



# Watching Over Mam

Story By Elizabeth Whitchurch  
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Who's watching over mom? Expertly and caringly: the RNs, CNAs, administrators and OTAs who learned so well at WITC.

*Y*ou can almost hear it. Touch it. The kindness that is. At Hudson's Christian Community Home Services (CCHS), there are four living locations under one roof, and at each, the atmosphere pulses gently with loving kindness, with an underlying current of concern and a strong element of efficient organization. And at the heart of the facility, just a beat away from the residents, are trained, educated, caring people with diplomas from WITC.

## *The Registered Nurses*

With his family firmly entrenched in banking, Tom Youngberg felt an obligation to follow the financial path presented to him. With a four-year degree in political science and history, he simply didn't have the strong calling to finance. So after five years of effort, he pursued a 24-year career in printing. But the printing business is tumultuous, with many buy-outs and new names, so when a layoff came in 2009 at the age of 52, Youngberg decided it was time for a career change.



"I attended a WITC open house/information night, and asked the staff if nursing was a crazy idea," Youngberg says. "They assured me it wasn't, so I started taking general studies courses in January 2010.

"It was a perfect fit for me. Tuition was reasonable, and it was close to home," he says. Though Youngberg was on a waiting list for the nursing program, some of his university credits transferred and he took prerequisites until he started the core program in January 2011.

“Even though I was the oldest in the class,” Youngberg says, “I got a lot of support from my younger classmates. It wasn’t long and I felt very comfortable. I actually brought some expertise from my previous jobs – working with people, customer service, meeting deadlines – that carries over into nursing.”

The Student Success Center played a part in Youngberg’s return to college, as well. “I needed a little brush up on my math skills, and they were there to help me.”

A May 2013 grad, Youngberg was immediately hired as an RN at Christian Community Homes of Hudson, where he had also worked as a certified nursing assistant – also WITC training. “It’s such a joy to work with the residents and their families. Often because I’m from Hudson, they’ll recognize me, or I’ll see a family member relax because they see a friendly face.”

Sarilyn Lewis, another WITC-educated registered nurse, graduated with her associate degree – nursing (ADN) in 2001. The Hammond resident continued her education with three years at UW-Green Bay and one at



*Tom Youngberg, right, keeps a close eye on residents’ vital signs.*

UW-River Falls in the vet program before she changed her mind. She chose WITC’s associate degree-nursing program and graduated in two years.

“I feel very qualified with my WITC education,” she says. “Eventually I want to pursue a bachelor’s and master’s degree, but I received good training. They prepared me for the job, and I liked the rotations. It’s a tough, but doable program, and I’d recommend it to others.”

## *The Business Office*

When Debi Mager applied for the business office manager position at Christian Community Home (CCH), she didn’t have specific experience in the medical field, but she had accounting experience, a tax preparation certification, and a two-year degree in accounting from WITC. “I felt prepared to do the job,” Mager says. “My education gave me the foundation to learn medical billing, so I thought, ‘Why not?’”

Well, Mager not only got the job, she was promoted a year later to her current position as Director of Financial Services at CCH for both the Hudson and Osceola locations. “Having been here over a year, I can definitely see how some things we did in class make sense,” Mager says, speaking of her WITC accounting classes.

Mager’s responsibilities are numerous at CCH. Within her scope, she oversees all of the Hudson and Osceola billing/receivables, accounts payable, payroll, and collections. She also helps new residents with the often complicated Medicaid application and renewals. “I help take stress out of the financial aspect for those without family,” she explains.



*Sarilyn Lewis, RN*



*Debi Mager, Director of Financial Services*

"I meet with families and I get to know them one-on-one. Building strong connections with people is important in this position. I've always felt social work was my calling ... and this position has a lot of social work." She enjoys this job because so many aspects enhance her strong interest in human services.

As a single mom raising two kids, Mager was laid off from her job in 2010. The job market hadn't recovered yet, and she realized she wanted a degree. She considered the UW system, but decided it took too long and cost too much. "WITC was a perfect fit," Mager says. "I learned what I needed and was quickly back into the job market."

As a non-traditional student, she was a bit uncomfortable about being in classes and relearning how to study. She says the WITC staff rallies around students to help them be successful, as they did with her. "You need to give it (learning/college) time and effort; you have to do your part," she says. "So many people are there to help you. You aren't doing it on your own. You certainly don't have to spend \$25,000 a year to get the college experience," she says.

"WITC was a great opportunity for me, and my skill and confidence levels increased. It was a growing experience," Mager says. "I enjoyed my time at WITC – you get out what you put in." There were a lot of things she learned because she got involved: Student Ambassador, tutor, Business Professionals of America, Student Senate, and tax preparation for low income people.

"Everything I learned at WITC, I can take and use down the road."

### *The Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA)*

Dozens are scheduled to cover a 24-7 schedule, and many of CCHS's CNAs are graduates of the WITC program. Each story is as unique as the people they care for. Nancy Frye and Ashley Cain both work across the entire CCHS Hudson complex, including WinterGreen, Pine Ridge, Pine Ridge Gardens and CCH. Both happen to be medication aids, too, which requires additional training before they can administer residents' meds.

Frye, who resides in Hudson, received her CNA training from WITC in February 2011. Her energy and positive attitude radiate from her as she prepares to talk about her work. Frye feels it's a "career you grow with. People who go into this career need to know it is for the people – not the money.

"I love talking with the residents and putting smiles on their faces and making their day. My favorite part is sitting and learning from them. It's such a rewarding career," she says.

"My education and experience are useful with my mom, who has been in a wheelchair due to muscular dystrophy since I was 17. My mom was my inspiration to go into health care and to help people. Each day I like to make the most of the day happy and joyful."

Enter Cain, another WITC-trained CNA at the same CCHS Hudson location. Ashley treks from Stillwater, Minn., to CCHS to care for the people. "I've known since I was little girl this is what I wanted to do," she says with a contagious smile. The distinctive flower she wears in hair seems to bob in



*Mary Ellen Smith, right, a WITC-educated occupational therapy assistant, works with a resident who is learning how to walk after a serious illness.*

agreement. "I've always been comfy with older people – in high school, I'd hang out with them just for fun."

After high school, she filled five years with odd jobs before she realized she wanted to pursue care training. She chose WITC-New Richmond because her grandmother lived there and her brother had graduated from WITC's motorcycle, marine and outdoor power product program.

"I love my job, and I make a difference too. We're like a big family – we are their family in many cases," Cain says. "Often family members tell me they're relieved when they see me at the desk."

The CNAs, male and female, strive to develop relationships, often becoming a type of family for the resident. I love yous, hugs, a kind, listening ear, an arm to lean on are frequently seen and heard. And for many residents, it's the CNA's smile that opens ... and closes ... each day.

## *The Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA)*

But often in a complex like this, there are services behind the scenes. One such service at CCHS is occupational therapy, where people "learn the skills for the job of living." Here WITC graduate Mary Ellen Smith cares for mom as an OT assistant. Mary Ellen is employed by RehabCare and works by a contract agreement at Hudson's CCHS.

Smith was considered a non-traditional student at WITC, since she'd attended UW-River Falls for a year, suffered her mother's death, and then worked for several years before deciding to attend WITC. A friend recommended the occupational therapy assistant (OTA) program at WITC, and Mary Ellen took a look at it. The popular OTA program had a waiting list, so she did her general studies requirements first. Smith liked the small class sizes and the fact that

instructors knew her name. "I wasn't just a number," she says.

"I love what I do. When I look back I've never regretted my decision. I enjoy helping people gain independence. And I love to see people go home able to do things they couldn't do when they started – sometimes it's as simple as curling the back of their hair. That makes me happy. Every patient has left a piece of themselves with me," she says.

"You need the right personality to be an OTA," Smith says. "Lots of patience, and you need to think outside the box. Every disability is different, so you need to adapt and think what will work for each person. Sometimes a resident shows me something I didn't know and I learn from them."

And that's who's watching mom so expertly and caringly: the RNs, CNAs, administrators and OTAs who learned so well at WITC. ■



## Christian Community Homes and Services, Inc.,

sponsored by the Hudson United Methodist Church, is a Medicare and Medicaid certified rehabilitation and skilled nursing facility providing skilled and intermediate nursing care for the elderly and disabled, first began its operation in 1981. It later added another facility in Osceola in 2011. The non-profit organization serves residents of the campus and the extended community in a loving and caring environment. The staff is dedicated to helping meet their physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs, and to encourage a sense of dignity and individuality.

Included in the Hudson complex are WinterGreen, where residents may live independently or contract for assisted living services, Pine Ridge Assisted Living, for those who require daily living managed assistance, Pine Ridge Gardens, for those with memory care needs and Christian Community Home, for residents who require long-term care services or rehabilitation. The Hudson complex also includes the Red Oak Center, which provides exercise equipment and services for fitness and rehabilitation. CCH of Osceola offers a skilled nursing facility and memory care center.

