As the Dean of the College of Nursing at the University of South Florida, I see young women and men following their dreams everyday as they embark on a path to a successful and fulfilling career in the ever-expanding world of healthcare. I see veteran healthcare professionals returning to the USF College of Nursing to further their educations and, ultimately their career. Leading all of them is a group of talented educators who generously share their knowledge, experience and support. To all of these remarkable people, nursing is more than their job, it is their life. These bright individuals are dedicated every day to the art and science of nursing because within them lies the inherent desire to help, to heal, to nurture, to explore.

When I was a student considering my own future in healthcare, my dreams and goals were, and still are, the same as those who have chosen to pursue their education and careers in nursing at USF today. Nursing is my life.

While you explore the pages of Nursing Life, you will find testaments to the college’s dedication to nursing education, research and excellence in patient care. I encourage you to remember that at the USF College of Nursing, our passion is for life, making it better for all, now and for the future.

Patricia Burns, PhD, RN, FAAN
Sr. Associate Vice President, USF Health Dean, USF College of Nursing
Innovative. Progressive. Passionate. Creative. These are just a few of the words that have been used to describe nursing education at the University of South Florida. If you are a nurse, it's not just a job, it's who you are. Nursing is life.
Another reason for my stay is to develop a strong relationship between the two nursing programs and further an exchange of ideas.

Last fall the college welcomed Andreas Peesel, a nursing student from Germany. Peesel chose to study nursing education at University of South Florida which was made possible through a two-semester scholarship from the University of Osnabrück in Osnabrück, Germany.

Peesel worked as a surgical nurse for three years in Germany but in 2004 decided to go to school to become a teacher. He now holds a Bachelors Degree in Nursing with minors in English, American Studies and Education from the University of Osnabrück. While at USF, he has been working to improve his English speaking skills in addition to learning more about our American healthcare and the nursing educational system. He is especially interested in how nursing is taught.
at USF. He aspires to teach nursing as well as English at a German vocational school, which offers instruction in various different professions.

“I always was interested in teaching,” said Andreas Peesel.

Germany’s educational system is different than the United States. German students may attend a vocational school following their primary education. Specific to nursing education, in Germany, there are no registered nurses. Instead nurses earn a “life-long licensure”.

Peesel was surprised by the course workload at USF and in the United States overall. He explains that, although students in the United States attempt fewer credit hours each semester than students in Europe, each course’s workload is much heavier here in the United States.

“That’s one reason for me coming; what you have in Germany and what you have in the United States,” said Andreas Peesel.

Germany operates both private and socialized systems of medicine. In the socialized medicine system, everyone must purchase health insurance which guarantees that everyone has access to health care. According to Peesel almost 50% of the German personal income goes towards taxes and insurance. He notes that through socialized medicine the access to healthcare is greatly increased while maintaining the quality of care. According to Peesel, private healthcare patients receive better amenities, but about the same medical services offered to socialized medicine patients. Those receiving private healthcare include teachers, businesspeople, officers, police and military.

Peesel is taking masters level nursing courses at USF and plans to take the German state examination which is the equivalent to a masters degree. He also would like to continue studying at USF in the future.

“Attending classes as a student at USF provides a good basis for comparing the different programs,” said Peesel. “Another reason for my stay is to develop a strong relationship between the two nursing programs and further an exchange of ideas.”
To address the ongoing national nursing shortage, the University of South Florida College of Nursing is enhancing the depth of preparation for today’s nursing workforce and training the nurse educators of the future. On October 5, 2007, the College hosted two programs that demonstrate a commitment to inspiring all nurses, this generation and the next.

The day began with an orientation for the College’s newest future nurses - the elite group of students enrolled in the C.A.R.E. program. C.A.R.E., or Creating Access to RN Education, is a limited-access restricted program designed for high-achieving first time in college students. The orientation was organized to ensure that C.A.R.E. students get off to the right start with program requirements, personal responsibility, and college resources.

That evening, the College hosted a Doctoral Open House for prospective students interested in doctoral programs. The Open House provided a forum for prospective students to convene to ask questions, meet faculty, explore research interests, learn about the programs, and make a decision about their plans for doctoral studies. The experience was incredibly motivating for all in attendance, making it a convincing factor for many to pursue doctoral studies. In all, forty-two prospective doctoral students attended the event along with program directors, staff, and current students. Feedback on the Open House has been tremendous with a large percentage of applications to nursing doctoral programs coming from Open House participants.

The C.A.R.E. orientation and Doctoral Open House are just two examples of the wealth of options that the College offers to those interested in pursuing nursing degrees. These options include three pathways to obtaining a bachelors degree, an expansive range of masters concentrations, a research-based PhD, and an advanced clinical Doctor of Nursing Practice degree. From those initially embarking on a career in nursing, to those preparing to take the ultimate step in nursing education, the dedication to the art and science of nursing is the same for everyone at the USF College of Nursing.
A Celebration of Diversity
Story by Ashlea Hudak

Consistent with the values of the University of South Florida and adapted by the USF College of Nursing, the Diversity Committee seeks to create an atmosphere of acceptance and equality. Arranged by the College of Nursing’s Diversity Committee, the Annual USF College of Nursing Diversity Celebration filled the gathering space of the college with music and food, as well as nursing faculty, staff and students wearing traditional clothing from their native culture or heritage.

The event included a contest, cultural display and pot-luck lunch supplied by volunteering nursing faculty, staff and students. Nineteen-year old jazz flutist and local rising musical talent, Jose Valentino

Ruiz, provided electrifying music and entertained diversity celebration guests. Ruiz’s Hispanic heritage is evident in his music with the passionate combination of classical flute and Latin inspiration.

At the close of the event, Dean for a Day raffle winner, Anna Pate presented the Outstanding Costume Award to nursing master’s student, Marilyn Aluoch, who wore her traditional Kenyan attire.

This event was made possible through the generous donation of time by nursing students, faculty and staff. The diversity committee is already looking forward to planning and participating in next year’s festivities at the College of Nursing Diversity Celebration. The College of Nursing also participates in the Annual USF Cultural Fiesta held in November at USF Health.

The College of Nursing Diversity Committee is a member of the Florida Alliance Initiative (FIA), an alliance of 15 Florida Universities formed with the Nebraska and Virginia Workforce Improvement as a model. The USF College of Nursing is hosting the FIA website at http://health.usf.edu/nocms/nursing/fai/ and has secured funding to host a conference in future.

The USF College of Nursing Diversity Committee mission statement demonstrates the college’s commitment to diversity and equality in the health care workforce.

The College of Nursing at the University of South Florida strives to create and maintain a fully inclusive environment that actively promotes and values diversity in its broadest sense. Specifically this includes ensuring broad representation of students, faculty and staff across multiple indicators of diversity defined by age, gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic level, national origin, religious belief, and sexual orientation, as well as by prior educational attainment and work experiences that are cross-disciplinary. Moreover, the College of Nursing is committed to developing a health care workforce that effectively meets the cultural, racial and ethnic needs of the communities it serves. These dedicated values are consistent with the University of South Florida’s commitment to diversity, while tailored to the specific educational, research, service, and outreach mission of the College of Nursing.
The tenure of Anna Pate, College of Nursing

Dean for a Day

Story by Ashlea Hudak
College of Nursing Dean for a Day Anna Pate took office and retired on the same day, September 21, 2007. During the course of the day she shadowed the Dean of the College of Nursing at the University of South Florida, Patricia A. Burns, attending events, meetings and lectures. Not only did Dean for a Day, Anna Pate attend the events, she acted as the Dean at all of the events.

Anna Pate, was selected for this opportunity through a USF Health raffle drawing during the Carnival Bash this past spring. The idea for Dean for a Day blossomed from a dinner conversation between the deans from the Colleges of Nursing, Public Health and Medicine, as a unique learning experience for students.

The three colleges held Dean for a Day raffles as a way to create excitement and boost friendly competition among all USF Health students.

“It’s a great opportunity for our students to learn what happens behind the scenes and see how the collaborative efforts of the faculty, administrators, staff and students blend to make a college function”, said Dean Patricia Burns, “The Dean for a Day raffle was extremely successful.”

On the morning of her day-long tenure, Pate attended the College of Nursing’s Faculty Council meeting and presented the Dean’s Report. During the well received report, Pate introduced new nursing faculty, relayed business from the University’s Council of Deans meeting, spoke of upcoming events and announced a large donation made to the college.

“It’s a lot of work and it takes a lot of knowledge,” said Pate. “You have to know about finance and marketing as well as nursing.”

Later on in the morning, Pate introduced and presented a plaque to the College of Nursing’s first in a series of scheduled Distinguished Lecturers, Dr. Kathy Richards. Pate and Dean Burns both attended Dr. Richard’s engaging lecture and research presentation on Behavioral Interventions for Insomnia and Older Adults.

As another eventful Friday at the College of Nursing continued, the gathering space of the college filled with music and food and as well as faculty, staff and students wearing traditional garb from their native culture or heritage.

Pate welcomed and thanked faculty, staff and students for their attendance and participation in the Diversity Celebration arranged by the College of Nursing’s Diversity Committee. The event included a costume contest, cultural display and pot-luck lunch supplied by volunteering nursing faculty, staff and students. In addition, electrifying music provided by jazz flutist and rising musical talent, Jose Valentino Ruiz, entertained Diversity Celebration guests. At the close of the event, Dean for a Day Anna Pate presented the Outstanding Costume Award to Nursing master’s student, Marilyn Aluoch, who won the award for her traditional Kenyan attire.

“"It’s a great opportunity for our students to learn what happens behind the scenes..."
THE SPIRIT OF USF HEALTH

Story by Ashlea Hudak
In the spirit of USF Health collaboration, this year nursing students united with students from other areas of USF Health to create a USF Health homecoming float.

The organization and sponsorship of this event was the nursing students’ contribution to the collection of USF Health student social events. Contributions from the other colleges included the College of Medicine Executive Council and the College of Public Health Student Association co-sponsoring the Welcome Back Luncheon for all USF Health students and the Dine with the Dean dinner.

“This year is our first to do a USF Health float,” said College of Nursing Student Council Social Chair, Laura Nowlin. “We are trying to work more as a team with the College of Nursing, College of Medicine and College of Public Health.”

The entry fee and rental of the homecoming float was paid for by College of Nursing Dean Patricia A. Burns. In order to repay Dean Burns, the nursing students have vowed to keep the refrigerator in the nursing student kitchen spotless as well as take turns cleaning the surrounding area.

The USF Health float was filled with nursing students wearing scrubs in every color and pattern as well as a dozen medicine students in their traditional light blue scrub attire. Public health students participated in spirit as they were away at an academic conference and were not able to attend the homecoming parade festivities. Riding on the float in the parade were also the College of Nursing’s guests from the University of Panama, Professor Lourdes De Alguero and Panamanian nursing students Liris Castillo and Celeste Cedeño.

The students embraced this year’s homecoming theme, “Let’s Get Excited”, as they met at noon on the day of the homecoming night parade to work on their float and prepare additional posters and decorations. The float resembled a castle tower’s walkway with a grey stone brick design complete with large arched doorways. Mythical creatures dressed in College of Nursing and Medicine student attire adorned the front of the float. A display of USF green and gold decorations and balloons transformed the rented “Ancient Treasures” parade float into an outstanding embodiment of USF Health and Homecoming spirit.

College of Nursing and Medicine students as well as the College of Nursing’s guests from the University of Panama aboard the Fall 2007 USF HEALTH Homecoming Parade float.
The bottom line is to improve the quality of life for women and their babies

Maureen Groer, RN, PhD, FAAN, Gordon Keller Professor of Nursing at USF, has received a four-year, $1.45-million National Institutes of Health grant to study changes in immune function following childbirth with the research study, "Influence of Lactation on Postpartum Stress and Immunity" during which participants will be screened for thyroid disease.

As one of the first studies to prospectively examine bio-behavioral markers in postpartum women, Dr. Groer and co-investigators: Cecile Jevitt, PhD, Professor and Jason Beckstead, PhD, Associate Professor, College of Nursing; David Keefe, MD, James M. Ingram Professor and Chairman Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, College of Medicine; and Wei Wang, PhD, Research Assistant Professor, Biostatistics, College of Public Health will study bio-behavioral markers and analyze their connection with stress and overall health in postpartum women.
“We want to try and understand how biology and psychology are related in postpartum women,” said Dr. Groer.

Pregnant and postpartum women are by nature very healthy. They have an active immune system, experience fewer infections and less stress. Furthermore, when they are stressed, they do not experience negative health effects. Dr. Groer found in a previous NIH funded study, that postpartum women may experience heightened immune defenses, and this response may protect women from infectious diseases. The increased postpartum response of the immune system may, however, also increase susceptibility to certain autoimmune diseases.

In the United States, women return to work and daily activities only six weeks after delivery, when they are still physiologically recovering from childbirth. In Europe, women are afforded up to a year. Their mood can be also be greatly affected during this time as they deal with the stress of leaving the baby during the day and staying up late at night caring for the child. Women who breastfeed experience additional challenges regarding maintaining a supply of milk for their baby and often feel discouraged to pump while at work. It may also be difficult to find room to store and keep the milk safe and clean in a workplace environment. It is, therefore, understandable that the number one complaint of post-partum women is fatigue.

Dr. Groer’s study participants will complete comprehensive surveys including information about their physical health, mood and stress levels. Specifically, the group will compare healthy mothers with those at risk for postpartum thyroiditis, an inflammation of the thyroid gland. The thyroid gland is very important in pregnancy and postpartum and is essential for metabolism, temperature, mood, reproduction and many other functions. Thyroiditis affects 7 to 10 percent of women following childbirth and, although thyroid disease in postpartum women is usually not severe, it is a model of autoimmunity in the postpartum. Dr. Groer will compare these results with experiences and biological processes of the control group, postpartum women not at risk for thyroiditis.

“The bottom line is to improve the quality of life for women and their babies,” Dr. Groer said.

The grant has also facilitated the hiring of additional staff to assist with the collection and analysis of data including Lab Technician, Maura Manion, and Graduate Research assistant, Jean Francois. A Research Nurse, Monalisa Harrington, will also join the team soon to coordinate participants’ in-home follow-up visits, as well as mentor graduate and undergraduate nursing students in conducting research in this area. Together the group will follow over 200 Tampa area women who will be recruited through USF Health, the clinic at Tampa General Hospital and Genesis clinic, from delivery until six months postpartum.

The lab in which the scientific analysis of data will take place is being relocated from a nearby building to a more accessible location in the College of Nursing. Plans for the lab space are currently in development.

“Several nursing faculty are using or plan to use the lab,” said Dr. Groer. “Having it in a central location will provide the resources and convenience necessary for faculty and student research.”
Over the summer, University of South Florida College of Nursing faculty member and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) student, Afriyie Johnson, traveled to Accra, Ghana in Africa as part of her evidence based project for her DNP degree. Her project took place at Valley View University in Oyibi, a suburb of Accra. Initially, Johnson sought to develop a protocol to help diploma prepared registered nurses (RNs) become baccalaureate prepared nurses in a shorter time than current progression.

Johnson’s plans changed when she found that her visit coincided with Valley View University’s baccalaureate nursing program accreditation visit. The visit came just four days after her arrival and Johnson became very involved in the processes of assisting VVU in meeting the recommendations made by the National Accreditation Board of Ghana. Johnson felt that if there wasn’t a school of nursing in the area, there could not be a bridge program for diploma nurses to become bachelors-prepared nurses. This realization resulted in a priority shift and Johnson’s subsequent changes in project focus.

During the next four weeks, Johnson was instrumental in making revisions and fulfilling the recommendations of the accreditation board to bring Valley View University into compliance with the standards required to receive accreditation for a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. Johnson helped prepare curriculum and accreditation documents as well as affiliation agreements for their clinical sites, one of which is in a remote mountainous location.

As part of the ongoing effort, Johnson and nurses from the U.S. including New York are collaborating with the head of the nursing school at Valley View University to plan faculty development workshops for Summer 2008.
Their goal is to train nurses, physicians, and scientists as nursing faculty. They also plan to expose the local nurses to the expanding roles of nursing in the global market.

"Ghana is a beautiful country and the administration of Valley View University were wonderfully open, receptive and supportive of the assistance and expertise that we brought and plan to bring next summer," said Johnson.

In the United States, we rely heavily on technology based education, however, nurses in Ghana rely on their exceptional nursing skills and educational techniques, due to the lack of resources in the region. Area hospitals, where the students work, see between five and six hundred patients every day, giving students a wealth of hands-on patient care experience.

"The nursing experience is so different and our practice realities are so different," said Johnson.

In Ghana there are often long wait periods between certification and employment. Upon receiving a nursing degree and passing the certification examination, nurses are placed in hospitals where there is a need, sometimes in locations far from their families. As a result, nurses in Ghana often seek employment in Europe, Canada and the United States. As in any discipline, people in search of a better lifestyle look for opportunities for better working conditions and rewards. Nurses in Ghana are no exception.

Johnson hopes her dream of developing a bridge program for diploma nurses to become bachelors-prepared nurses in Ghana will come to fruition at Valley View University. This would help alleviate some of the current nursing exodus. In the mean time, VVU’s school of nursing received official accreditation two weeks after Johnson’s departure and is currently educating its first cohort of nursing students.

“This experience was very satisfying. It was a lot of work and it was not what I expected to do; but it was certainly rewarding and I hope to be involved in more such endeavors as it will hopefully further bring nursing education and care, all over the world to similar standards.”

Top: The first church and school building in the village of Feyiasi was built by Ms. Johnson’s father several decades ago.
Below: Portrait of Afriye Johnson
The University of South Florida College of Nursing Center for Psychoneuroimmunology continues to grow and develop. This past fall, the College of Nursing hosted the first in a series of meetings, retreats and conventions drawing highly-renowned Psychoneuroimmunology researchers from all across the country. Specific ideas for research as well as more general suggestions for the direction of the center were discussed.

Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) is the study of the interrelationships between the brain, behavior and the immune system. The PNI Center’s two primary purposes are to collect and translate information pertaining to the brain, behavior, and immune system into health-promoting strategies and to characterize the mechanisms that mediate relationships between psychological/behavioral events and health-outcomes involving the immune system.

“The center will pursue three avenues of service,” said Director of the USF College of Nursing Center for Psychoneuroimmunology and Senior Scientist, Nick Hall, PhD. “These will include research, education, and the translation of knowledge into clinical practice. This will be accomplished through the creation of an environment that will facilitate the free exchange of ideas pertaining to the way psychological variables, the brain, and the immune system interact.”

The Center capitalizes on the University and College of Nursing’s plentiful resources and existing collaborations. This includes a newly established partnership with the Saddlebrook Resort Wellness Center, and the opportunity to work with the elite athletes and corporate clients who visit and train at this world renowned facility. The College of Nursing faculty’s many ongoing National Institute of Health (NIH) funded grants and the support of College of Nursing Dean Patricia A. Burns, also advance the Center’s goals.

“Whether a person is seeking optimal health to achieve their professional objectives, or whether they simply want to enjoy life more, the College of Nursing Center for Psychoneuroimmunology, along with it’s partners, is the place to start,” says Hall. Anyone wishing to be informed of center research and educational activities should contact Nick Hall at nhall@health.usf.edu
The USF College of Nursing Research Center supports the conduct of timely, clinically-relevant, multi-disciplinary research that significantly advances the science of health. This includes, but is not limited to, patient care and health services delivery, evidence-based medicine, and identification of pathophysiological mechanisms.

“My goal is to create an environment and infrastructure that leads to substantially larger and more diverse research opportunities,” said Executive Director of the Research Center at the University of South Florida College of Nursing, Kevin E. Kip, PhD.

Collaborations are currently underway between the College of Nursing and USF Health Information Technologies (IT) to formally establish a USF Health Data Coordinating Center that will be housed at the College of Nursing. This center will partner directly with the Colleges of Medicine and Public Health. The USF Health IT group will provide technological capability in data management and administration, including
the development of web based data entry systems based on relational databases and structured query language (SQL).

Dr. Kip has considerable past experience in managing studies as a data coordination center and is preparing an ambitious January 2008 submission (~$3.5M) to be a Data Coordination Core (DCC) for a multi-center study on Chronic Pelvic Pain with the NIDDK. Other DCC grant applications are presently underway and being identified.

"The aim is to expand our research infrastructure and capabilities, while compiling and maintaining large data sets that can be used for preliminary analyses for future grant submissions, publications, and masters and doctoral theses and dissertations," Dr. Kip said.

The College of Nursing has substantially increased its grant submission activities. In particular, multiple R01 grant applications for the November 2007 cycle were submitted, including proposed studies in the area of end of life care (PI: Dr. Susan McMillan), and mindfulness based stress reductions (MBSR) for breast cancer survivors (PI: Dr. Cecile Lengacher). The College is optimistic of the success of these submissions.

Additional pending and submitted grant awards and proposals include a SUCCEED grant award for $150,000 from the Florida Department of Education for a collaborative activity using an existing Clinical Collaboration established in 2001 with 15 health care facilities in the Tampa Bay area. Dr. Sandra Cadena will be the Principal Investigator should this application be funded, as anticipated. Multiple grant applications were submitted to the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) this past December.

Dr. Janine Overcash, in collaboration with Dr. Martine Extermann (Moffitt) as co-Principal Investigators, submitted an NIH R01 grant proposal entitled: “Colorectal Cancer: Post-Operative Geriatric Intervention.” This initial NIH submission is a randomized trial to assess the impact of a geriatric intervention in cancer patients with the use of an oncology therapeutic trial methodology.

Dr. Versie Johnson-Mallard submitted a concept paper to the Vaccine Division of Merck for consideration of a full proposal submission to investigate the knowledge and acceptance success of these submissions.

"My goal is to create an environment and infrastructure that leads to substantially larger and more diverse research opportunities"
for receiving the GARDASIL® vaccine (for HPV infection) among African American and Hispanic young adults (females and males) attending two historical Black universities in Florida. Results of this investigation will help determine the potential feasibility and barriers to widespread use of the vaccine among young minority adults with the goal of decreasing cancers that are causally associated with HPV.

The College is also seeking congressionally-earmarked funding for 2 special projects: A Center for Psychoneuroimmunology Education and Research to be directed by Dr. Nick Hall, and Supplemental Services and Research to Improve Emotional Health and Quality of Life Among Veterans with Severe Disabilities (PI: Dr. Cecile Lengacher). The latter project will partner with the James A. Haley VA Hospital. In addition, other grant applications by both faculty and students have either been submitted or are pending.

“In today’s fiscally constrained environment, we must seek multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional collaborations, as well as varied and creative funding sources” Dr. Kip said. “This is why we have purposely sought and established collaborations with USF Health IT, other USF colleges, and health services and institutions throughout the Tampa Bay area.”

Consisting of five offices and a small conference area, The Research Center facility is now fully equipped with computers and phones. Recent personnel hires to support the Research Center include:

1) Dr. Shirley Fitzgerald, a PhD epidemiologist and biostatistician who has a 20% secondary appointment with the College and is providing epidemiological and biostatistical support, will serve as a direct link for collaborations with the VA Medical Center; 2) Kristen Coley, an undergraduate student who is assisting with patient recruitment, literature searches, and other research activities; and 3) Janice Walker, unit research Administrator, who is assuming a critical financial management role by assisting faculty with pre-submission grant budgets, and post-award tracking and forecasting of expenditures. In addition, Susan Binkowski has been formally hired and promoted as unit research administrator to serve as grants manager for the College.

Future staff of the Research Center at the College of Nursing will include a research administrative specialist to assist faculty and students with submission, revision and renewal of IRB applications, a statistician to aid faculty with statistical analyses of research data and grant applications, and a data manager to help with the collection, management, and quality control of research data.

“Like Rome, our Research Center cannot be built in a day,” Dr. Kip said. “Nonetheless, we are committed to getting as many of the pieces and processes in place as rapidly as possible to significantly improve the national research ranking of the USF College of Nursing.”
For more than 20 years, Ted and Marty Couch have been working behind the scenes, generously supporting the causes they hold dear. Their family has embraced a culture of philanthropy and in 1988 created the Couch Family Foundation to support education, medical advancement and the underserved.

As a result of their dedication to lifelong learning, the Couch Family Foundation donated $25,000 to establish the Couch Family Foundation First Generation Scholarship benefiting USF College of Nursing students. This gift, eligible for a 100% match through the State of Florida First Generation Scholars program, will result in $50,000 for students who are the first in their families to seek a college education. Many of these students face tremendous financial hurdles in pursuing their lifelong dream. These funds touch the deepest need for our most vulnerable students.

“Our family feels that we are fortunate, and as such, have a responsibility to give back to the community.”

OPPORTUNITY & MOTIVATION FOR SUCCESS

Story by Bethany Rushing
“You have to have a certain level of formal education to succeed,” says T.J. Couch, Vice President of the Couch Family Foundation Board. “Now, of course, there are exceptions. There are folks that have never been to college that are on the Fortune 500 list, but, in a broader perspective, I think that education is extremely important. So, when you look at the problems in our society, a lot of them can be traced back to not having the tools to be able to better yourself in our society.” By focusing on first generation students, the family endeavors to create a cycle of success for generations to come.

Partial tuition scholarships are a tool that the foundation hopes will encourage young learners to persevere and inspire a strong work ethic.

Couch states, “[My dad] grew up in a household where they measured the water used to make certain that they did not exceed the minimum allotment and use more water than the base allocation…if you use one gallon over this you’ve got an extra charge. And, you know, it was a very tough time. My grandmother was a single parent rearing four children, and it was hard to make ends meet. Everyone had to work to survive. As a result, everyone in my family, cousins and extended family as well, has a very strong work ethic. My dad feels that it is very important that people have, what he calls, ‘skin in the game’—that when you have to contribute some of your own effort it is more meaningful and it provides more motivation for you to succeed. By not giving the full ride, we’re not holding something back, but essentially we’re providing motivation for the person to have the best opportunity to succeed.”

The Couch family’s investment in future generations extends to their own family. Just as the family is allowing first generation students the opportunity to create a cycle of success, they are also continuing their cycle of philanthropy through their own future generations.

“Our family feels that we are fortunate, and as such, have a responsibility to give back to the community. It’s starting to expand through generations now as my siblings and I are becoming more involved with the foundation. My sister’s kids recently gave a presentation to the foundation to appeal for funds for their Cub Scout troupe. Those who are fortunate have that responsibility and duty to give back to the community and it’s important that they actually do it. And, you can’t deny the good feeling. It’s certainly not the putting on of the tuxedo and going to the fundraising dinner, it’s not the name on a placard by an entryway…it’s actually seeing the changes for the better that have come about by making a grant or a contribution.”

For the USF College of Nursing, that contribution is visible in the five students who were selected as Couch Family Foundation First Generation scholars this year: Janae Freeman, Tracy Simon, Rene Rutledge, Ashley Nye and Phung Huynh.

For more information on the Couch Family Foundation, please visit: www.couchfamilyfoundation.org
There were no robots in those days. We were each other’s pin cushions.
USF College of Nursing graduate Donna Young, class of 1976, currently works as the House Director of the Ronald McDonald House program in both Tampa and St. Petersburg. Young’s interest in healthcare started while volunteering at the James Haley Veteran’s Hospital in the Physical Therapy Dept., and from there grew into a passion for nursing.

“I remember some of these male, post-Vietnam war-era veterans would come down for whirlpool therapy and I always wanted to know more. It wasn’t enough just to see them come down and get their therapy, I wanted to know what else was happening back up on the floor and know more about their whole medical history. So I decided I was going to go into nursing,” says Young.

Once enrolled in the College of Nursing, Young found it to be a very rigorous program. “I think being in the second class they gave us a tremendous workload as they adjusted the program and saw how much they needed to teach us,” said Young.

During a recent trip back to see the new College of Nursing facilities Young was floored.

“Times have changed. You know, you’re seeing it from this nice new building and all the growth that’s involved with USF Health. I mean we went to school in the trailers. I have fond memories of that experience.”

Upon her visit to the state-of-the-art Virtual Learning Center, Young was introduced to one of the “robots” that simulates different health conditions to aid in diagnosis and treatment education.

“When I was in school we were each other’s guinea pigs. We’d get on the table and be examined and we actually gave each other the shots. There were no robots in those days. We were each other’s pin cushions.”

Now at the Ronald McDonald House, Young counts her experience at the USF College of Nursing invaluable. After opening the first Ronald McDonald House in the state of Florida in 1980, she has continued with the organization, now supervising three houses with construction underway on the fourth.

Young says, “We’ve grown over time and I’ve been able to use my skills of team-leading. I’m not doing drug cards or care plans anymore, but I have fond memories of those. That’s how things have changed for me. Because this is a semi-medical complex where families stay when their children are in the hospital or are outpatients, they’re telling us about their situation and I can get a feel for whether there’s misinformation that they have, or who we need to refer them to back at the hospital. I feel comfortable in a hospital setting, too, so I don’t have any qualms about picking up the phone and talking to a social worker or chaplain or calling the nursing supervisor or the charge nurse and talking directly to them. That past experience has definitely been a help in guiding the growth of these houses.”

Whether working in a clinical setting or providing care to families whose children are undergoing medical treatment, nursing education has proven itself invaluable to alums like Young. According to Young, “Going to nursing school and those first few years in the hospital setting helped put me on this path to what I’m doing today.”
USF students in the certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNA) program pursue an education in anesthesia and advanced nursing practice. CRNAs are anesthesia specialists who administer approximately 65% of the 26 million anesthetics given to patients each year in the United States.