

## She Is a Nurse

She knew she wanted to be a nurse – just not in long-term health care. But God changed her mind, and her plans, about her career.

This is National Nurses Day, the beginning of National Nurses Week. And there is no better representative of what nursing is all about than Lynn Mefford, the director of nursing at The Heritage Center in Morristown, Tenn. She was presented Life Care's highest honor for a nurse, the Mary Denton Award, on April 21, during the annual meeting for directors of nursing.

Mefford has all the professional skills required for her job. More importantly, she has a heart for the people she serves.

Mefford has 33 years of service in long-term care. Her entry into the geriatric field, however, began reluctantly. "I was working in nursing at St. Mary's Medical Center in Knoxville when Betty Anderson, a neighbor of mine and the director of nursing at Life Care Center of Morristown, called me. She said, 'Lynn, I need you very much. One of my nurses has gone into premature labor, and I've got to have some help at the center.'

"I told Betty, 'Why, I've never walked into a nursing home, ever. I wouldn't know what to do.' Betty said she had another nurse who would be there with me, and she talked me into it. That other nurse called in sick, so it was only me and four CNAs to serve 120 residents in the whole building. I grabbed one of the CNAs, and said, 'Don't you leave my side.' Those CNAs told me what to do, and I did it. I thought if I got through this night, I'd never come back.

"The next day, which was a Saturday, Betty begged me to 'please come back.' She offered to meet me at the building and work with me if I would. I did, and then started working part-time. Betty and I formed a bond; she is one of the greatest ladies I have known. We related to each other. I got close to the patients, and the rest is history. I still have a relationship with Eva Justice, the CNA who was my savior that night. She began my education in the care of the elderly, and I will never forget the tender loving care she showed those residents, as well as me. Those imprints never leave our hearts."

Mefford has been the DON at The Heritage Center since it opened in November 1988. Born in Virginia, she and her family moved to Morristown when she was nine years old. She earned her LPN license at St. Mary's Medical Center and her R.N. degree at Walters State Community College in Morristown. Mefford and her husband, Mike, will soon celebrate their 36<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. They have a son, Chris, daughter-in-law, Kristen, and a grandson, Mason, 2.

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“The No. 1 attribute to describe Lynn,” said Robert Breeden, executive director of The Heritage Center, “is that she is a leader, not a manager. I firmly believe that people are not meant to be managed, but to be led. Lynn is the perfect example of the servant leader.”

Mefford, then, is an icon of the nursing profession and of this week of celebration. National Nurses Week is one of the nation’s largest health care events, recognizing the contributions and commitments nurses make and educating the public about the significant work they perform. We are proud of her, and of all the nurses who serve in our company and impact the lives of our residents. They build our reputation.

As Mefford reflects on her life, she said her long-term care career has been personally rewarding. “It is satisfying to serve the elderly; they have lived full, rich lives, and they deserve the care and attention. But the ones who get to me the most are the young ones who come our way, and we have a lot of them. As an example, we have one woman who is 40 years old. She suffered a stroke at age 36. Now, when one of us goes out, all she asks for is a Route 44 [a large drink] from Sonic. She, and others like her, have been robbed of a lot of the adventures and activities in life – the opportunity to enjoy life like I do.”

Mefford is a nurse. It’s her calling. It’s her heart.

--Beecher Hunter