Fayetteville Student Receives Golden Eagle Honor

Nontraditional Student Plans to Pursue Career in Forensic Nursing

BENTONVILLE, Ark. (April 9, 2013) – Meghan McConnell knows what it takes to escape domestic abuse. Now, she’s committed to completing her education and helping others who may face similar challenges.

The Fayetteville mother of two will graduate in May from NorthWest Arkansas Community College with an Associate of Science in Nursing, an Associate of Arts and an Associate of General Studies. She is interested in pursuing forensic nursing with a specialization in domestic abuse, particularly assault and battery. Upon passing the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses, she will be taking necessary classes to receive her Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner credentials. She also plans to apply to the Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Northwest. She would later like to obtain her master’s degree and a doctorate.

“There is a big need for forensic nurses, and I strongly feel that I can create change, inform, educate and use my medical skills this way,” she said.

McConnell was named the Golden Eagle Award recipient at NWACC in March. Students are nominated for NWACC’s Golden Eagle Award by an instructor, administrative staff person or a student organization adviser. Each candidate must have at least a 3.0 grade point average in a minimum of six credit hours of class as well as demonstrate social awareness, personal development, a diverse interest and involvement in varied activities, interpersonal communication skills and a commitment to education.

McConnell was nominated by three members of the college staff.

“Meghan is a nontraditional student raising two children while enrolled in NWACC’s very rigorous nursing program,” wrote Christie Brinsfield, director of the college’s Career Pathways Initiative. “She also takes additional hours toward completion of her Associate of Science with aspirations of a
BSN and beyond. Not only is she a single parent and full-time student, but she also volunteers at a community clinic. She is active in the Career Pathways program, meeting required workshop and assessment obligations.”

Christina Mitchell, a case manager with Career Pathways, noted that McConnell has a 3.26 grade point average and works as a volunteer at a local clinic serving walk-in and psychiatric patients. “She does this in addition to required clinicals, studying and raising two children. Her long-term career goals include completing Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner training, completing a master’s degree and working first-hand with emergency abuse situations involving women and children.” Her story has been featured by the Single Parent Scholarship Program of Northwest Arkansas, Mitchell noted.

Jerod Bradshaw, also a case manager with Career Pathways, said that McConnell continuously helps other students with school or personal problems with compassion. “She presents herself in an admirable and upstanding manner,” he wrote.

McConnell said she originally entered NWACC’s nursing program intending to work in oncology. Her father is a cancer survivor and she recalled sitting in the lobby during her dad’s treatments and doctors’ visits. “The nurses were always friendly and made sure I was OK, comfortable, fed, and above all, they made sure I knew that they cared. This is when I knew I wanted to be a nurse.”

She hasn’t wavered from her decision to be a nurse. However, during her studies in the nursing program at NWACC, an instructor, Charla Jamerson, introduced her to a different specialty, forensic nursing. “I had never heard of forensic nursing, and I never knew it was possible,” she said. “Charla explained to me that what she does is to perform a nursing examination on the victim and document every bit of physical and emotional evidence on the victim. Her assessment is then taken to court in order to help prosecute the attacker. I knew that this was what I was supposed to do.”

Her decision was confirmed when she participated in clinical rotations at Arkansas Children’s Hospital. She was able to see how the hospital handles abuse cases and what the needs are for helping the patients stay safe. A child there had suffered from extreme abuse. “It was when I was holding this baby’s little foot in my hand that I knew that this is why God has put me on this Earth,” she said.

She said with her research, she hopes and plans to help keep victims safe. “With my research, I plan to try to change laws, making it easier to protect victims from their attackers,” she said. “As a victim, I know what it is like to be scared, scared that a little piece of paper is not going to protect you if this person really wants to get to you.”

She said that if better laws are in place, more people will feel safe. “If there is better protection for victims, there is a better chance of people leaving their abusive situation,” she said. “I also plan on helping hospitals, doctor’s offices, and other support service companies have better resources available for victims of violence. With more information and more resources, there is a better chance of people being willing to leave abusive situations, and a better chance of increased safety. Where there is knowledge, there is power.”

NorthWest Arkansas Community College is a smart choice for students wanting to pursue quality higher education. As an accredited institution through The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, NWACC is a public two-year institution that serves and strengthens its
surrounding communities in Benton and Washington counties by helping our students maximize their potential and exceed expectations. With state-of-the-art facilities, NWACC provides excellent academic instruction and workforce training needed to succeed, offering personalized attention from highly respected faculty, staff, and administrators. For more information, visit www.nwacc.edu.