Beyond state-of-the-art facilities and leading-edge technology, a health care organization’s most valuable asset is its people. From its earliest days as Middletown Hospital, Atrium Medical Center has recognized the importance of its staff in delivering quality health care and compassionately supporting patients and families so they feel safe and comfortable.

The hospital’s ongoing investment in education is testimony to its commitment to nurturing the best and brightest caregivers. This issue of Legends looks back at three of the hospital’s early on-site schools – nursing, radiology technology and laboratory technology – and forward to Atrium’s involvement in the innovative Greentree Health Science Academy.

Growing Our Own

On February 4, 1924, less than a decade after the hospital opened its doors, the Middletown Hospital School of Nursing (MHSN) accepted its first students into a three-year diploma program. In 1927, after 36 months of classroom learning and clinical experience, the school’s first seven nurses graduated, passed their state board exams and became registered nurses (RNs).

Tuition, room and board for all three years was less than a semester’s worth of nursing school today. Students lived in Verity Hall where they attended nursing classes taught by RN instructors, staff doctors and other health care professionals. They spent a significant amount of time working in the hospital under supervision. Students rotated through departments and were graded by program instructors and nurse managers. Third-year students had full charge duties on afternoon and night shifts, which helped the hospital with staffing and gave the fledgling nurses hands-on experience.
Upon graduation, students were awarded their nursing pin, designed for the first graduating class in 1927 by Mabel Pittman, supervisor of nurses and superintendent of the hospital. She was inspired by a sunrise she observed while in the hospital’s delivery room one morning: the beginning of a new day, a new life and a new school. Soon after their graduation, the class of 1927 formed the MHSN Alumni Association, which continues today.

In 1945, MHSN affiliated with Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. First-year students commuted there four days a week for their first semester for pre-clinical classroom learning. In 1960, the program moved to Miami’s new Middletown campus. To enhance their clinical experience and thoroughly prepare them for state board exams, students also did field trips and internships at other institutions, such as Dayton State Mental Hospital, Cincinnati’s Dunham Hospital for patients with tuberculosis, Cincinnati’s General Hospital to gain pediatric and contagious disease experience, and, in later years, Children’s Hospital in Cincinnati.

During World War II, MHSN participated in the Cadet Nurse Corps. The U.S. Army sponsored nursing students who upon graduation were obliged to serve in the armed forces. During the war, many RNs working in patient care were called up, leaving significant responsibilities on the shoulders of student nurses who worked long hours and made a valuable contribution to the war effort by keeping home-front hospitals fully functioning. MHSN had two student cohorts in progress during the war years. To accommodate this growth, the building housing classrooms and the nurses’ residence was enlarged. In 1945, MHSN graduated 45 nurses, the largest graduating class in its history.
By the early 1970s, hospital-based nursing schools were giving way to college programs. Miami University Middletown developed its own associate degree nursing program and, while students did their clinical rotations at Middletown Hospital, there was no reason for the hospital to operate a school of its own. When MHSN closed in 1972, the program had graduated 479 nurses, many of whom stayed with the hospital for their entire careers, working in various aspects of patient care and management.

HIGH TECH DEMANDS

The late 1960s saw a resurgence in hospital-based education with creation of the School of Radiology Technology and the School of Laboratory Technology. As the diagnostic and treatment potential of these disciplines grew, the hospital needed to ensure it would have a steady stream of well-trained technicians to do the job. Once again, the answer was “grow our own.”

The School of Radiology Technology opened in 1967. The two-year radiology technician program was open to high school graduates with a B or above average who had taken a range of science and math courses. Acceptance hinged on an interview with the school’s director. Tuition was low – $350 per year plus $200 for books in 1988 – and for a while, the school also gave students a stipend.

The first group of three students soon grew to an average of five to six per class. Students were taught in the radiology department classroom and did their clinical work in the hospital alongside department staff. After graduation, they could sit for the national American Registry of Radiologic Technologists exam. Working in the hospital over a
two-year period instilled a sense of pride and ownership in the tech students. One or two from every class remained with the hospital. In fact, 20 graduates work at Atrium today. However, the School of Radiology Technology closed in 1997 as junior colleges came on the scene with associate degree programs.

In 1968, faced with a lack of laboratory technicians and too few schools to train more, Robert Carson, MD, chief pathologist and medical director of the laboratory, instituted a hospital-based School of Laboratory Technology. At first, the program trained clinical laboratory associates but later evolved into a school for medical laboratory technicians, both prepared to sit for the national registration exam.

The 12-month classroom and clinical program was tuition-free and, in the early years, offered a stipend. Qualified students were high school graduates and later, associate degree graduates, with good grades who met the school’s accrediting agency’s standards for entry. But the real test for potential students was the personal interview with Dr. Carson and the program’s education coordinator.

Students spent their first six weeks in a small classroom setting in the laboratory before venturing out into the laboratory department and hospital under the watchful eye of a clinical supervisor with in-depth training in areas such as chemistry, hematology, microbiology and blood bank. The school attempted to recruit six students per year and averaged four to five
technicians in each graduating class, most of whom continued working at the hospital. Many of Atrium's current laboratory technicians attended the lab school, in addition to Atrium president and CEO Carol Turner.

In 1996, the hospital closed the school because it had become very labor-intensive. By affiliating with Wright State University and the University of Cincinnati bachelor's degree programs for medical laboratory technology, the hospital continues to provide clinical experience for aspiring laboratorians.

THE TRADITION CONTINUES

It took patience, collaboration and flexibility, but after 10 years of planning, Greentree Health Science Academy opened on the Atrium campus in 2012. The school connects students of all ages and with varying education levels to promising futures in health care. The $7.6 million, 31,000-square-foot education facility is a partnership among the City of Middletown, Atrium Medical Center, Warren County Career Center, Warren County Port Authority, Miami University Middletown and Cincinnati State, with financial assistance from the State of Ohio and the federal government.

Greentree is designed to provide a seamless transition from high school to postsecondary education to a career, creating a pipeline of qualified health care professionals and a local solution to the national problem of a shrinking health care workforce. In 2013, Greentree was honored by the Ohio City/County Management Association with its Intergovernmental Cooperation Award as a statewide and nationwide model for community partnerships.

Knowing that an investment in education strengthens today's workforce and prepares tomorrow's health care professionals, generous donors have established and supported scholarships for Atrium employees. Administered through Atrium Medical Center Foundation, these scholarships include:
• Atrium Cardiology Ancillary Services Endowment
• G. Robert Gage Memorial Scholarship
• Stuart Ives Fund
• Nellie Losh Scholarship
• Nadine & Beryl Orr Nursing Excellence Fund
• Jeanne R. Sandston Memorial Endowment Fund
• Patricia Ann Slagle Nursing Scholarship

Atrium Auxiliary Middletown and the MHSN Alumni Association also offer scholarships.

Despite all the changes in health care over nearly a century, the hospital’s tradition of “growing our own” continues to strengthen care and caring at Atrium Medical Center.

Thanks to Doris Heffron, RN; Marguerite Miles, RN; Imogene Campbell, RN; Melissa Curtis, BS, RT(R)(M); and Jan Schuster, MT(ASCP) for their assistance with this issue of Legends.
This is the third in a series of profiles celebrating the 2017 centennial anniversary of Atrium Medical Center (formerly Middletown Hospital and Middletown Regional Hospital). The series honors men and women whose civic-mindedness and genuine caring for others helped Middletown grow and contributed to establishment of the first-class medical center the region boasts today.

Past Legends focused on:
Paul Galeese, **Issue 1** and E.O. Bauer, MD, and John L. Bauer, MD, **Issue 2**.