

# “Honor Thy Nurse”: Establishing a Nursing Honor Guard

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## PURPOSE

To implement a program that recognizes men and women who have dedicated their professional lives to nursing, and to pay respect to fellow nurses, (retired or active N.P., R.N. or L.P.N.), at the end of life’s journey, for the devotion and commitment they demonstrated in caring for the vulnerable.

## BACKGROUND

- The Honor Guard was established after the unexpected passing of Shelley Willette. Shelley was a Nephrology R.N. who was interested in starting an honor guard in the greater Plattsburgh area. She had envisioned doing something similar to what military, police, and firemen do for their fallen colleagues.
- In June 2013, an introductory meeting was held where Shelley shared the information she had obtained with 4 or 5 interested colleagues. The group was excited to move forward to establish a local honor guard. When Shelley passed, shortly after our first meeting, her colleagues sprang into action and were able to make her dream a reality at her services. Nurses lined the entry to the funeral home and stood at her casket during her wake. We also lined the entry to the church and processed down the aisle together at her funeral. In her memory, we call our honor guard “Shelley’s Watch”.

## METHOD

### Moving Forward Included:

- Regular meetings to formalize services
- Developing a dress code and brochure
- Hand delivering informational letters and brochures to all local funeral homes
- Creating an account and procedures for managing funds
- Seeking donations to cover the cost of brochures, Nightingale lamps, flowers etc. The hospital foundation was instrumental in donating seed money and created a “Shelley’s Watch” account to manage the funds. Local businesses, nursing organizations, and Shelley’s family also made donations. We pass a nurses cap at meetings and our volunteer nurses are always generous .
- Advertising: Letter to Editor, articles in local newspapers, hospital newsletters, and social media.
- Creating master list of members – volunteers are current and retired RN’s , NP’s and LPN’s from all nursing backgrounds
- Deciding how to communicate with members: Facebook, e-mail etc.
- Developing a service outline

## SERVICES

Services can be individualized based on the wishes of the deceased or family. They may include “A Nurse’s Prayer”, “The Nightingale Tribute”, (developed by the Kansas State Nurses Association), “She Was There” by Duane Jaeger, RN, MSN, and a Final Call to Duty. During these readings, a porcelain Nightingale lamp with a white candle is lit in the nurses’ honor. When the nurse doesn’t respond to a third and final call, they are relieved of their earthly duties, and asked to rest in peace. The candle is extinguished, and the lamp is presented to the family along with roses to signify the nurses devotion to his or her profession. We hope to move toward requesting, when available, honor guard members who are reciting the tributes and final call, wear a white uniform and cap, along with a vintage (or replicated) nurses’ cape.

## SAMPLE SERVICE OUTLINE

**The Nightingale Tribute**

Nursing is a calling; It is giving of one's self to enhance the lives of others. The Nursing Honor Guard members here today honor \_\_\_\_\_ and his/her life as a nurse. \_\_\_\_\_ is not remembered by his/her years as a nurse, but by the difference, he/she made during those years by stepping into people's lives....by special moments:

**She (He) Was There by Duane Jaeger, RN, MSN**

When a calming, quiet presence was all that was needed, \_\_\_\_\_ was there.  
In the excitement & miracle of birth or in the mystery & loss of life, \_\_\_\_\_ was there.  
When a silent glance could uplift a patient, family member or friend, \_\_\_\_\_ was there.  
At those times when the unexplainable needed to be explained, \_\_\_\_\_ was there.  
When the situation demanded a swift foot & sharp mind, \_\_\_\_\_ was there.  
When a gentle touch, a firm push, or an encouraging word was needed, \_\_\_\_\_ was there.  
In choosing the best one from a family's "Thank You" box of chocolates, \_\_\_\_\_ was there.  
To witness humanity – its beauty, in good times & bad, without judgment, \_\_\_\_\_ was there.  
To embrace the woes of the world, willingly, & offer hope, \_\_\_\_\_ was there.  
And now, that it is time to be at the Greater One's side, \_\_\_\_\_ is there.

\_\_\_\_\_, we honor you this day & give you \_\_\_\_\_ roses to symbolize our honor and appreciation for being our colleague.

**Final Call To Duty**

We now light The Nightingale Lamp in \_\_\_\_\_'s honor.

All members present will be asked to report to duty with a response of "reporting for duty"

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please report to duty (Silent Pause)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Please report to duty (Silent Pause)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Please report to duty (Silent Pause)

This is the final call for \_\_\_\_\_ served selflessly & gave for the good of others. His/her tasks are complete...his/her duties are done...\_\_\_\_\_ is going home. May he/she rest in peace.

(The Nightingale Lamp's flame is extinguished & the lamp is presented to the family)

## BROCHURE

*How do I arrange for an Honor Guard tribute for my loved one?*

- Visit with your funeral home director about the Honor Guard.
  - Schedule a tribute up to the service up, collaboration with the family, funeral home and/or place of worship.
  - You may wish to honor the memory of your loved one through a donation in his/her name to further the work of the Nursing Honor Guard.
- To make a donation or to request the presence of the Nursing Honor Guard at a nurse's services, please contact one of the following:
- Joni-Jill Tobrocke: 518-569-3277  
Wanda Flynn: 518-572-7702  
Jill Tedford: 518-534-3191  
Peggy Tolosky: 518-578-0460

**A Nurse's Prayer**

Give me strength and wisdom;  
When others need my touch;  
A soothing word to speak to them,  
Their hearts yearn for so much.  
Give me joy and laughter,  
To lift a weary soul;  
Pour in me compassion,  
To make the broken whole.  
Give me gentle healing hands,  
For those left in my care;  
A blessing to those who need me,  
This is a nurse's prayer.

**We Gratefully Acknowledge Support From the Following Sponsors:**

C.V.P.H. Foundation  
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American Legion Post 912  
Northern Adirondack Nurses Association  
Russell B. Childs Post 769

### “Shelley’s Watch” Nursing Honor Guard



Nursing is a calling; It is giving of one's self to enhance the lives of others. Nursing is a service profession that cannot be lived in isolation. Nurses rely on each other for the synergistic effect of teamwork in our efforts of care giving. It is appropriate that we honor our colleagues not only during their career, but also at the end of life's journey.



#### Nursing Honor Guard

Nursing Honor Guard recognizes and pays homage to men and women who have dedicated their professional lives to nursing. The nursing Honor Guard has been established to honor these individuals upon their death. The Honor Guard's presence helps shine a light on a nurses' dedication to their chosen profession, and helps ease mourners' grief during their time of loss. The nurses who are members of the Honor Guard consider it both an honor and a privilege to participate in final services for their fellow nurses.



#### Services Provided by the Nursing Honor Guard

Nursing is a profession steeped in tradition. We use these traditions as symbols, which reflect honor and respect for those who have given so much and who have served so well.

Honor Guard services can be individualized according to the wishes of the deceased or family and based on the availability of volunteers. Services may include:

- The Nightingale Tribute, developed by the Kansas State Nurses Association.
  - She Was There by Duane Jaeger, RN, MSN
  - Final Call to Duty
  - Casket or entry way Honor Guard
- Services may be held at varying sites such as:
- Funeral Home
  - Church or House of Worship
  - Cemetery
  - Private home
  - Other venue

#### Eligibility for Services

Any Registered Nurse, Licensed Practical Nurse, or Nurse Practitioner whose funeral service is within a 50 mile radius of Plattsburgh. Honor Guard services are provided based on the availability of volunteers. Nursing colleagues of the deceased are welcome to participate.

#### Nursing Honor Guard Members

Members of the Honor Guard will wear any combination of navy blue & white nursing uniforms, scrubs, or dress clothes



## RESULTS

In the 4 years the honor guard has been established, we have been called upon for 18 services. We continue to adjust, organize, and improve our tributes. These free services have been held at funeral homes, churches, cemeteries, and private homes. Funeral home staff members have been supportive of our efforts. Many times, the service is very emotional, for both families and honor guard members. It provides comfort to family and friends. People paying their respects express feeling very touched and thankful. Our membership continues to grow, and includes over 289 nurses from hospitals, doctors offices, public health, education, hospice, home care and others. As nurses attending services for colleagues witness what we do, many choose to become a part of it.

## PAST SERVICES



## CONCLUSIONS

The honor guard’s presence gives meaningful recognition to the nurse who has passed, and helps to ease mourner’s grief during their time of loss. The nurses who are members of the honor guard consider it both an honor and a privilege to participate in final services for their fellow nurses. We hope to inspire others to create similar groups in their communities. If you’re interested in assistance facilitating the formation of a nursing honor guard, please contact me at [jjtobrocke@hotmail.com](mailto:jjtobrocke@hotmail.com).