

Celebrating the 2017 Nurse of the Year

At what age did you first realize you wanted to be a nurse? The American Nurses Foundation's Honor a Nurse 2017 Nurse of the Year, Linda J. Hassler, DNP, RN, GCNS-BC, FNGNA, said she was only 16 years old.

Hassler was honored by Joanne Alderman, MS-N, APRN-CNS(c), RN-BC, FNGNA, geriatric nursing practice educator consultant at Geriatric Collaborative Care Nursing Services-PLLC, through the Foundation's Honor a Nurse Program, which provides a platform to recognize extraordinary nurses while giving back to the profession. In the nomination, Alderman shared that she is "proud of Linda and the professional nursing accomplishments she has attained and her commitment to nursing, our older adults, and their caregivers. She is a vibrant, learned, and dedicated gerontological nurse."

Both American Nurses Association (ANA) members for more than 35 years, Hassler, a New Jersey State Nurses Association member, and Alderman, an Oklahoma Nurses Association member, met in 2006 through the National Gerontological Association's Special Interest Group of Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses.



Linda Hassler

But it was back when Hassler was 16, and her father, then a camp director in upstate New York, needed a health lodge secretary/nursing assistant that she first rose to the challenge and found out how complex, compassionate, and exciting nursing could be.

She later went into gerontology because of a personal experience as well; when her great aunt was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and entered a nursing home, Hassler saw firsthand the wonderful care being provided and wanted to help make that difference for others.

Since July 2017, Hassler has served as nursing excellence director at Hackensack Meridian Nursing and Rehabilitation, where she manages the nurse residency and professional growth ladder programs. At age 53, Hassler went back to school and recently completed her doctor of nursing practice degree at Rutgers University, where she is now an instructor in the entry to baccalaureate practice division, second-degree program, in the school of nursing.

Hassler has been recognized with various awards throughout her career. In 2016, she was the Distinguished Educator, National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners and received the 2009

New Jersey State Nurses Association CARES (Clinical, Administration, Research, Education, Support) Award for Excellence in Nursing Education.

Today, Hassler's greatest joy is when she sees a student's or new nurse's mind click and understand why they are doing what they do—the science behind nursing. When she reads her teaching or presentation evaluations and sees comments like, "This was eye-opening" or "I thought I knew how to care for an older adult, but today I learned so much more," Hassler knows she chose the right career path.



Linda Hassler (left) with Joanne Alderman

"The American Nurses Foundation receives so many beautiful tributes every year, but this particular tribute highlighted the importance of colleague support and caring for one another," said American Nurses Foundation Chair Tim Porter-O'Grady, DM, EdD, APRN, FAAN. "We are thrilled to recognize Linda."

The American Nurses Foundation created the Honor a Nurse program to recognize nurses' extraordinary contributions to healthcare. The program enables colleagues, friends, family, and others to honor a nurse or a group of nurses who have made a positive difference, while supporting the profession philanthropically. The funds raised are used to support nursing research, scholarships, and programs to improve nurses' lives and the nursing profession. Nurses

 **Honor
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who have been honored qualify for the Honor a Nurse, Nurse of the Year award. For more information and to honor a nurse, visit givetonursing.org/honoranurse. Consider recognizing the nurses you know—a great way to celebrate National Nurses Week, May 6-12.