

Grad's Dream Job

Inspired by family visits to Scottish Rite Hospital, rookie starts her nursing journey

The RN on her professional license stands for registered nurse, but Lisette Buechner thinks of it proudly as “real nurse.” After graduating in December from the Georgia Baptist College of Nursing of Mercer University, Buechner was hired to work in the pediatric intensive care unit at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Scottish Rite.

“Sometimes I have to remind myself that I'm out of nursing school and actually working in the hospital that inspired my nursing career — that I've come full circle and done what I set out to do. I feel very blessed,” she said.

Buechner, 23, was a senior in high school when her cousin, Christopher Segurola, was seriously hurt in a car crash and ended up in Scottish Rite Hospital for many weeks. Visits to see Segurola helped inspire her to become a nurse.

“I'd never been in that kind of environment and seen nurses helping people get better. I knew that's what I wanted to do,” she said.

After taking nursing prerequisite classes at the University of Georgia, Buechner transferred to Mercer's nursing school, where she had to learn a different way of studying and taking tests.

“You can't just read and memorize the material. All the exams are application-based, so you have to know it inside-out and be able to apply it,” Buechner said. “Nursing school was hard, but not impossible, because the teachers want you to succeed.”

She spent her first summer after starting nursing school working in an externship program at Shepherd's Spinal Center. “That gave me so much experience and made me a lot more comfortable in my second year of nursing school,” she said.

Buechner had hoped to work as an extern at Children's the next summer, but all Mercer nursing students were required to take a full load of classes that semester.

“I knew I had to figure another way to get my foot in the door, so I volunteered,” she said. “I was the art cart girl and did arts and crafts with the patients. It was so much fun.”

At a professor's suggestion, she took a job as a health care technician in the emergency room at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston, which reinforced her desire to work with children. She did her leadership practicum in the pediatric ICU at Scottish Rite last fall, which led to a coveted job offer.

At graduation in December, she was given Mercer's Excellence in Pediatric Nursing Award. With a choice of jobs in Children's pediatric intensive care unit or the emergency room, Buechner chose the PICU.



Lisette Buechner, an assistant coach of the girls varsity lacrosse team at St. Pius X High School, instructs players during a game.

"I knew I'd have my patients longer, and that getting to know them and their families better would help me know how to take care of them," she said. "I think people can see your passion and what kind of nurse you are by how you take care of their children."

About a third of Children's nurses start working there as young graduates, said Sharon Jordan, interim nurse manager for the PICU at Scottish Rite. Buechner is a good example of how a recent nursing graduate can infuse a unit with enthusiasm, Jordan said.

"Lisette is smart, enthusiastic and showed us she had initiative, and worked well with patients during her practicum. We look for people who love nursing and are willing to learn," Jordan said. "She brings a lot of new knowledge and an overall freshness to the job. She's glad to be here and we're glad to have her."

New grads receive 10 to 14 weeks of orientation to give them various patient experiences. Buechner is nearing the time when she'll be a "real nurse" on the night shift.

"The thought of no longer being a student is still scary, but every day I learn something new and get better at something I wasn't good at before," she said. "I don't feel totally alone, because I feel like I get 110 percent support for what I'm doing."

Conventional wisdom is that it takes about a year before new graduates are fully comfortable as floor nurses. The time doubles in intensive care, where sophisticated technology meets the sickest patients.



Lisette Buechner, a December nursing school graduate, recently started working in the pediatric intensive care unit at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Scottish Rite. She's got her arm around the Weldon Award, a stuffed monkey that's given to a Children's Healthcare of Atlanta unit or department for providing exceptional service to patients and their families.

Buechner plans to take it one day at a time.

"People ask me how I cope with the emotional toll of dying patients. I'm an emotional person and sometimes I cry, but I just have to hope that the good days will outnumber the bad," she said.

With the rehabilitation unit down the hall, she takes comfort in seeing some of her patients laughing and playing. "That's a good feeling," she said.

Another is being an assistant coach of the varsity lacrosse team at St. Pius X High School, where she played basketball and lacrosse as a student. She started coaching when she was in nursing school.

"Fortunately I'm the type person who loves having her schedule filled, and coaching gives me balance," she said.

"When I've had a really hard day, I can look forward to relaxing on the field at practice and coaching a sport I love," she said.

Hard work has brought Buechner to her dream job, but she has no intention of slowing down.

"My first goal is to learn what I need to know to be a good ICU nurse," she said.

She also plans to take advantage of the continuing education certifications that Children's offers.

"In the long run, I'd like to get my master's degree," she said, "but first I need to figure out what I'm good at and where I want to grow."