

NSNA/Nursing Spectrum/Nurseweek 3rd Annual Essay Contest Grand Prize Winner

Almost everyone chooses nursing as a career to make a difference in patients' lives. But how do we make a difference in the nursing profession? NSNA and *Nursing Spectrum* cosponsored an essay contest that asked students to answer the question, "How Do You Make a Difference in the Nursing Profession?" The winner, Michael Spieker, a nursing student at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford, OK, won first place and traveled this summer on *Nursing Spectrum's* Alaska Cruise. He also won a \$1,000 travel stipend, complimentary registration to the NSNA 52nd Annual Convention in Nashville, a plaque, an NSNA Leadership U certificate, and a selection of Nursing Spectrum CareerWare® merchandise.

Diana Knox, RN, MS, CHN, the faculty member who sponsored Spieker's winning entry, received an NSNA Leadership U certificate, one free contact



Grand Prize Essay Winner Michael Spieker pictured here with Cindy Saver, Nursing Spectrum representative.

hour of continuing education credit, and free registration to the NSNA 2004 Convention.

Essays were judged on relevance to theme, writing style, originality, grammar, and spelling. Judges included representatives from *Nursing Spectrum* and leaders of professional nursing organizations.

Touching Lives by Michael Spieker

One year ago, I made a decision that has changed my life: I became a nursing student. As a 33-year-old man, I returned to college to enter a profession dominated by women. I am currently finishing the second semester of my junior year, a year that has held many challenges for me — not only academically, but in many other areas of my life. I have devoted a great deal of my time outside the classroom to my new passion: nursing.

I have learned over the last year what it means to touch others' lives through caring, a lesson that cannot

be taught through textbooks, lectures, or exams, but through personal experiences. I have witnessed nurses in action, demonstrating the caring it takes to touch the lives of others.

Over the last year, I have devoted my time outside the classroom to promoting this profession. I began the year by becoming politically active in my local and state student nurses' association, first as a delegate to the annual convention and then by becoming an officer for the Oklahoma Student Nurses Association. I believe that being

active in our association throughout our career fosters a sense of pride in the profession.

Through my position with my student chapter, I am promoting a poster campaign that includes men (as well as members of underrepresented populations) as nurses who are leaders, strong and confident in career choice. This campaign is a recruiting resource for high schools and colleges throughout the state, and the posters are being widely disseminated.

I am also conducting a research project with other nursing students to determine attitudes toward men in nursing, including: men's attitudes toward other men in the nursing profession; women's attitudes toward men in nursing; and nurses' attitudes toward men in nursing. We hope this study will shed light on both our progress and challenges in the acceptance of men in nursing.

I am also promoting nursing as a career to children by distributing coloring books produced by the Northeast Indiana Organization of Nurse Executives to elementary school students. The coloring books portray nursing as an exciting career for both men and women. I have also distributed them to patients and visi-

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tors at local hospitals and to kids on the labor and delivery floor anxiously awaiting the arrival of a new sibling. I discuss with the kids what it means to be a nurse, and show them how nursing instruments work.

I believe that caring goes beyond the workplace and into the community. The last year, I served Christmas dinner to over 800 homeless people at a

local shelter; organized a local community health fair; volunteered at the local elementary school to teach kids about Halloween candy safety; and conducted preventive screenings and health promotion teaching in a mobile screening van. All these projects reflect what it means to be a caring nurse. My lifelong goal as a nurse is to touch the lives of others and make sure they know I care. ☺