

# On Call and All Heart

We're honoring National Nurses Day with profiles of four dedicated local nurses.

BY MOLLY MECHLER



**ACROSS HOSPITALS**, clinics, schools and offices throughout the country, nurses play an essential part in our healthcare system. They're often the first to comfort, care for and treat patients. Beyond their medical expertise, nurses also serve as advocates, educators and caregivers, going above and beyond their duties to ensure the well-being of their patients.

In recognition of National Nurses Day (May 6), we're showcasing four local nurses: Lexie Dettlinger, Ellie Schmieder and husband and wife Lindsey and Matt Wood. Their stories are unique, but their unwavering dedication is immeasurable.

## **LEXIE DETTLINGER:**

### **Caring for Mothers and their Newborns**

Lexie Dettlinger, a Brielle native and 2019 graduate of Manasquan High School, has dedicated her nursing career to caring for new mothers and their babies. After earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Tampa in 2023, she became a registered nurse at Tampa General Hospital, specializing in high-risk maternal care.

Lexie's enthusiasm for nursing was inspired by her grandmother, a devoted NICU nurse known for her kindness and dedication. Lexie has since embraced those same qualities

in her own nursing career, prioritizing communication, empathy and patience. "I spend as much time as I can with my patients," says Lexie, "tending to their needs and ensuring they receive personalized care."

Working in the postpartum unit, Lexie provides care for mothers and their newborns, assisting with pain management, breastfeeding support and administering health assessments. "First time mothers often feel nervous, overwhelmed and have many questions. I strive to provide the reassurance and guidance they need."

Lexie prides herself on the importance of strong communication

Opposite: Lexie Dettlinger has been the recipient of multiple Daisy awards. Lexie now works at Tampa General Hospital.

This page clockwise from top right: Ellie and co-worker. Ellie Schmieder graduated from Fairfield University in 2023. Ellie currently works in oncology at Jersey Shore Medical Center.



and relationship-building in her patient care. Her ability to connect with patients has earned her multiple Daisy Awards, an honor given to exceptional nurses nominated by their patients. She says she often hears patients tell her, “I wish I could bring you home with me.”

Lexie recently transitioned from night to day shifts due to an influx of daytime births, both scheduled C-sections and spontaneous labors. Despite the demanding 12-hour shifts, Lexie finds immense fulfillment in supporting new parents during such an important time in their lives.

But not every moment is filled with joy. Lexie vividly recalls a case involving a mother who hemorrhaged due to preeclampsia and required emergency surgery. “It was terrifying. But those experiences make you stronger and more committed to being present for your patients.”

Regarding the old wives’ tale regarding full moons and increased births, Lexie says she has witnessed it firsthand. “It’s one hundred percent true! The energy shifts, and things just go wrong. More babies are born, and patients tend to be more out of it.”

Though she loves her current role, Lexie is drawn to the excitement of the birthing process and envisions someday transitioning to labor and delivery. For now, she plans to stay in Tampa, but remains open to returning to New Jersey and possibly working at Jersey Shore University Medical Center. Regardless of where she lands, her patients will always be in good hands.



#### ELLIE SCHMIEDER:

##### Compassion for Patients With Cancer

Ellie Schmieder, Manasquan resident and 2019 graduate of Manasquan High School, is dedicating her nursing career to patients undergoing cancer treatment. She joined Jersey Shore Medical Center after earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Fairfield University in 2023.

Although she was initially unsure about nursing, Ellie credits her mother, a local pediatrician, for planting the seed. “No desk job could give me the fulfillment nursing does,” says Ellie. The job has changed her perspective on life, making her more grateful for the little things. “I don’t sweat the small stuff anymore. Things could always be worse.”



Although Ellie hadn’t planned on oncology, a nurse she once shadowed and befriended became a floor manager and encouraged her to apply. Over time, she came to appreciate the challenges and rewards. Her patients often require blood transfusions, post-op care or cancer screenings. She’s certified to administer chemotherapy, an essential skill in her field.

Many patients struggle with their diagnoses and can be uncooperative or erratic. In many cases, she’s witnessed grief and heartbreak up close. Nevertheless, Ellie approaches each day with patience and empathy. “You take every day as it comes.”

She’s also seen the impact of staffing shortages, as good nurses are more





in demand than ever. Through it all, she strives to give each patient care and attention. On any given shift, she manages five to six patients, though when administering chemotherapy, her patient load is reduced to four.

Already taking on leadership roles, Ellie has trained two new nurses and enjoys mentoring others. She finds teaching fulfilling, and remains open to pursuing a master's degree in nursing education.

Like Lexie, Ellie also believes in the full moon phenomenon, but finds that her patients are more affected by sundown syndrome. "Sundowning especially affects those with dementia. They get confused and sometimes aggressive."

Even in the face of these difficult cases, Ellie stays positive. "I love people. I talk to my patients all day long. I want to know as much as I can about them and advocate for them in every way. I'll stay late to finish my

charting, so it doesn't interfere with my time with my patients." Long after her shift ends, Ellie often finds herself thinking about her patients.

#### **LINDSEY AND MATT WOOD: A Husband and Wife Nursing Team**

For Lindsey and Matt Wood, nursing is more than a job. It's a calling, a shared passion and a way of life. Their paths to nursing were uniquely their own. But as a married couple now working in the same hospital, they navigate long shifts and emotional cases, all while balancing family life in Brielle.

Lindsey and Matt both explored other professional avenues and adventures before realizing their calling. Lindsey initially earned a communications degree from Monmouth University. A senior-year elective in traditional and alternative medicine piqued her interest in nursing—but at the time, it was too late

to change majors. Years later, feeling unhappy in her career, she made the decision to "go for it."

Lindsey's mother had also transitioned to nursing later in life. So, in 2013, after her sixth child had begun kindergarten, Lindsey enrolled in courses at Ocean County College. In 2016, she began working at Ocean University Medical Center. She currently works in the Stroke/Telemetry Unit, caring for patients who require intermediate monitoring.

Matt's journey was significantly different. After graduating from high school, he joined the Navy and later transitioned to the Army National Guard, where he attended flight school and flew Black Hawks. Nursing wasn't on his radar until later in life, when he pursued an online nursing degree at Brookdale Community College. He started at Ocean Medical Center in 2012 at the age of 42 and has spent the



Lindsay and Matt Wood currently work together at Ocean University Medical Center. Lindsay and Matt started dating in 2017. Lindsay and Matt were married in 2021.



last 13 years working in the Cardiac Care Unit (CCU).

Although Lindsey and Matt both graduated from Manasquan High School, they didn't properly cross paths until years later. Lindsey was attending nursing school and working as a bartender; Matt lived nearby and often stopped by her bar for something to eat. Lindsey would often ask him questions about nursing. In 2017, one year after Lindsey began working at the hospital, Matt and Lindsey started dating. They married in 2021, becoming one of the few husband-and-wife nursing duos in the local field.

Despite working at the same hospital and often having similar schedules, they rarely drive to work together. "Matt likes to leave early, and I sleep until the last possible minute," says Lindsey with a laugh.

They love their work, but both

acknowledge its difficulties, including staffing shortages, administrative tasks and insurance complications. Lindsey finds it frustrating that charting takes time from patient interaction, while Matt says, "nursing is both physically and mentally demanding."

Working with stroke patients can be especially emotional for Lindsey. She sees many young individuals who suffer life-altering strokes, leaving them unable to walk, talk or eat. "The younger cases hit me the hardest. Sometimes all we can do is educate and try to prevent a second stroke."

She is currently pursuing her master's degree as a nurse practitioner, which will give her the ability to diagnose and prescribe medications to patients.

Matt is the only male nurse on his shift and sees a wide variety of patients, young and old, from those recovering from surgery to overdose victims. He's witnessed many colleagues move on

to intensive care units or emergency departments, but he loves where he is and can't imagine doing anything else.

"The patient-nurse relationship is the most rewarding part," says Lindsey. Seeing a patient recover and receiving heartfelt thanks reminds her of why she chose this path. She was recently honored as "Preceptor of the Year," recognized for training and mentoring new nurses.

Though they don't work side by side at the hospital, their shared profession has strengthened their bond. Their mutual understanding of the profession's challenges and rewards makes them a unique team, both in the field and at home. As Matt puts it, "I couldn't imagine not being married to a nurse."

*Molly Mechler is a dedicated mother, seasoned educator, avid reader, recreational runner, thrifty shopper and local beach lover.*