

Looking for Future LTC Leaders While Honoring Leaders of the Past – Ward Scholarship Fund Established

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The future of long-term care (LTC) and the development of our nurse leaders cannot be left to chance. A nursing leader in LTC care must possess the right stuff and represent a special blend of clinical expertise, regulatory know-how, compassion, innovation, fairness, and attention to detail. A nurse in LTC is all about “Advancing Excellence” and doing what is right for the people we serve in our facilities.

LTC leaders are always on the lookout for special individuals that will guide the future. FADONA is pleased to announce that a new scholarship program has just been established to support that goal.

Thanks to the generosity of the Ward Family, The Imogene Ward Nursing Scholarship Award has been established through FADONA to honor the memory of a true LTC leader. Her philosophy, vision, and history are captured in this article through the words of her husband, Homer, and sons, Mike and Jeff.

I had the pleasure of meeting with the Wards to discuss the uniqueness of LTC and how things have changed and yet in many ways remained the same as when the Ward Family began its mission in LTC in the late '60s.

IN THE BEGINNING

Imogene Ward was president of her graduating class at the Madison College of Nursing in Nashville, Tenn. When she took her nursing state boards, she scored first in her class. It was just her nature to strive for excellence, to raise the bar, and to be a visionary thinker.

During her years as a nursing student, she determined that working with the elderly was her calling. She spent about a year at the Veasy Nursing Home in Tampa, first as a staff nurse, later as DON. She was the only RN on staff at a 65-70 bed “Mom & Pop,” the starting place for her future.

It was love at first sight for her and the elderly she cared for. Homer and Imogene Ward then decided to open

their own facility and make a difference.

LTC PIONEERS

The Wards were pioneers. In the '50s and '60s, there was a transition in the way care was rendered in LTC. In order to meet the needs of this newly-emerging health care entity, an investment was needed in developing people as well as programs and services for LTC.

Homer and Imogene had the magic formula for positive outcomes. They understood that “change takes time and people need to be patient when facilitating positive change.” They built success on a stable leadership team. Homer attributes much of their success to creating an environment where people were part of the culture, not unlike the culture change philosophy we are seeing today.

A FAMILY MISSION

The family built a 100-bed nursing home known as University Park Convalescent & Nursing Home. The facility opened May 1, 1967, and its passed the Medicare survey in the first 10 days.

Back then, they were paid a \$9-per-day Medicare rate, and there was no Medicaid program yet. The County Welfare Program paid \$4-per-day for room, board, and general care. They had to be innovative and adaptive. The environment was on a fast track to change — just like today.

Imogene spent five years as a DON when the first 100 beds opened. After that, she took the helm as head of nursing administration and watched her facility grow in phases from 100 beds in '67, 100 more in '69, and another 66 beds in '71. It became the largest privately-owned in the state, and the name changed to University Park Convalescent Center in 1971, when the north and south facilities



Imogene Ward

became one building. They were accredited by Joint Commission in '68. JCAHO was voluntary, but she wanted everything to be top-notch.

Back when Homer Ward became an administrator, it was by self-appointment. The state requirement was that you needed a high school diploma. Homer had a college background in business administration

and eight years' experience as a quality control inspector. Together, the couple pushed innovative quality thinking and relied on people as their greatest resources.

Esteemed pioneers in long-term care, the Wards were stepping stones for the leaders of today.

They were very involved in FHCA and FNA and wanted to positively influence the care in nursing homes and the image in the community. Homer's advice for current and future leaders is clear: “Be connected, be a voice. Don't wait for others to take action.”

Homer noted that Imogene never waited for someone else to solve a problem; she sought the solutions with and through her team. Their common-sense philosophy, according to Homer, was: “Make the care available when and where it is needed. There is no substitute for good care. There is a place in the continuum for LTC, and the right people are needed to do what is necessary and render the appropriate services. LTC must remain available, affordable, and quality driven.”

MENTORING OTHERS TO BE MORE

Homer stressed that, when they started in LTC, it was hard to find people with geriatric experience, “so you had to develop people.” Imogene believed that the idea holds true today. Her attitude was about challenging people to be more. She demonstrated that a good

leader is a mentor who identifies gaps in service and zeros in on the opportunities. Imogene knew that you can't wait for other people to come up with the solutions.

She believed in educating and raising the bar, getting people to know their potential. She wrote P&P for physicians and medical directors in LTC.

Imogene wanted to educate people to do things the right way. Not only was she writing guidelines, but she also developed a curriculum for activity directors for FHCA and provided a 3-day statewide seminar on criteria for activities in nursing homes.

Back in the early years, activities belonged to nursing, and she was very holistic in her approach. Imogene developed one of the first certified nursing assistant programs in the state. There was no criteria for nursing assistants in the '70s. Therefore, she created a curriculum that laid out the how-to's such as bathing, dressing, feeding, transferring, etc.

Raising the bar again, the facility created its own optional, 3-month program. Upon completion, the employee had to be certified by an RN in the facility. Graduates received a patch and a pin that designated them as a CNA at University Park, with a 10-percent pay increase.

In the '70s she worked with Dr. McDonald to help develop a geriatric nursing program at the USF School of Nursing.

RESPONDING TO THE CALL

What inspired her as a nurse? What made her special? Mike and Homer both talked about how much she enjoyed the elderly. Her grandfather was the first resident at her nursing home, and the first of many lives she would touch. Her family calls her "compassionate" and also "very motivated."

In 1976, she attended the University of Miami, graduating as one of the first geriatric nurse practitioners in the state. In 1981-82 she was president of the Florida Nurses Association's District 4.

Making rounds was an absolute. She was a visible and hands-on leader. It was her way to be sure that whatever needed to be done for a resident got done.

What did a day in her life as a DON look like? Mike Ward and his brother Jeff

The Imogene Ward Nursing Scholarship Award

In honor of Imogene Ward's life and work in the nursing and LTC professions.

FADONA is proud to announce that, thanks to the generosity of the Ward Family, **The Imogene Ward Nursing Scholarship Award** has been established through FADONA to honor the memory of a true LTC leader.

Her philosophy, vision, and history are captured in this article through the words of her husband, Homer, and sons, Mike and Jeff.

At this time, we are posting the criteria and instructions for the scholarship on the FADONA website at www.fadona.org. In addition, you will find an online nomination process for this award on our website.

For more information, or to make a contribution to the fund, please contact FADONA at (561) 659-2167.

have both had long and successful careers as nursing home administrators. Mike recalls a history of dedication to LTC.

"It was a family business and we all spent time there," he said. "As kids, we remember Christmas parties and holidays. Today, dietary does a lot of holiday things for the staff. Back then, Mom would cook the turkey and feed the staff." He remembers his mother putting on her uniform and cap and working holidays, going in on nights, and doing whatever was expected.

"Jeff and I worked in many different areas. We visited residents, played games, and assisted in central supply, dietary, activities, and maintenance," said Mike Ward. "We were cleaning fans, changing light bulbs, folding laundry, and transporting supplies."

The facility is now Delta Health Care. In 2006, some of the original CNA staff hired by Imogene were recognized for years of service. Irene, who was hired in 1972 as a housekeeper, is now a CNA and has been there 35 years.

Florene Chapman made a wrong turn many years ago when she was job hunting. She found Imogene and agrees that making a wrong turn was a right turn for her. Today, she is also a CNA.

Employees remember Imogene as being fair and kind, treating people as equals. She was viewed as a leader who was always ready to help out. Part of the caregiving team, she was not afraid to get her hands dirty.

Imogene Ward was a forward thinker and a role model. When asked what advice she might give nurse leaders in LTC so they can make a real difference, Homer said, "Have a respectful attitude."

"She was an advocate for the residents and knew that any problems should be listened to. That is what you are there for, to help these people," Homer concluded.

WHAT ABOUT A SCHOLARSHIP?

I asked the Ward Family, "What would she say about a scholarship in her name?" They mutually responded that she would be honored. She was a nurse who was proud of her profession.

In closing, I asked the family, "What qualities would she look for in a recipient?" They responded by describing a person who sounded very much like Imogene Ward: "She would look for someone who is respectful and determined to do what is right. A person that is ethical, with both integrity and honesty. The recipient should be compassionate, an advocate, and someone that wants to spend a career in LTC devoted to this profession."

"Lastly, she would want to see someone that is a good communicator, a team player, and one who believes in pushing the envelope to elevate standards. They should be sincere in what they do, see the great reward in caring for the elderly, and just go out there and get the job done."

Now it is up to you, our leaders, to identify who is ready to rise to the call! ☒