

BC3 registered nursing graduate receives 51-year-old pin from inspiring grandmother

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Judith Whitacre, 71, of Butler, fastens the nursing pin she wore to work daily for 37 years at Butler Memorial Hospital to the scrubs of her 19-year-old granddaughter, Cecelia Pellegrino, of Butler, during Pellegrino's graduation Thursday evening from Butler County Community College's Nursing, R.N., program. At left on the stage of Succop Theater on BC3's main campus in Butler Township is Sandra Barlett, secretary of BC3's Shaffer School of Nursing and Allied Health and at right, Brittany Rakarich, a BC3 clinical instructor.

(Butler, PA) Judith Whitacre passed along her passion for nursing to her only granddaughter, Cecelia Pellegrino. On Thursday evening at Butler County Community College, the 71-year-old retired registered nurse also passed along the pin she received upon graduating from Butler Memorial Hospital's School of Nursing 51 years ago to the 19-year-old who has completed BC3's rigorous two-year program.

Whitacre earned the nearly 2-inch-long pin in 1968, five years before BC3's first class of registered nursing students were seated on the college's main campus in Butler Township, and wore the pin on her scrubs' left lapel during a 37-year career at Butler Memorial Hospital.

“Every single day,” Pellegrino said.

“Every day,” Whitacre echoed.

Inside BC3’s Succop Theater during the college’s 2019 nurse pinning ceremony, BC3 instructors Nichole Tiche, Holly Brennen, Brittany Rakarich, Heather Darrington, Jessica Lasanich and Julia Carney fastened a BC3 nursing pin to the white scrubs of each of Pellegrino’s 54 classmates – officially marking their successful completion of BC3’s 70-credit Nursing, R.N. program.

Whitacre entered from stage left, and affixed her 14-karat Butler Memorial Hospital School of Nursing pin – her maiden name, Judith Hinchberger engraved on its back – to the white scrubs worn by Pellegrino, Whitacre’s only descendant to follow in her footsteps.

“To be able to have that pin is incredible,” said Pellegrino, a 2017 Butler Senior High School graduate and Butler resident. “I don’t really think words can describe it.”

The pin, said Whitacre, a Butler resident who retired in 2005 from a career spent entirely at Butler Memorial Hospital, means “everything” and represents “dedication to the profession of nursing.”

Whitacre’s dedication inspired Pellegrino, who said that as a 15-year-old she began volunteering at Butler Memorial Hospital delivering newspapers to patients.

“She has always kind of pushed me in the direction of helping people,” Pellegrino said. “She was the one to get me into candystriping at the hospital when I was younger, which kind of sparked my love for it. She has always helped me figure out what is important in life as far as helping others. She has been a huge support for me throughout my whole nursing school experience at BC3. It has just been so wonderful to have her.”

Pellegrino’s education from BC3, she said, was also wonderful.



Judith Whitacre’s hand supports that of her granddaughter, Cecelia Pellegrino, who holds the 51-year-old nursing pin her grandmother wore to work daily for 37 years at Butler Memorial Hospital. Whitacre placed the pin on Pellegrino’s scrubs during a ceremony Thursday evening to mark Pellegrino’s graduation from Butler County Community College’s Nursing, R.N., program.

“I had always heard such great things about BC3,” she said. “I had a couple of friends who had gone through the registered nursing program who recommended it to me. Being that it is a community college, all of the instructors are very personable and you get a lot of one-on-one time in comparison to a university. The whole personalized experience was what I was going for.

“I got a lot more attention and I could go and talk to instructors if I had questions. They would take time out for me, and sit down and try to help me out with whatever I was struggling with. It was nice to always feel like you could reach out to one of them. They were able to take the time to help you out with whatever you needed.

“I really couldn’t ask for anything more.”

Other than being among the 75 percent of BC3 graduates who are debt-free – as Pellegrino is, while also entering a field that was among the Top 20 paying occupations in 2018 that require only an associate degree, with a median salary of \$68,450, according to GetEducated.Com.

“It is going to be amazing,” Pellegrino said. “So many of my friends have gone off to universities and they are coming out with incredible amounts of debt. To be able to set out on my own debt-free and to be able to have freedom and not be held down by student loans is just so freeing. Basically I feel like I can go out and start living my life as opposed to being held back and working to pay off all my loans.”

Her granddaughter’s decision to select BC3 has also paid off, Whitacre said.

“She felt that she wanted a good education and she didn’t necessarily want to go far away,” Whitacre said. “So it was perfect. And it has been perfect. She has had a good education. It has just been a great experience for her.”

As will having the pin, Pellegrino said, one that is now also engraved with the initials CJP 2019 under her grandmother’s maiden name.

“I will definitely keep it forever.”

Judith Whitacre, 71, left, of Butler, is shown with her granddaughter, Cecelia Pellegrino, 19, of Butler, at Butler County Community College on Thursday evening, when Pellegrino graduated from BC3’s Nursing, R.N., program and received from her grandmother the nursing pin she wore to work daily for 37 years at Butler Memorial Hospital.



Judith Whitacre, 71, left, of Butler, is shown with her granddaughter, Cecelia Pellegrino, 19, of Butler, at Butler County Community College on Thursday evening, when Pellegrino graduated from BC3’s Nursing, R.N., program and received from her grandmother the nursing pin she wore to work daily for 37 years at Butler Memorial Hospital.

