

Carly Sanders, of Wishek, says two experiences from her childhood steered her in the path of becoming a nurse -- at the age of 10, comforting a family friend whose husband had died, and, seven years later, performing CPR on a person.

Sanders grew up in Fredonia, a small town in the southeast quadrant of the state. She recalls a blizzard taking hold of the area the year she turned double digits, causing life-threatening travel conditions.

A family friend's husband died during the storm, Sanders said, and an ambulance was not able to travel to the rural area to transport the body for several days due to the bad roads.

"So my dad had us all take turns sitting with this individual's wife, trying to comfort her and play cards and just occupy her because, obviously, that was pretty traumatizing for her," she said. "I was only 10 but I can really remember that."

Sanders said she knew a career in the medical field was right for her after she unsuccessfully performed CPR, at the age of 17, on an individual who collapsed at a Fredonia business.

The Kulm High School graduate received her bachelor of science in nursing degree in 2010 from Presentation College, in Aberdeen, S.D.

Sanders worked as an intern and certified nursing assistant the summer of 2009 at Wishek's South Central Health, where she signed on as a registered nurse a year later. She currently serves as the organization's director of nursing and was the hospital auxiliary president for six years.

The Wishek Ambulance Service volunteer lives with her husband, Eric, and their 3-year-old son, Jonas. The couple is expecting their second child in October.

Bismarck Tribune readers voted Sanders one of the top 10 nurses. "Compassionate" is the word Acacia Stuckle used to describe her sister on the nomination form.

"Carly puts her heart and soul into her rural hospital," Stuckle wrote. "She does whatever it takes to meet the needs of her patients, going above and beyond on a daily basis. Stories from local folks make me incredibly proud of her and the work she does each day."

Forming personal relationships with her patients and seeing them progress are the most rewarding aspects of being a nurse, Sanders said.

"We see a lot of the same patients and it's so easy to get so close with them and their families that they start to feel like your own family," she said. "And we don't have a very large staff so the staff we do have, we all really are family here ... There's always somebody to pick you up when you're down." Sanders shared the story of her team reviving a patient after he coded, and having him return to the hospital some time later to say thanks and give hugs.

"Those moments are why nurses do it," she said. "Just the biggest reward you can get is to see somebody walking around and living their normal life after something tragic happens."

Rural health care nurses are invaluable, Sanders said, because they have experience treating a vast array of medical conditions, including broken hips, chest pains and traumatic injuries.

The director of nursing says South Central Health is vital to the Wishek community. She is an advocate of all rural hospitals and clinics.

“A lot of people don’t understand how important rural health care is until they need us,” Sanders said.

“Being 100 miles from a medical facility when you’re in an emergency would be detrimental to somebody’s livelihood.

“On top of that, we have a lot of elderly people in our community ... we are here for so many people that it’s hard for them to travel, it’s just hard for them to get out,” she added.

Sanders encourages nursing school graduates to consider rural communities when searching for a job.

“I know a lot of people think it’s boring, but I can tell you it’s everything but boring here. We do so many things, you will become so well rounded,” she said. “And, as new grads, I’m telling you this is the place to be.”