became clear by the time she was a freshman in high school.

"I knew from an early age that I wanted to help others — it was a natural choice," Harkins said.

Harkins spent the first decade of her nursing career in various roles before realizing her true passion was in women's health. However, after the birth of her fourth child, she chose to pause her nursing career and stay home to raise her family — which evolved into six children.

"It wasn't until my children were grown that I felt the calling to return to nursing," Harkins said. "I prayed for guidance and doors to open, and

they did. I landed at LaVie Health, a pregnancy medical clinic, where I previously served as a patient advocate volunteer many years ago. I've been a clinical nurse there for over six years."

Harkins works with women facing unplanned pregnancies. Many of these women come from difficult circumstances — some are homeless, others are in abusive relationships, and many are unsure of where to turn for help. She provides support, education and resources to help them make informed decisions about their pregnancies.

"We see kids and teenagers from all ages, and we even perform sports physicals," Harkins said. "But our main focus is women that have unplanned pregnancies, and they're anywhere from teenagers to 20s. Our main goal is to treat them with unconditional love. Some women don't know they are treasured and precious, and we let them know they are."

Harkins performs limited obstetric ultrasounds, which are critical in determining the pregnancy's viability, the gestational age, and whether the pregnancy is inside the uterus (to rule out ectopic pregnancy). While the clinic does not perform abortions, their services like pregnancy tests, counseling, and some of the sexually transmitted infections (STIs) testing, are provided free of charge.

"Our appointments last an hour, which allows us to sit down and get to know the women," Harkins said. "We try to help them process their emotions and let them know they are

supported. Whether it's helping them find housing or connecting them with resources for abuse or counseling, we focus on their needs first."

Her role also includes educating the women about the three options they have: parenting, adoption and abortion. She shared that many women come to the clinic with no idea of what parenting might look like because they grew up in environments without stable, supportive families. She walks them through each option in depth.

For Harkins, it's not just a job — it's a calling. As a devout Christian, she believes her work is an extension of her faith.

"I pray all the way to work, asking God to use me to help these women," Harkins said. "Many of them are going through tremendous struggles, and they are hurting. I want them to leave feeling valued and cared for, and if they need to come back and see me every week — I'm here for them. We show zero judgment. After all, at some point in our lives, everyone has been in certain situations because of choices we've made or other people have made that affect us."

Harkins' story is one of dedication, faith, and an unyielding desire to help others. She is a beacon of hope for those who need it most and shows them through love and support that even the most difficult situations can lead to brighter days.

"I want to give them hope for the next day, and the next day — and the next day," Harkins said. "I'm only equipped to do this because of Jesus."



STATS



EMPLOYER: LaVie Health

NURSING PROGRAM: Miles Community College

FOCUS: Clinical Nurse

YEARS OF SERVICE: 16

"I knew from an early age that I wanted to help others — it was a natural choice."

Charlotte Harkins



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KALLIE LUSK

BSN, RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON

Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

With a deep-rooted passion for caring for others, Kallie Lusk has carved a unique path in the medical field, specializing in cancer care. Her journey, marked by empathy, hard work, and the ability to form meaningful connections with patients and their families, is truly inspiring.

“From an early age, I always knew I wanted to do something with people,” Lusk said. “I love having relationships with others and taking care of them. Nursing seemed like the obvious path, where I knew I could make a positive impact in the

lives of others.”

Lusk discovered cancer care during her nursing school rotations. She recalls how wonderful the nurses were and how much they loved their patients. Even more impressionable to Lusk was that the cancer patients were also amazing, along with their supportive families.

“During rotations, I knew instantly I wanted to work with cancer patients,” Lusk said. “The patients, the families, the staff – everyone was so family-oriented, and I wanted to be a part of that. Our team’s approach to patient care is collaborative, and the bonds we form with patients are meaningful.” ➔



STATS

EMPLOYER: Billings Clinic

NURSING PROGRAM: Montana State University – Bozeman

FOCUS: Inpatient cancer care

YEARS OF SERVICE: 5



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KALLIE LUSK, continued

Working on the inpatient cancer care floor, Lusk has learned firsthand about the unique challenges that cancer patients face. Many arrive in the emergency department with severe symptoms but don't realize they have cancer.

"When they come up to our floor from the ED, we'll do biopsies and find out their cancers and start their treatments pretty immediately," Lusk said. "Others may already know they have cancer but require new treatment options after their current regimen stops working. Some of our patients stay a few nights ... others stay for weeks."

Cancer care is emotionally demanding, and Lusk does not shy away from the emotional connections that come with it — she embraces them. This deep attachment is both a challenge and a reward. While the emotional toll of witnessing patients struggle through

illness can be tough, she finds strength in knowing that she and her team provide essential support during some of the most difficult moments in their patients' lives.

"I get attached to my patients, and I think about them even when I'm not at work," Lusk said. "They're like family to me."

To help manage the emotional strain of her job, she finds solace in outdoor activities. Lusk enjoys camping, fishing and hiking. It's a way for her to debrief and clear her head. By taking time for herself, Lusk returns to her work with renewed energy and the ability to offer her patients the best care possible.

Lusk's accomplishments extend beyond her nursing career as she treasures her role as an "auntie." With four nephews and a few baby chickens to dote on, she balances her demanding career with time spent creating joyful memories with her family.

"Being an auntie to my nephews is my favorite thing in the world."

Her coworkers describe her as someone who brings joy and light into the workplace — someone who can be heard singing, laughing and sometimes even dancing with patients. Lusk is known for her positive attitude and her efforts to lift patients' spirits, which may include sprinkling glitter in a patient's room to brighten their day.

"It's all about showing compassion and kindness," Lusk said. "I had a dear friend and colleague share a simple, but powerful

piece of advice — kindness always matters. No matter how challenging the day, being kind will always win. No matter how exhausted or frustrated I am, kindness is always the key to making an impact."

Nursing is a career that demands so much from those who choose it. It requires emotional strength and an unwavering commitment to the well-being of others. Whether Lusk is administering chemotherapy, offering a comforting word, or simply being there for her patients in their darkest moments, she is a testament to the power of kindness.

"I get attached to my patients, and I think about them even when I'm not at work."

Kallie Lusk



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MARY JO MILLER

BSN, RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON

Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

Mary Jo Miller's path to nursing began with a personal health scare during her junior high years. Hospitalized to rule out meningitis, she was influenced by the compassionate care of the nurses who attended to her. Their kindness and attentiveness left a lasting impression, inspiring her to pursue a career in nursing.

"I was super sick with a high fever and stiff neck," Miller said. "That was my first experience in a hospital, and I was infatuated with the nurses. They took such an interest in me and made me feel so wonderful. I remember thinking ... wow, what a great job."

It wasn't until high school that she solidified her decision to become a nurse. She took a health occupations class where students could choose a profession to shadow, and Miller chose a hospital.

"That was a great class and opportunity," Miller said. "An opportunity that clinched the deal for me."

Graduating in 1979, Miller faced initial challenges securing a nursing position within a hospital due to limited openings. Undeterred, she began her career in Jamestown, ND, working in a chemical dependency unit. After a year, she moved to Wahpeton, ND, to support her husband's educational path and worked at a rehabilitation and nursing facility. Despite gaining valuable experience, her aspiration remained to work as a registered nurse in a hospital setting.

"It's surprising to reflect on a time when there were no nursing positions open in a hospital, and yet today, we are in desperate need of nurses," Miller said. "I found both positions interesting and learned, of course ... but I wasn't satisfied and wanted to use the skills that I learned in nursing school in a hospital."

In 1984, upon moving to Billings, Miller achieved her goal by joining St. Vincent Hospital

as an oncology nurse. For over six years, she honed her skills and developed a deep connection with her patients. However, when an opportunity arose in the mother-newborn unit, Miller jumped at the chance and found her true calling as a mother-baby nurse. Miller dedicated the remainder of her career to caring for new mothers and their infants until she retired in late March.

"I love caring for new moms and their newborns, and I love the people I work with," Miller said. "I get emotional talking about it because I know when I read this article, I will be retired."

Reflecting on her career, Miller expressed profound gratitude for the relationships built with colleagues and the privilege of witnessing the miracle of birth. She emphasized the profound joy and fulfillment she found in supporting families during such a pivotal moment in their lives.

"The birth of a baby is such a miracle, and it's such a happy and uplifting floor to work on," Miller said. "Yes, there are sad times, which can be hard for me. I try not to bring it home with me, but invariably, I'll think about what happened all evening and right before bed. I'm a firm believer in prayer, and that's all I can do with such sadness ... is pray for my patients and their family members. Thankfully, the happy times far outweigh the sad times."

Miller reflects on her 46-year nursing career with pride, cherishing her many accomplishments — being the first in her family to graduate from college and raising three children among them.

"My approach to life is pretty simple: I treat people the way I'd hope to be treated," Miller said.

Even when her dreams of working in a hospital setting were delayed, Miller pressed on with unwavering tenacity, continually learning and growing. Her journey highlights the profound impact of compassionate care and the vital role perseverance plays in nursing.



"I love caring for new moms and their newborns, and I love the people I work with."

Mary Jo Miller



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honoree
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STATS

EMPLOYER: Intermountain Health, St. Vincent Regional Hospital

NURSING PROGRAM: University of Jamestown

FOCUS: Mother Newborn

YEARS OF SERVICE: 46



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ERIN MOSNESS RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON
Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

Nursing is more than just a career—it's a calling, one that Erin Mosness couldn't ignore.

For Mosness, the path to becoming a nurse was anything but straightforward. From a background in interactive media design to health care to restaurant management and finally, back to health care, her journey exemplifies resilience and a desire to care for others.

When she graduated from high school, Mosness moved to Florida and pursued her other passion — art, which led to earning an associate's degree and working in the design industry. While she enjoyed the creativity of that field, she knew something was missing.

"I didn't feel fulfilled at the time," Mosness said. "I'm very empathetic and love caring for people ... that's what I wanted to do. When I moved back to Billings, I began my health care journey as a certified nursing assistant and later as a licensed practical nurse — both in rehabilitation."

Along the way, Mosness has had some life roadblocks, which led her to manage a restaurant for several years. However, she never let go of her dream to become a registered nurse and with her renewed sense of purpose, eventually overcame the challenges in her life, came back to the health care field and passed her nursing boards last summer.

"I don't want to get into details, but I've had quite a life so far ... it's been hard," Mosness said. "I'm so glad I never gave up. I love my coworkers, and the environment is so positive. It's such a great place to work."

Mosness finds joy in watching her patients recover. As a rehabilitation nurse for six months, she plays a crucial role in her patients' healing journey. She collaborates with speech therapists, physical and occupational therapists and dietitians, ensuring that each patient follows their prescribed treatment plan.

"The beautiful thing about rehab is that most people get better," Mosness said. "For example, they may arrive in a wheelchair but leave using a walker. I oversee all facets of their care."

But beyond the medical aspect and helping her patients heal, she also enjoys the human connection. "I'm all about bringing light into other people's lives, and that light comes from God. I also believe everyone needs a human touch, whether a hug or a little pat on the back."

While nursing requires empathy, it also demands a strong will and emotional resilience. Her dedication extends beyond the workplace. As a single mother, she prioritizes a work-life balance, choosing a schedule that allows her to be there for her daughter while maintaining her passion for nursing.

"I have to set healthy boundaries because I have a daughter at home who needs me — I need to be present for her," Mosness said.

With a heart filled with ambition, Mosness remains committed to growing in her nursing career. She's an inspiration to aspiring nurses and wants to make a meaningful impact in the lives of others. Her journey is a testament to the power of perseverance, proving that no matter the obstacles, one can always find their way back to their passion.



"The beautiful thing about rehab is that most people get better."

Erin Mosness



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STATS

EMPLOYER: The Rehabilitation Hospital of Montana

NURSING PROGRAM: City College at Montana State University - Billings

FOCUS: Rehabilitation

YEARS OF SERVICE: 8.5



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CARA FAIRBANKS

BSN,
RN-BC,
MSW

BY JENNIFER L. MASON

Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

From an early age, Cara Fairbanks was fascinated by how the mind and body work together, and that passion guided her to psychiatric nursing. Her interest peaked during a high school psychology class, where she was captivated by the subject and drawn to the idea of helping others. She considered various fields within health care, but psychiatric nursing stood out and her clinical rotation solidified that choice.

"I fell in love with it," Fairbanks said. "I enjoyed sitting in on the group sessions, and assessments, and seeing how we could help patients holistically." She knew then that psychiatric nursing was where she belonged.

Today, Fairbanks is a board-certified charge nurse in a psychiatric unit, taking on leadership responsibilities while continuing to provide direct patient care. She helps manage the department's workflow, oversees staffing and scheduling, and ensures patients receive the critical care they need.

"Psychiatric patients often arrive in crisis — many are at risk of harming themselves or others. However, some people don't realize we also treat medical conditions alongside psychiatric illnesses," Fairbanks said. "Some patients come in with wounds, exposure-related health issues, or chronic conditions like diabetes."

The work is intense, but Fairbanks thrives in the environment. She describes her team as a family, bonded by the challenges and triumphs of their shared work. Fairbanks takes pride in their ability to provide cutting-edge treatments and the strong support system they've built for each other.

Fairbanks is working on her master's

degree to become a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner. It's a role that will allow her more independence in patient care, including the ability to prescribe medication. She hopes to continue her career at Billings Clinic, where she has built strong relationships and feels a deep connection to her work.

Despite the emotional weight of her profession, Fairbanks remains lighthearted.

"I don't take myself too seriously," Fairbanks said. "Whether it's playing small pranks on coworkers or keeping the mood upbeat, I believe humor and positivity are essential in an environment where patients struggle with severe mental health issues."

Outside of work, Fairbanks finds her greatest joy in being a mother. She recognizes the challenges of balancing a demanding career with family life, but she believes nursing is an ideal profession for mothers because of its flexibility and opportunities for growth. Her daughter is even considering following in her footsteps.

When asked how she has grown throughout her career, Fairbanks points to confidence. Early on, she frequently questioned herself, always seeking ways to improve. Over time, she has developed the assurance and leadership skills that make her a strong presence in her department.

"Nursing is the most rewarding career you could ever choose," Fairbanks said.

"It's constantly evolving, and there are so many directions you can go. You're always learning, always growing."

With her deep passion, strong sense of purpose, and unwavering commitment to her patients, Fairbanks is not just a nurse — she's a force for hope and healing in the world of psychiatric care.



STATS

EMPLOYER: Billings Clinic

NURSING PROGRAM: Montana State University

FOCUS: Inpatient psychiatry

YEARS OF SERVICE: 12



"Nursing is the most rewarding career you could ever choose."

Cara Fairbanks



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BECKY WEGNER

BSN, RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON

Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

Becky Wegner's path to nursing started long before she became a registered nurse. Growing up, she was exposed to the world of health care through her mother, who worked as an EMT. From a young age, her mom taught her how to take blood pressure and listen to heart sounds, laying the foundation for a career in helping people.

Wegner had another front-row seat in health care in high school, where she worked as a medical assistant in a doctor's office. During these formative years, she realized her passion for the medical field. However, it wasn't until she became a mother that she considered a career in nursing.

"I had a baby that was born very sick and required specialized care at Denver Children's Hospital," Wegner said. "During my daughter's 10-week stay in the NICU, I was impressed by the nurses who cared for her. The compassion, skill, and strength these nurses showed sparked a deeper passion in me to pursue a career where I could make an impact, just as those nurses had done for my family."

Once her children were old enough to be in school, Wegner enrolled in nursing school. Despite being considered a nontraditional student, she embraced the challenge, balancing her studies with the demands of raising a family. It was no small feat, but Wegner's determination paid off, and she soon found herself working as a nurse.

Wegner's career in nursing took

root in the emergency department (ED) of Stillwater Community Hospital, later acquired by Billings Clinic and became Stillwater Billings Clinic. Initially, she started as a licensed practical nurse and worked in various areas, including the emergency department and the acute care floor. It was in the fast-paced environment of the ED where Wegner discovered her true calling.

"I think it was the adrenaline rush that I couldn't get enough of," Wegner said. "And 19 years later, I'm still in emergency care. Whether it's caring for patients involved in car accidents or treating life-threatening injuries, I thrive off of the energy and urgency of emergency care."

Over the years, Wegner's role has evolved, and she has since become a charge nurse, a leadership position where she manages the daily operations of the ED and oversees staff. Despite her leadership role, Wegner has remained grounded in her passion for hands-on patient care.

One of the unique aspects of her work is the strong bond she shares with her community. Working in a small town means that many of the patients she treats are not just people she meets in an emergency — they're people she's known for years. Whether it's a neighbor, a friend's child, or a long-time acquaintance, Wegner's connection to her patients makes her care even more meaningful.

"I like taking care of our community members," Wegner said. "Most of them I've known all my life.

The connections I have are both a privilege and a challenge."

Wegner admits this makes it harder to stop thinking about her patients long after her shift ends, wondering how they're doing. However, she finds balance by staying busy at home, where she and her husband run an auto mechanics business and manage their family farm.

"There's always something for me to do," Wegner said. "And while the distraction and busyness help, I still think about my patients all the time."

Wegner's leadership extends beyond her charge nurse duties. She also picks up shifts as an intake nurse in the endoscopy program. Additionally, Wegner serves as a pediatric champion for the hospital, ensuring that the facility remains credentialed to care for pediatric patients.

"As the pediatric champion, I make sure we remain pediatric capable ... and that we always have the supplies to receive a pediatric patient, treat the patient and ship the patient," Wegner said. "While we don't keep pediatric patients on our acute floor very often, we do see them in the ED."

During her nursing career, she has learned to stand firm with all her responsibilities while advocating for herself and her staff — all leadership qualities. Wegner's confidence and calming style are her greatest strengths, which allow her to confront challenging situations head-on.

"You have to be calm and caring in the ED," Wegner said. "Humor helps too. If you don't laugh about it, it will eat you up."



STATS



EMPLOYER: Stillwater Billings Clinic

NURSING PROGRAM: City College at Montana State University - Billings and Chamberlain University

FOCUS: Emergency Department and Acute Care

YEARS OF SERVICE: 19

"I like taking care of our community members."

Becky Wegner



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CHRIS TANNER

BSN, CCRN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON

Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

For Chris Tanner, the journey into health care was shaped by a passion for public service, emergency medicine and a deep desire to help people in their most vulnerable moments. With years of experience in both emergency medical services and intensive care, Tanner has built a career that reflects dedication, resilience and continuous learning.

Inspired by his aunt and uncle's service as firefighters, Tanner's path to nursing began as a firefighter EMT. He started as a volunteer and eventually took on a full-time role while pursuing his education. Though initially considered public health, he found that nursing offered a more direct way to integrate his skills and interests.

During his time at a critical access hospital in Wyoming, Tanner gained invaluable skills handling a wide range of cases in an environment that required adaptability and strong critical-thinking skills. Those experiences led to his desire to transition to the intensive care unit (ICU). He knew the ICU required a high level of expertise, and the ability to make quick decisions ... and he was ready for the challenge.

"During the pandemic, there were plenty of job openings in the ICU and it presented an opportunity for me to step into that field," Tanner said. "My background as an EMT and emergency care proved to be an asset. It was the perfect time to try it out."

A typical shift for Tanner in the ICU consists of caring for one to two critically ill patients, a ratio that allows nurses to provide focused and meticulous care. Whether patients arrive from emergency rooms, scheduled surgeries, or outside facilities, ICU nurses must remain vigilant, monitoring their patients closely and anticipating potential complications.

"I get to know my patients and their families very well," Tanner said. "Some patients stay for a long time ... others get better quicker. Regardless of how long they need to stay, I enjoy forming those close relationships."

The emotional toll of working in the ICU can be

significant. Tanner has learned over the years to compartmentalize, allowing him to provide the best care possible without carrying the weight of every case home with him.

"At first, it wasn't that way," he admitted. "During my time as an EMT, I took home many emotions and images. When you're on the frontline like that — nothing is edited. It's taken years to be able to turn that off in my brain, but ultimately, I take care of my sick patients ... know I did my best, and then move on from there."

Becoming an ICU nurse was no easy feat. The transition required a rigorous three- to six-month orientation process, where new nurses are paired with experienced nurses to develop time management, prioritization and advanced patient care skills. For Tanner, completing ICU orientation was one of his proudest achievements.

"The ICU orientation is intense and there's a lot to learn," Tanner said. "The orientation is hefty for sure and you definitely need to be thorough and a critical thinker."

Beyond the technical skills, he believes that the most crucial qualities for a nurse are compassion, kindness and the ability to connect with patients.

In addition to nursing, Tanner enjoys working in construction a couple of days a week — a trade he has been involved in for over 20 years. This combination of skills has given him a unique perspective on health care versus hands-on craftsmanship.

"Nursing is stable ... a constant job," Tanner said. "It's a profession where you can make a tangible difference in people's lives. You also get to know your patients, be exposed to cutting-edge medical treatments and have opportunities to grow. I especially enjoy my elderly patients. I like to hear their stories and what makes them tick."

Tanner's journey exemplifies the adaptability and compassion that define the nursing profession. From his beginnings in emergency medical services to his current role in the ICU, he continues to impact lives — one patient at a time.



**"I get to know my patients
and their families very well."**

Chris Tanner



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STATS

EMPLOYER: Intermountain Health, St. Vincent Regional Hospital

NURSING PROGRAM: Central Wyoming Community College and Capella University

FOCUS: Intensive Care Unit
YEARS OF SERVICE: 10

JOEY TRAYWICK RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON
Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

For Joey Traywick, the road to becoming a nurse was anything but conventional. His journey, marked by shifts in career aspirations and an unwavering commitment to making a difference, highlights the profound impact of the nursing profession.

Before nursing, Traywick pursued acting for several years. However, he felt his comedic personality and ability to bring joy to others were trapped. While acting may seem like an unusual prelude to a nursing career, he sees a clear connection.

"I realized I could still make people laugh, even at death's door," Traywick said. "I didn't want to give up being funny and knew that nursing would provide me with a variety of audiences and opportunities."

Armed with a bachelor's degree in exercise science, Traywick's first stint in the health care field was as an exercise physiologist in the cardiac rehabilitation department at Billings Clinic. He envisioned his future in that role — until he observed the nurses around him.

"I noticed they had a varied experience at work, and I liked what I saw," said Traywick. "They were excited to be at work, engaged and knowledgeable — I wanted those things too."

This realization led him to pursue his licensed practical nurse certification and later his registered nurse degree.

The journey wasn't always easy. While working full-time in the emergency department as a licensed practical nurse, he juggled family responsibilities and education. Traywick shared how his wife, Cece, played a crucial role in keeping everything together.

"I was working relentlessly, trying to go to school to become a registered nurse, raise kids and stay married," Traywick said. "My wife was a rock through it all."

After becoming a registered nurse, he transitioned to the post-anesthesia care unit (PACU) at Billings Clinic. The shift was intentional as he sought a balance between the adrenaline rush of the emergency department and a calmer and more stable environment. He playfully shared that patients in the PACU wake up



STATS

EMPLOYER: Billings Clinic

NURSING PROGRAM: City College at Montana State University - Billings

FOCUS: Post-anesthesia care unit (PACU)

YEARS OF SERVICE: 16



from surgery in a rather agreeable mood.

"In the emergency department, you're wrestling with a variety of patients and circumstances and with that comes different behaviors," Traywick said. "Nine out of 10 times, things go pretty smoothly when a patient wakes up in the PACU and is recovering, but that one time keeps me on my toes and engaged."

As someone who loves to laugh and wants to make others laugh, it comes natural for Traywick to include humor at the bedside. Whether there are highs or lows during his shift, it's the human



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JOEY TRAYWICK, continued

connection that makes nursing the most rewarding for him. He shared how he would rather make patients smile and laugh than bring them a warm blanket. “I don’t want to miss out on lifting someone up because it can be an emotional rollercoaster,” Traywick said. “I want to make a difference. I wear a lanyard every shift that was gifted to me from the wife of a patient who died of COVID – it’s an everyday reminder of why I do what I do.”

Reflecting on his career, Traywick acknowledges that nursing has humbled him. He’s learned to slow down, connect and bring calmness into the room. His advice for aspiring nurses? Be empathetic. Through his journey, Traywick embodies what it means to be a nurse – selfless, resilient and deeply human. His story is a testament to the impact of nursing and the people who dedicate their lives to it.

“In the emergency department, you’re wrestling with a variety of patients and circumstances and with that comes different behaviors.”

Joey Traywick



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2025 NOMINEES

Nominee	Place of Work
Amanda Anderson	Stillwater Billings Clinic
Anne Van Ballegooyen	Intermountain Health
Ashley Vickery	Billings Clinic
Brianna Comer	Billings Clinic
Ginna Ross	Billings Clinic
Jeanne Maciag	Rosebud County Health Care Center
Jeanne Logan	Intermountain Health
Katie Erb	Billings Clinic
Kelly Bourgeois	Retired in Bridger
Kristi Williams	LaVie Health
Lindsey Grabowska	Stillwater Billings Clinic
Mackenzie Carlson	Billings Clinic
Anne Van Ballegooyen	Intermountain Health
Annie Shaver	Intermountain Health
Annie Shaver	Intermountain Health
Cristina Rivera Feliciano	Indian Health Service
Debbie Rang	Intermountain Health
Ellie Hanser	The Rehabilitation Hospital of Montana
Kallie Lusk	Billings Clinic
Kari Fox	Billings Clinic

Nominee	Place of Work
Michaela Wall	Billings Clinic
Sam Miller	RiverStone Health
Sarah Black	Intermountain Health
Sarah Meuchel	LaVie Health
Tasha Fligge	Self Employed
Tela Schwartz	Billings Clinic
Tom “TC” Coble	Billings Clinic
Merilee Cole	Intermountain Health
Amber Mille	Intermountain Health
Cory Steiner	Intermountain Health
Sarah Eickert	Intermountain Health
Kari Waleri	DCI Big Sky
Kayla Lemire-Phillips	Billings Clinic
Kendall Eliasson	Billings Clinic
Leah Vossler	Billings Clinic
Lisa Marie Allen	Indian Health Service
Pamela Power Barr	Intermountain Health
Shelly Tenbrooke	Billings Clinic
Sunny Lone Bear	Fort Washakie Health Center



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