

## Fay Whitney

by Suzanne B. Bopp  
Alumnews editor

**M**any external measures indicate the success Fay Whitney has had: degrees earned, awards won, papers published,

lives touched. Soon another one, even more readily evident, will appear: her name on the new UW School of Nursing building.

Whitney, who was born in Syracuse, N.Y., and grew up nearby in a town called Liverpool, always knew the direction her life would take. "I wanted to be a nurse from when I was a tiny girl," she says. She never wavered from that goal.

When it was time to go to college, she went to the University of Rochester School of Nursing, a five-year program at that time. While there, she married Ralph Whitney, who had grown up just three blocks away from her, and she had her first daughter a month and a half after she graduated. Then Whitney stayed home and raised her family - she had another daughter and a son, each child only 15 months apart. During this time, the family moved back to Syracuse. They lived on a Christmas tree farm, raising 100,000 trees, and she also taught children to ride. Her husband worked in investment banking and commuted to New York City.

After spending 12 years at home, Whitney went back to school to earn two master's degrees and a doctorate at Syracuse University. She intended to teach nursing. While working on her doctorate, she went to work as the director of the nurse practitioner's program at the State University of New York. Nurse practitioners, she explains, are mostly advanced practice nurses who have master's degrees, and the majority of their work is in primary care. They can work with physicians if they choose, but unlike physicians' assistants, they don't have to. They are independently licensed.

She did postdoctoral work at the University of Pennsylvania, teaching social science and economics to nurse practitioners, then stepped in as director of their program. Their children had moved out by that time, so she and her husband moved to Bryn Mawr, outside Philadelphia, and she



Fay Whitney, professor emeritus

worked there for the next 10 years. After that, they made an even bigger move. "We decided we'd had enough of living in the city and came west in 1993," she says.

They considered Colorado, Montana and Wyoming. She knew she wanted to be near a university so she could teach, and her husband needed to be near an airport so he could travel. Wyoming soon became the frontrunner. Once they made that decision, they knew they wanted to be within 50 miles of UW. They bought a ranch in Wheatland, where they started a herd of black Angus cattle.

Whitney was first a visiting professor, and then she became the director of UW's nurse practitioner program. At that time, the program at UW was very small, turning out only five to 10 people every other year. Whitney began to build the program. Under her supervision, the school started to

offer courses when working nurses could come, often over weekends. She helped tweak the curriculum to get it in line with other programs. Interdisciplinary work was emphasized. "Now all of our faculty practice," she says. "They have to get certified and stay certified."

### THE MEDALLION SERVICE AWARD IS GIVEN TO RECOGNIZE OUTSTANDING SERVICE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING.

The state had 27 nurse practitioners when she came; now there are more than 200 and more than 8,000 in the U.S., many of them working in underprivileged and rural areas. "It's hard to get primary care for those folks," Whitney says. It was hard also to get care for seniors, so Whitney opened a wellness clinic at the Epson Senior Center. "We did a lot of training of health providers for elderly with pharmacy students, social work students and others" she says. "We focused on health programs, not sick programs. That's become popular around the country now." Much

of Whitney's own research has focused on stroke, an area that did receive a lot of attention in the past. "It needed to grow. This is what I find something that needs to grow and grow it."

Because of the Whitneys, the University of Wyoming College of Health Sciences is continuing to grow. Ralph Whitney donated \$3 million to the nursing school, which will be renamed in his wife's honor. "There were two or three elements to it," he says of the gift. "I was trying to surprise Fay. She stayed home and raised our children while I started my career. I wanted to put something back in her world." Secondly, "our giving has always been to the educational world. And I wanted to do something for Wyoming." Their donation stands as a testament to a philosophy the Whitneys share. "We believe in education as the basis for a good life," she says.

Right now, health sciences courses are spread all over the campus - not an ideal situation for students. "We wanted to consolidate it in a new building," Whitney says. "It makes research and interdisciplinary practice easier. If you're doing health care, you have to be working with other nurses, pharmacists, physicians. If you're going to work together, you need people to be educated together. It promotes a team approach, which is important." The dedication of the building is scheduled for October; having her name on it seemed odd at first. "It was a little conundrum for me for a while. I'm not dead," she says. "But I've gotten used to it I guess."

Whitney retired in 2002, though her schedule shows no indications of it. She remains a professor emerita and what she calls an "odd-job person." If they need someone to teach a course, for example, she will volunteer to do it. So she is still working, but not as a fully paid faculty member.

In what spare time she can find, she likes to read, fly fish and garden. She'd like to do a master gardener program some day. About 10 years ago, she and her husband made a deal that they'd take a big trip every year, and they have held to that. This year's destination is Tuscany. They continue to work with the universities they're connected to and to serve on various boards. Now that she's retired, she does hope to learn to fly fish better, but change little else, since, she says, "I'm not sure I even believe in retirement." ❧