

SPRING 2025

The Pulse

Laurel Ridge Community College Nursing News

Since 2002, nearly 1,300 students have earned an associate degree in nursing from Laurel Ridge. Our graduates make an enormous difference in the health of our communities!

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New Clinical Partnership: Laurel Ridge and Blue Ridge Care



(L-R) Dr. Kim Blosser, Laurel Ridge President; Blake Smyle, Blue Ridge Care VP of Clinical Operations; Altonia Garrett, Blue Ridge Care COO; and Johanna Weiss, Laurel Ridge VP of Academic and Student Affairs

Thanks to a new clinical affiliation agreement, Laurel Ridge students in the Nursing and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) programs will gain valuable hands-on experience under the supervision of the expert clinical team at Blue Ridge Care (formerly Blue Ridge Hospice).

"This is an incredible opportunity for our students. They will receive practical, real-world experience that is crucial for their professional development," said Scott Vanderkooi, Dean of Health Professions at Laurel Ridge.

"Our partnership will also support Blue Ridge Care's mission to provide high quality and compassionate patient care," explains Altonia Garrett, the organization's chief operating officer. "We are excited to collaborate to train the next generation of healthcare professionals."

Nursing Program Welcomes Delegate Webert

Virginia Delegate Mike Webert (61st district) recently met with college officials and toured the Fauquier Campus in Warrenton. He was impressed with the new Skilled Trades Center and the nursing and surgical technology labs in Hazel Hall.

"I am grateful for the educational resources available right here in Fauquier County. Laurel Ridge will continue to have my support for these great programs!"

Photo: Delegate Mike Webert checks SimMan's pulse during a demonstration with Professor Jon Hammer. Hammer previously worked as an ER nurse, a flight medic in the U.S. Air Force Reserve, and a firefighter-paramedic.



The Yang Family Supports Future Nurses

Leonard and Janet Yang

Laurel Ridge donors Leonard and Janet Yang know what it takes to be successful in the healthcare field, and both are community college graduates. Janet is a nurse, and her husband is a retired ER doctor at Winchester Medical Center. In 2022, they created the **Yang Family Health Professions & Education Scholarship**.

“This was our calling,” Leonard said. The Yangs both attended Illinois Central College, a community college in Peoria, Ill. “I believe in the community college system,” said Leonard. “It kept my expenses down, so I didn’t have a huge debt like some of my peers did, and I don’t feel like there was any deficit in my education. I felt very well prepared.”

Leonard went on to medical school at the University of Illinois, while Janet completed her nursing degree at Bradley University. The two met when Janet transferred from the cardiac unit to the ER department at Peoria’s Methodist Medical Center.

“We saw how my coworkers in the emergency department struggled,” Leonard said. “Things would get in the way, or there wasn’t enough money. They had to hold off on another semester, and they were working full time. They studied at night, and they were exhausted.”

Janet added, “If we can give students like them some support, it is just really fulfilling to be able to do that.”

Jay Lynch ’25

Jay Lynch is very grateful for the Yang Family Scholarship. “The idea of college has always been daunting from a financial point of view,” she said. “My family doesn’t have money to help me pursue my dream of being a nurse. Financial aid and scholarships have been a lifesaver.”

A second-generation Filipino, Jay earned an associate degree in nursing this year (see photo) and plans to work in a hospital ER before pursuing a BSN. Her career goal is to be nurse practitioner.



Alumni Spotlight: Andrea Sann '14

degree from Graceland University. She now works as a nurse practitioner at Susquehanna Health Neurology and is affiliated with UPMC in Williamsport, Pa.

“I have had a passion for neurology since the day I started my nursing career,” she said. “In fact, my very first job as an RN was on a neurology medical surgical floor.”

While she enjoyed her classes at Laurel Ridge, there were a few standouts, including her anatomy and physiology courses, taught by the late Dr. James Crowley and Jeffrey Hollar, microbiology, taught by Dr. Brian Cantwell, and a public speaking class. The latter, Sann said, “really helped me to conquer my fear of public speaking, which as a healthcare professional, is a skill I use almost daily.”

As for the Nursing program, “It is a very vigorous program and requires a great deal of dedication and commitment,” Sann noted. “The program pushed me to strive for excellence, which is something we must

do every day for the benefit of our patients.” Ladonna Williams and Tanya Bock stand out as faculty members she looked up to in the program.

“My foundation at Laurel Ridge helped to shape the entire course of my nursing career.”

“The courses gave me instrumental knowledge that helped me to understand what is going on in my patients’ bodies and understand why certain treatments work,” said Sann. “The clinical rotations taught me how to think on my feet, prioritize, and handle the chaos of the healthcare setting—a setting I now thrive in.”

Andrea (Fala) Sann, BSN, RN, AGACNP-BC, ACNPC-AG, CCRN, chose Laurel Ridge to begin her nursing career for several reasons.

“Not only does Laurel Ridge have an exceptional reputation in the community,” she said, “but the college is also known for preparing nurses who are skilled, knowledgeable, and able to do their job from day one.”

Sann went on to earn her bachelor’s degree from Chamberlain University and master’s

Faculty Spotlight

Elizabeth “Liza” Marshall is the longest serving nursing faculty member at Laurel Ridge.

Liza Marshall’s first experience at Laurel Ridge was in 1993 to complete nursing pre-requisites before returning to her alma mater, Auburn University, to earn her BSN. She had met her husband previously at Auburn while pursuing her BS in family and child development, and they moved to his hometown of Winchester. After working at the Veteran’s Administration Hospital in Martinsburg, W.Va., Liza worked as a staff nurse and certified childbirth educator at Winchester Medical Center.

“As a staff nurse, I educated patients and precepted and oriented student nurses,” said Liza. “I loved sharing my knowledge and experiences with others. It doesn’t hurt that I do have a gift for gab.” After a workplace injury left her with a partial disability in her dominant hand and wrist, she decided to get her MSN in nursing education from the University of Phoenix.

In 2001, Liza found her way back to Laurel Ridge as a preceptor and clinical instructor while simultaneously working at Winchester Medical Center. Then, in August 2003, “I was officially hired full-time as an instructor. I taught in both the nursing and practical nursing programs.”

Liza now has two roles at Laurel Ridge: Associate Professor of Nursing and Nurse Retention Specialist. She has taught many courses over the years, and favorites include maternal/child health and first-semester med/surg fundamentals.

“I have found that the students are eager and excited about the first semester and want to absorb all the information they can,” she said. She frequently reminds students that no matter where their nursing path takes them, they will always use their fundamentals.

“When students make a connection, I love seeing that look in their eyes.”

“As a nurse retention specialist, I focus on student success,” Liza said. She helps students with test-taking skills and study skills by reviewing how they study and identifying the best way they learn. She also assists students with time management and scheduling—helping them to balance work, school, and life. “I am also here to listen, hold a hand, or give a pat on the back,” she adds. “Helping students to improve and succeed is one of the most rewarding responsibilities I have.”

What has kept Liza at Laurel Ridge for just shy of 23 years? She credits the people, the friends she has made, the atmosphere, and the students.



“I have seen many changes over my time here, so it is never boring,” Liza noted. “To be completely honest, after the first couple of years, I had a feeling that I had found my home for the remainder of my career.”



Laurel Ridge is Number One

Laurel Ridge Community College faculty and staff are doing great things—and have the stats to prove it.

For four straight years, the college has been No. 1 among the 23 institutions in the Virginia Community College System when it comes to student success data points measured by the state system’s outcome-based funding model.

According to Dr. Caroline Wood, associate vice president of student services and academic support, “We have exceptional faculty who care about making sure students are learning and are successful.”

For more information about this and other happenings at the college, visit laurelridge.edu/news.

Will you support the next generation of Laurel Ridge nurses?

A donation of any size to our Nursing Fund will make a difference: laurelridge.edu/donatenow



Laurel Ridge Receives State-of-the-Art Surgical Simulators



Laurel Ridge Surgical Technology students now have access to a powerful new tool to learn laparoscopic skills: the LapSim ST® virtual reality training system. U.S. Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine of Virginia worked to secure \$305,000 in federal funding to purchase simulators for both the Fauquier and Middletown campuses.

“This funding is an investment in Laurel Ridge and its students,” said the senators, “and also the greater health and wellbeing of our communities at a time when we are grappling with healthcare provider shortages.”

LapSim ST® is manufactured exclusively by Surgical Science, Inc., and the training curriculum is designed specifically for both surgical technology and surgical first assistant programs.

“We can teach the material in the textbook, and we can somewhat simulate surgical situations. But to actually feel what it’s like to follow with the camera is pretty amazing,” said Surgical Technology Program Director Tina Putman. “It will give our students valuable experience before they start clinicals in the operating room.”