

Nursing Program Is Part of Ambitious Turnaround at AG's Northwest College

The denomination plans a \$39 million campaign to beef up its nursing program—which will train missionaries

Northwest College, an Assemblies of God (AG) school started in 1934 near Seattle with only a handful of students, recently fulfilled a pledge of its founders by opening a nursing school that will eventually enroll 120. With the recent closings of AG nursing programs in Minnesota and Missouri, Northwest will have the AG's only training program for nurses.

The ground-breaking last year of the Mark and Huldah Buntain School of Nursing marks a period of transition at Northwest, a Christian liberal arts school with an enrollment of 1,039 students. In the next seven years, school officials plan to spend

\$39 million to construct four buildings, as well as fund the startup of a master's program and pay for the addition of several off-campus satellite classes. The school's first master's program—in family psychology—began in September.

In addition, Northwest soon will undergo its second name change in its 67-year history. Pacific Northwest University is one name being considered as school administrators look toward the possibility of obtaining university status. Don Argue, president of Northwest since 1998, said the school's founders wanted a nursing school included in its lineup.

"When we examined the college's earliest documents, we discovered that the founders called for a nursing program,"

Argue said. "The dedication of the school of nursing is in many ways the culmination of steps that began at Northwest's formation."

The nursing program was named after Mark and Huldah Buntain because of their lifelong commitment in Calcutta, India, where they built the Mission of Mercy hospital. Mark Buntain died in 1989, and Huldah continues to work in Calcutta.

"The Buntain name, along with Mission of Mercy, is synonymous with proclaiming the gospel by serving hard to reach people in tough places," Argue said.

The Buntain School of Nursing became the seventh bachelor of arts nursing program in Washington state. It opened with 59 students for three grade levels. It will add a senior class for the 2001-02 school year, increasing enrollment by 30 students. Ground-breaking for a \$9 million, three-story science center is scheduled for spring 2002.

"We've become artists at sharing space," Carl Christensen, dean of the nursing program, said. "We'll welcome the additional space."

Christensen, a Fullbright academic scholar, turned down a position at the University of Washington nursing program to join Northwest—a choice that Argue calls a "coup" for the college.

Starting the program cost \$410,000, and the school plans to build the science center debt-free. The Northwest District Women's Ministry made a \$135,000 donation to help the college meet the pledge to stay out of debt.

Christensen said the program is committed to inspire students to a life of ministry in nursing. Every graduate from the program will have an opportunity to work abroad to expose students to mission work firsthand. Mission of Mercy will be one of several service options for students.

School officials also expect a financial boost from an unusual source—the National Football League’s Seattle Seahawks.

The college’s 65-acre campus is home to the training facility used by the Seahawks. The team has used 10 acres for practice fields and a three-story, \$11 million building that houses offices, a locker room and weight room, all of it rent-free. However, a stipulation in the 20-year lease—which expires in four years—would make the college owners of the facility.

Among the changes Argue has helped bring is a school anthem that stresses fulfilling God’s purpose in people’s lives, whether in full-time ministry, business, nursing or education. A 14-foot banner hangs from the chapel wall with the school’s mission statement—“Carrying the call. Heart, head, hand”—written in bold lettering. The wording points out the staff’s belief that the fulfillment of God’s purpose isn’t achieved only by becoming a pastor or a missionary.

“Clearly, the New Testament calls us all,” Argue said. “The Lord of the harvest says I want you to be a business executive; I want you to be a nurse. So often it’s as if you’re not in full-time ministry. It’s like you’re not part of the ‘guild.’ For years I’ve felt that our view of the call of God was not complete.”

—Gail Wood