

College of Nursing students surround Dr. Rebecca Keating-Lefler, who serves UNMC as a professor, alumni association president and scholarship donor

ALUMNUS TAKES A 360° APPROACH TO NURSING

by Adrienne Fasse

A tragedy at a young age paved the way for an Omaha native to impact nursing in many ways.

Rebecca Keating-Lefler, Ph.D., was only 14 when her mother died from a tragic fall. It was then she knew that helping people was the way to honor her mother's memory.

"My mother's passing was significant," she said. "She inspired me in many ways. She emphasized the importance of making a difference in the lives of others as the greatest life activity.

"I knew I could honor her by becoming a nurse because nurses are the most visible health care professionals who are always at the bedside and who focus on delivering holistic care to patients and also to their families." The recent passing of Dr. Lefler's father, who also inspired her by his altruistic attitude and behaviors, renewed her passion for giving back to those in need.

Nursing was the right choice for Dr. Keating-Lefler, who earned her associate's degree from the UNMC College of Nursing in 1986, then her bachelor's degree the following year. While working on her BSN, she got a taste of research.

"I had some brilliant mentors in the college who I was able to assist with a parent-infant research study. It's here that I discovered a love of teaching and research," she said.

After Dr. Keating-Lefler earned her master's degree in 1992, she began teaching at the Nebraska Methodist College. In 1995, she returned to UNMC to pursue a doctorate in nursing and upon completion she stayed to continue her research and teach.

As an assistant professor in the department of Families and Health Systems, Dr. Keating-Lefler saw a need to do more.

"I always believed there was something I could give back to students," she said. "They inspire me on a daily basis, and I hope I can do the same for them."

Dr. Keating-Lefler decided to expand her sphere of influence and provide financial support to nursing students. In 2003, she and her husband established the Dr. Rebecca Keating-Lefler and Steven Lefler Scholarship Fund. This award is given to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who want to enter the nursing program at UNMC.

"I knew it was important to target vulnerable populations with this scholarship," she said. "My research team works to improve outcomes for single, low-income mothers and their children. I know first hand their immense needs and want to provide choices to students who have limited opportunities so they can improve their chances of career success."

Not only does Dr. Keating-Lefler support the College of Nursing through her teaching and scholarship support, she also helps former students stay connected to UNMC through her position as president of the UNMC College of Nursing Alumni Association. She hopes to reconnect as many alumni as possible with UNMC and encourage them to support student activities and the college's financial needs.

"The most important thing alumni can do is to give back to those who helped assure their professional success," she said.

Through her various efforts, Dr. Keating-Lefler hopes to continually be a vital member of the UNMC family – dedicated to the college's programs and goals of achieving excellence in academics and clinical performance.

"Health care in our country is at a critical point in time," she said. "Nurses are in a pivotal position to lead the interprofessional health care teams to assure quality and safe patient care is delivered to every person regardless of cultural, social, physical, mental and financial status." ∞