

The MONTANA STANDARD MAY 2023



# NURSES

*the heart of health care*



CELEBRATING NATIONAL NURSES WEEK MAY 6-12, 2023

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## Nurses are always on the front lines of health care.

But with COVID-19 – there isn't a single community in Montana that would have made it through the pandemic without nurses. Thank you to every nurse – for all you do every day, and for all you have done to help us navigate this crisis.

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# NURSES

*the heart of health care*

**T**hroughout Montana, nurses help to provide the baseline of care in our communities. Serving at the front line for public health, there's no overstating their importance and significance in making our lives as long and healthy as possible.

National Nurses' Week is an opportunity to thank and give back to nurses everywhere, with specific dates for National Student Nurses Day (May 8), National School Nurse Day (May 10), and International Nurses Day (May 12). The annual event's conclusion coincides with the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birthday.

In tandem with this event, Nurses: The Heart of Health Care celebrates those who choose a career of compassion in the nursing field, and recognizes the dedication of nursing staff across the state of Montana. Ten profiles of outstanding nurses are featured, nominated by their communities for making an extraordinary difference in people's lives.



MEAGAN THOMPSON, THE MONTANA STANDARD

Montana Technological University nursing student Sidnee Skelton gives a woman the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at the Butte Civic Center in 2021.

From numerous submissions, nine nurses were selected by a panel of judges from The Montana Standard, as well as Karen Van Daveer of Montana Tech and Father Patrick Beretta. The 10th selection, Readers' Choice, was voted on by the community. Presented in no particular order, these nursing profiles give insight into those who give so much of themselves, and offer thanks for their dedication to a field fraught with obstacles.

Nurses Week is already a time to recognize nurses and their profession, but since the pandemic it's crucial to celebrate these invaluable people. Simple gratitude and respect are essential in these times of incredible stress and a constantly evolving health care environment.

This fifth-annual edition of Nurses: The Heart of Health Care is made possible by The Montana Standard, statewide sponsor Blue Cross Blue Shield of Montana, and supporting sponsor City Brew.

Submissions have been edited for clarity.

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## THANK YOU TO OUR NURSES!

★ READERS' CHOICE AWARD

CATHERINE HARRINGTON

St. James  
Healthcare



Why did you become a nurse?

I always knew I wanted to be in the medical field. After high school I went to Carroll College and got a degree in psychology, then after talking with friends and family members who were nurses, I decided to go to Montana Tech for nursing school.

What was one of your most memorable nursing experiences?

One of my most memorable experiences as a nurse was when I was a new grad, and I got to watch someone's eyes be harvested for donation.

What skills are most important for nurses?

I think some skills that are really important for nurses are to make patients feel comfortable and talk to them about all the plans of care for the day.

What is the best advice you can give?

The best advice I can give any nurse is to know what you don't know, and always ask questions if you're unsure of anything, especially if you are a new nurse.

What does it take to be a nurse in challenging times?

Being a nurse in challenging times is not possible without having people to talk to and surrounding yourself with a good support system. I think this past year, I really got a new perspective on nursing after my husband was in a really bad car accident. I saw firsthand how scary it can be to have your loved one in the hospital, and after he was released, I was the one taking care of him and helping him to get back to his old self. This helped me to better empathize with my patients.

MEAGAN THOMPSON, THE MONTANA STANDARD  
Catherine Harrington is photographed outside of St. James Healthcare where she works as a nurse.

STATS

YEARS OF SERVICE:  
2

CURRENT POSITION:  
Nurse on the 3rd floor at St. James



# STACEY HARPER

Montana Facial Surgery,  
Dr. Kaufman's office



MEAGAN THOMPSON, THE MONTANA STANDARD

Stacey Harper, a nurse for Dr. Kaufman at Montana Facial Surgery, is photographed in an exam room at the Butte facility.

## Why did you become a nurse?

I've always wanted to be a nurse as far back as I can remember, and I love to help people. Great job to have because of the variety of positions and you can work anywhere as a nurse!

## What was one of your most memorable nursing experiences?

I've many amazing memories and stories, too many to recount here.

## What skills are most important for nurses?

Communication, patience, a sense of humor, problem solving, ability to care for people no matter what, compassion but able to set boundaries. All the clinical skills. Lots of continuing education.

## STATS

### YEARS OF SERVICE:

28

### CURRENT POSITION:

RN at Montana Facial Surgery

## What does it take to be a nurse in challenging times?

An abundance of patience, tolerance, flexibility, compassion, teamwork and collaboration, critical thinking/decision making, time management and many more.

## Any final thoughts?

Nursing can be a very challenging and rewarding profession if you are up for it.

# Congratulations Stacey Harper

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## LISA MCLEAN

St. James  
Family Birth Center**Why did you become a nurse?**

It really is a calling. I felt that. It is a gift, to me, and to others. Caring for others, especially in their most vulnerable times, fulfills me.

**What was one of your most memorable nursing experiences?**

I was blessed with a unique opportunity to teach basic nursing care to a group in Africa caring for AIDS patients. In the very best way, that experience and those people are etched in my memory.

**What skills are most important for nurses?**

Increasingly more complex skills are required, but the most important are patience, kindness, and empathy.

**What is the best advice you can give?**

Take care of yourselves and each other. Be Kind.

**What does it take to be a nurse in challenging times?**

More. More patience, more love, more perseverance, more self care.

**Any final thoughts?**

Remember to take Care of the Care-takers. We are so innately focused on caring for others that we forget that we are human too. It is important that we respect that and take care of ourselves as well.

**MEAGAN THOMPSON, THE MONTANA STANDARD**

Lisa McLean, a registered nurse at St. James, is photographed in the labor and delivery unit at the Butte hospital.

**STATS**

**YEARS OF SERVICE:**  
33

**CURRENT POSITION:**  
Maternal/Child OB RN at St. James  
Family Birth Center



# AMBER AUTENRIETH

New Hope Clinic

## Why did you become a nurse?

I'm a caregiver at heart. I love helping people. Being a support for patients and their families during very personal times in their lives brings me joy and fulfillment.

## What was one of your most memorable nursing experiences?

I have two most memorable nursing moments. The first is having the skills to take care of my premature twins and their many health needs as infants and toddlers; the second was being able to take care of my mom as she was battling cancer.

## What skills are most important for nurses?

The most important skills a nurse needs are love, compassion and knowing sometimes just listening is the best thing we can do to help.

## What is the best advice you can give?

Treat everyone with respect no matter who they are.

## What does it take to be a nurse in challenging times?

Being a nurse today is hard, mentally and emotionally. I feel you need a strong inner circle of people and a strong faith.

## Any final thoughts?

I am so thankful for the flexibility nursing has given me over the years and the opportunity to work in many different areas of nursing. I am very happy where I am, but excited to see where my nursing journey takes me in the future.



MEAGAN THOMPSON, THE MONTANA STANDARD

Amber Autenrieth, a licensed professional nurse and nurse manager at New Hope Pregnancy Center, is photographed in an exam room at the Butte facility.

## STATS

### YEARS OF SERVICE:

19

### CURRENT POSITION:

Nurse Manager at New Hope Clinic

“Being a nurse today is hard, mentally and emotionally. I feel you need a strong inner circle of people and a strong faith.”

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# TINA SULLIVAN

Easterseals-Goodwill  
Highlands Hospice



## Why did you become a nurse?

I became a nurse because I had a desire to help care for and serve people.

## What was one of your most memorable nursing experiences?

I have had a lot of memorable moments in my nursing career so far. The first one that comes to my mind is I was a pediatric nurse, and I was taking care of an infant that had meningitis. She was very ill, and we were trying everything we could to treat her. She ended up recovering from this thankfully. Years later I received a very nice thank you card from her. I eventually was able to meet her, and she had grown into a healthy beautiful young lady.

## What skills are most important for nurses?

The skills that I feel are most important for nurses are compassion, good communication skills, hardworking, patience and perseverance.

## What is the best advice you can give?

The best advice I can give is to choose a career that you love. Working every day is hard and so it is important to love what you do.

## What does it take to be a nurse in challenging times?

I think that it takes a lot of determination and grit to be a nurse. Healthcare is always changing and that can be challenging. Nurses have a unique opportunity every single day to make a profound impact on someone's life.

## Any final thoughts?

I am so glad that I became a nurse. It has truly been a great career choice for me. You have so many opportunities in different fields, you are never bored as a nurse. I have been blessed with great mentors and co-workers from which I have learned so much from over the years. I love being a nurse!

MEAGAN THOMPSON, THE MONTANA STANDARD

Tina Sullivan, a registered nurse at Easterseals Highlands Hospice, is photographed outside the Butte facility.

## STATS

**YEARS OF SERVICE:**  
21

**CURRENT POSITION:**  
Registered Nurse Case Manager  
for Easter Seals Highlands Hospice



JOE STERNHAGEN

St. James Hospital



**Why did you become a nurse?**

My mom who is a pharmacist recommended I look into nursing as she felt it best matched me as a person and she was correct. Nursing has fit me quite well.

**What was one of your most memorable nursing experiences?**

My most memorable nursing experience is when COVID first started and I was charge nurse for the very first day on the COVID unit in Great Falls.

I found out the the AC on the unit wasn't working as wearing the COVID precaution gowns and mask got quite hot.

**What skills are most important for nurses?**

The most important skills for nurses are time management, multi-tasking and knowing when to walk out of a patient's room to allow for patients to calm down.

**What is the best advice you can give?**

Teach the new grad students to stick up for themselves, and correct inappropriate patient behavior.

**What does it take to be a nurse in challenging times?**

For nurses to survive challenging times it's always important to ask for help and let a coworker know when you're struggling. Coworkers are able to help even when they are busy helping their patients.

MEAGAN THOMPSON, THE MONTANA STANDARD  
Joe Sternhagen is photographed at St. James where he works as a registered nurse in Butte.

STATS

YEARS OF SERVICE:  
5

CURRENT POSITION:  
Medical surgical nurse at St. James Hospital



JILL MURPHY

St. James  
Healthcare



**Why did you become a nurse?**

When I was a child, I was in the hospital a couple times with a foot issue. And I really admired the nurses who took care of me. I was in isolation, so didn't have a lot of visitors and the nurses were it. I thought they were great. And so from a very young age, it's just something I wanted to do.

**What was one of your most memorable nursing experiences?**

I'm an OB nurse. So I get to be there at the best moment in families' lives every day. When someone has a baby it's the best day of most people's lives, and I get to experience that every day on my job.

**What skills are most important for nurses?**

I know that like some people are really book smart. But I think in nursing, you have to have a lot of common sense and be able to think on your toes. Sometimes you have to make snap decisions and just be able to be very perceptive, I guess you have to be perceptive on what your situation is, and be able to think on your toes. I think that I've been able to do that very well.

**What is the best advice you can give?**

If someone pursues nursing because of the money, I would tell them that's not a good idea. It's a passion. It's something

that's got to come from inside. You can't think about the monetary part of it; it has to come from inside. The best nurses are people who knew they want to be a nurse for a long time, and they're just not going into it for alternative reasons. It's got to be a calling. It's about what's in your heart.

**What does it take to be a nurse in challenging times?**

It's just that passion and that desire to want to take care of people, and do the best you can at your job. Even after 30 years I still do a good job with my patients every day.

**Any final thoughts?**

Just do what you love.

MEAGAN THOMPSON, THE MONTANA STANDARD

Jill Murphy, a nurse in the birthing center at St. James, is photographed before she heads off to the night shift at the Butte hospital.

**STATS**

**YEARS OF SERVICE:**

33

**CURRENT POSITION:**

OB Nurse at St. James



# SHAYNA ALLEN

St. James Healthcare



## Why did you become a nurse?

I wanted a job that I could come home from at the end of the day and be proud of. It's rewarding knowing that you're able to help people on their toughest days.

## What was one of your most memorable nursing experiences?

The pandemic. It was a very challenging time—physically, mentally and emotionally, but I am proud of my coworkers and the work that we did. It came at us head on and every single person stepped up. I knew it beforehand, but that experience really made me

## STATS

**YEARS OF SERVICE:**

4

**CURRENT POSITION:**

ICU RN at St. James

realize how awesome my team is.

## What skills are most important for nurses?

I would say empathy, communication and the desire to continue learning.

## What is the best advice you can give?

Be nice to people, you never know what battles they are fighting.

## What does it take to be a nurse in challenging times?

A good team with a good sense of humor. We deal with a lot of heavy stuff, so I also think it's important to spend time with the people you love and do things you enjoy doing outside of work.

## Any final thoughts?

Thank you for recognizing nurses!

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COURTESY PHOTO

# LARRY WARNER

St. James Hospital



## Why did you become a nurse?

It was actually because I like helping people. So I actually worked in construction when I first moved to Montana. My family's not the most educated. Where I grew up, it was just graduating high school and that type of stuff.

And my wife's family said, "What would you like to be?" And I was like, "Well, I would always like to be a nurse." But, you know, no one ever thought it was possible before. So I did it.

## What was one of your most memorable nursing experiences?

Things like where I'm recognized by the community for doing a good job. And I

think that's kind of what I'm here for — to serve the community. I don't get too high or too low. I just like going to work.

## What skills are most important for nurses?

People skills. Just being able to communicate with with people is definitely key; letting them know that you're there for them, showing some empathy, compassion, things of that nature. Make them smile and laugh too. I love to do that. Rest and laughter are two of the best medicines.

## What is the best advice you can give?

It's going to be a difficult ride but once

you cross that path, it's awesome. So many doors open for you are there's so many options once you once you complete the process nursing school. Don't just chase your dream. Go catch it.

## What does it take to be a nurse in challenging times?

It's teamwork. My team, my manager, it's just high-level teamwork.

## Any final thoughts?

I'm grateful for this award and to be nominated and things of that nature. It's awesome to be recognized.

MEAGAN THOMPSON, THE MONTANA STANDARD

Larry Warner is photographed at the emergency room entrance where he works at SCL Health in Butte.

## STATS

### YEARS OF SERVICE:

6

### CURRENT POSITION:

RN in the St. James Emergency Room



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**THANK YOU NURSES**



The Montana Standard is proud to support the hardworking and compassionate nurses who keep us safe and healthy in our community every day.

*Thank You*  
**FOR ALL YOU DO!**

The **MONTANA STANDARD**  
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SHONNIE SMITH

Travel Nurse

Why did you become a nurse?

I have always been drawn to care for and nurture those around me in need. I've always wanted to be a part of something meaningful in my community. As a nurse, my passion is to ensure our senior community is provided the best quality of life and age with dignity and grace.

What was one of your most memorable nursing experiences?

One of my most memorable nursing experiences is the greater bond created between staff and residents during the pandemic. During the pandemic, when facilities were closed to the public, it really took a toll on the senior community. Staff proudly stepped up to temporarily fulfill that role and keep their spirits high. It was really wonderful to witness. Their families put their trust in us to be that emotional support system in their absence and I didn't take that lightly.

STATS

YEARS OF SERVICE:  
21

CURRENT POSITION:  
Travel Nurse, LPN

What skills are most important for nursing?

Effective communication, compassion, integrity, empathy for others, ability to prioritize, critical thinking and working well under pressure.

What is the best advice you can give?

As nurses we are always providing care to others, but often forget that self care is

just as important. We aren't expected to know everything, so don't be afraid to ask questions. Ask for help when needed, after all, nursing requires teamwork. Mistakes happen, accept them and then learn from them. Always be willing to learn.

What does it take to be a nurse in challenging times?

To be a nurse during challenging times you need thick skin, stamina and a sense of humor. Assuming you have all of the knowledge and know how, you also have to be able to roll with the punches. Routine in nursing is not guaranteed. Not all shifts will go your way. Tomorrow is a new day, and you will be okay!

Any final thoughts?

Going into nursing has been the best professional decision I've made. I cherish the relationships I've made with my residents and their families. I have mentors and



MEAGAN THOMPSON, THE MONTANA STANDARD  
Shonnie Smith is photographed at her home in Butte where she stays when not on duty as a travel nurse.

friendships from all fields of healthcare to call on and a greater love and understanding of my community.

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# SOLE MATES

Nurse friends create water resistant, breathable shoes for 12-hour shifts

**NANCY CLANTON**  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

**W**hen you're on your feet most of the day, you want your shoes to work as hard as you do. And when you're a nurse, you need them to do more than just support you.

Although some athletic shoes might fit the bill, two Los Angeles friends were disappointed at the lack of footwear options for them as nurses. So they decided to design their own.

"Footwear is the one aspect of our uniform that we have some freedom to choose our own individual style," Alex Pastorkovich and Loftin Dortch told Nurse.org. "We wanted a shoe that we, and all health care workers, could be excited to put on each day. We thought, 'Why can't we have a shoe that takes care of our feet for a 12-hour shift, while also looking super stylish?' So we said, 'Let's make one!' And that was the beginning of Üni."

Üni comes from "uniform" and "unique," two aspects of the shoes important to the friends.

"We designed our shoes to be worn with a uniform, but wanted them to be so much more than that," Dortch said. "We started thinking about how health care workers are so much more than the uniform they put on each day. Each individual is unique and we wanted Üni to be an outlet for them to showcase their individual style at work."



ÜNI PHOTOS

Nurses designed Üni footwear, which are designed to be worn with a uniform.

As part of their uniform, the shoes need to be more than just attractive though. The friends told Nurse.org their shoes are not only comfortable, slip resistant and stain repellent, but they also have an antimicrobial treatment that kills viruses, bacteria and microbes. In addition, the shoes have a layer that makes them water resistant without the use of chemicals or sprays.

"This unique feature allows our shoes to remain breathable, which prevents feet from getting overheated during those long 12+ hour shifts," Dortch said. "Our fabric also provides unmatched durability that can stand up to the harshest work conditions, significantly increasing the life of the shoes."

The shoes are available to order online at uni.shoes.

"We want to see Ünis in hospitals, offices, and clinics all across the country," the nurses said. "We had our co-workers in mind through the entire shoe design process and we can't wait for everyone to get a pair."



We are proud of our  
**Montana Tech nursing alumni**  
who make an impact in Butte, across  
Montana, and around the world.  
**Thank you for all you do!**

Also, thank you to our Montana Tech nursing faculty, Anni Anderson, Maureen Brophy, Janet Coe, Kristin Cullen, Allison Duffy, Charie Faught, Kara Howard, Nikole Kelly, Stacy Phillips, Angela Poole, Laurie Noel, Megan Rediske, Kathy Roth, Seana Ralph, and Miriam Young who are dedicated to educating and improving healthcare.



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May 6-12

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