

by Lisa Spellman

A RITE OF PASSAGE

WHITE COATS CONNECT STUDENTS TO ALUMS

As first-year medical student Jacob Gibbens pulled on the short white lab coat emblazoned with the UNMC logo his father offered a few words of wisdom.

“Get ready to hunker down,” said Don Gibbens, M.D., '85.

The Lincoln obstetrician and UNMC alum was on hand to congratulate his son upon entry to the medical profession.

“We didn’t have a white coat ceremony when I was in school,” he said. “We bought our own in our third year for \$12.”

But, Dr. Gibbens appreciates the significance of the ceremony now held at most medical schools across the nation.

“It’s a nice starting point for their medical education,” said Dr. Gibbens. “The white coat tells the student it’s a privilege to become a physician and not everyone is offered that privilege.”

On Aug. 24, the UNMC College of Medicine welcomed 126 students into the Class of 2011. The students, who hail from 12 different Nebraska colleges and 22 different states, were admitted out of more than 1,400 applications, said UNMC College of Medicine Dean John Gollan, M.D., Ph.D.

The white coat ceremony began as a tradition at UNMC in the mid-1990s, expanded to other disciplines and now includes ceremonies for the Colleges of Dentistry and Pharmacy and several allied health professions.

“The ceremony is a rite of passage, as well as a call to achieve the high standards set forth in the profession,” said John Reinhardt, D.D.S., dean of the UNMC College of Dentistry. “A white coat shows a certain professional pride, designating men and women who have earned the right to wear it and are proud of the profession they represent.”

An induction ceremony is held for students entering the College of Nursing and pinning ceremonies are held for students entering the Clinical Laboratory Science and Radiation Science



Technology Education programs.

“These ceremonies are symbolic for our students coming into their respective professions,” said Rubens Pamies, M.D., vice chancellor for academic affairs at UNMC. “They show the student’s commitment to the profession, to the hard work of those who’ve come before them and to future patients.”

UNMC alums have made a tradition of showing their support for the students entering the world of health care by sponsoring white coats.

Individual alumni helped sponsor white coats.

Kim Cuda, director of the UNMC Alumni Association, said the program has become popular with alums.

“It really struck a nerve because of the direct connection it provides to the student and to the school.”

The names of the sponsor, along with their contact information is printed on a piece of paper and slipped into the pocket of the new student’s white coat.

“The students are encouraged to drop a note or send an e-mail to their sponsor thanking them for their white coat,” Cuda said.

This year, 140 College of Medicine alumni sponsored 177 white coats, and 112 alumni from the College of Pharmacy sponsored 112 coats.

Staci Hubert, Pharm.D., '94, has sponsored a white coat for a student in the College of Pharmacy for the past four years.

The incoming College of Pharmacy Alumni Association board president said it is important for past alumni to support incoming students.

“It’s also a great networking tool,” Dr. Hubert said. “I received a nice e-mail from the student I sponsored along with a request for any words of advice. I opened my door and said if you have any questions don’t hesitate to call me.” ☺☺