

All in the WITC Family

By Celia Tarnowski • Photo by Jeff Frey

It's easy to see the family resemblance in the four young women seated around the table. They share facial features, a good sense of humor, infectious giggles and a verbal shorthand with each other that often occurs with close siblings. Growing up as the four "Ross sisters" in Superior, Wis., each one is unique in her own right; but all share caring and compassionate spirits that led them to careers in the health field.

All four attended WITC-Superior, with Andrea, Alissa and Hilary graduating from the Nursing program, while Haley earned her Nursing Assistant certificate (CNA).

Middle child, Hilary Lambert, was the first in the group to earn her associate degree in Nursing in 2005. She now divides her time between working at St. Mary's Solvay Hospice House and St. Luke's Hospital on their Hospice Oncology floor and in the infusion therapy department.

Identical twins, Andrea Kubarek and Alissa Frias, graduated just a year apart from each other in 2007 and 2008. Andrea works at St. Mary's Hospital in Duluth, Minn., in the Pediatric Intensive care unit (ICU) and Pediatric Oncology. Alissa works for the Caregivers Network as a pediatric homecare nurse.

Originally, both Hilary and Alissa thought they would pursue careers as doctors. Those plans changed when, upon closer examination, they determined that the amount of time and personal investment this profession required would make it extremely difficult to devote quality time to their families. Neither has regrets about the decision to change careers.

"When you look at how much time you would have to spend in school, doing your residency, and then at the hospital working ... there would never be any time to be with your family," Hilary says.

Andrea didn't originally plan a career in the health field. "I wanted to play baseball for the Brewers when I was little," she says with a laugh. Admittedly a little squeamish when she was younger, nursing wasn't a consideration. "I never thought of being a nurse," Andrea says. "I'd get a little light headed in the hospital. I even passed on getting my ears pierced!"

Andrea's perspective changed after she started a family. "After having my four kids, something made me decide to go into the nursing field." She started the nursing program when her youngest was 6 months old.

"You know, she had four kids ... all that time on her hands, why not start college!" joked Alissa.

Haley, 19 years old and the baby of the family, is currently working as a CNA at the Golden Living Center in Superior. Haley credits Alissa with getting her started in the CNA program when she was still in high school.

"She told me about the program, so I checked it out online and enrolled," says Haley. "It was a little difficult juggling a job and homework, you just had to be really organized. It was pretty sweet when my friends and I would compare



Sisters Haley Ross, left, Hilary Lambert, Andrea Kubarek and Alissa Frias all attended WITC.

four members of the same family attend your class is not something many instructors have experienced.

"What really struck me about the girls was that they were all individuals with different personalities, but were all the same in seeming to be very caring individuals who really came across as caregivers from the start," Kitter-Carey says. "What really stands out is that they were all very active and engaged students with strong work ethics."

Diversity in the healthcare field is something they all appreciate.

"One thing I've found is that we all have strengths, so we can use each other as a resource," says Andrea. "Because we work in different areas of the field we can go to each other with questions and benefit from each others' expertise," adds Hilary.

Building on their current skill set in the healthcare field has also become a family affair as Hilary is studying at The College of St. Scholastica to become a Family Nurse Practitioner. Andrea and Alissa are both pursuing a bachelor's degree in nursing from Viterbo University in La Crosse, Wis.

"When you have a family, you really take school seriously," says Alissa, "I'm doing this for my children and for myself."

In addition to all of the sisters attending WITC, two of the spouses also received an associate degree from WITC as well. Andrea's husband, Chris, earned a degree in Marketing. Hilary's husband, Troy, holds a degree in Computer Programming.

"This is just an overall family school," Hilary says with a smile. ■



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