



PROFILES OF COMPASSION CLASS OF 2020 INDUCTEE

JEANNE VANPOPPEL, RN



“I STAYED AT UM ST. JOSEPH
for all those years because of the people. Everyone there grows together. It’s the kind of place I always wanted to work. It is the kind of place that I can go back to, to be in good company every day.”

It’s safe to say that Jeanne VanPoppel, RN, made a lasting impact during the years she devoted to her career as a nurse at UM St. Joseph Medical Center. She is recognized as a 2020 Profiles of Compassion honoree, despite the fact that she retired more than a decade ago.

Jeanne began serving the hospital in her teenage years, coming on board as a volunteer, determined to give back in a meaningful way to a local Catholic hospital. Being in the patient care environment and witnessing the tremendous work done every day by health care professionals inspired her to stay and do more. She started nursing school in 1964, with a goal to remain at UM St. Joseph and build a successful and personally rewarding career. “Nursing was a good fit for me. It’s in my nature to put others first and I was fascinated by the science side of the profession. I was interested in it and it came easily to me, because I loved it so much.”

Orthopaedic care proved to be Jeanne’s true calling. She joined UM St. Joseph’s orthopaedic unit as a floor nurse in 1975, and worked there until her retirement in 2008. Throughout her tenure, Jeanne remained committed to going above and beyond, serving on a number of committees designed to streamline and optimize patient care, the patient experience and patient outcomes, which were all new considerations at the time.

In recognition of her outstanding efforts, and although she was only working two days a week, she was voted Employee of the Year on her unit in 1992 and later served as a patient care coordinator on the evening shift.

“In high school, I was known to be timid and shy, and nursing forced me to get out of my comfort zone. Once I did, everything

clicked. I gained so much confidence, and my day-to-day work became even more rewarding.”

Jeanne reflects fondly back on her experience at UM St. Joseph and the many people who guided her, supported her and became her friends along the way. When asked who her greatest role model or mentor is, she quickly provides three names: fellow Profiles of Compassion alumni Frances Forte, RN, who led the orthopaedic unit many years ago and who was a valuable leader during Jeanne’s early years as an orthopaedic nurse; and Janet Connolly, RN, who worked side by side with Jeanne as a floor nurse, both on a medical-surgical unit and in orthopaedics. She also credits Lucy Dieaco, RN, an instructor who saw potential in Jeanne, believed in her abilities and whose guidance supported her throughout her career in more ways than can be counted. “I owe these women a lot of gratitude. They changed my life in many ways.”

“Speechless” is the best word to describe how Jeanne felt when she was notified of her selection to the Profiles of Compassion Class of 2020. “Validated” is another. “Being a nurse . . . it was more than a job to me. It’s what made me feel alive. It gave more to me than I ever gave to it. So, to win this award, especially so many years after I retired from my profession—it validates all the time and passion I put into my work for so many years.”

Today, Jeanne continues to work for her family business, Maryland Performance Specialties, a company she and her late husband founded together in the late 1970s and is managed today by her two adult children, Lisa and Brian. She plans to get involved in community volunteerism in the future, and hints that she may very well find herself back where it all started, here at UM St. Joseph. The place she considered a second home for so many years.