

Nursing home employee earns nursing degree

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Willett

AUBURN — Fourteen employees of American Senior Communities were honored last week with a graduation luncheon after completing nursing programs made available to them through an educational opportunity.

One of the graduates, Joshua Willett of Auburn, will continue to work at Betz Nursing Home in Auburn as a licensed practical nurse.

American Senior Communities and its municipal corporation partner, The Health & Hospital Corporation, together are the largest senior care provider in Indiana. Both organizations promote professional growth of their employees and in the long-term care nursing profession, and they have created an innovative pathway for employees to become nurses.

“We are the only long-term care provider who does this,” said American Senior Communities CEO Donna Kelsey, adding that the impact of the program has been significant statewide.

The nursing scholarship program, known as Opportunities to Nursing Excellence, is designed to aid front-line caregiver staff members to achieve new levels of education and skills as nurses. Employees of the skilled nursing and assisted living communities can increase their professional education while working and tending to the needs of their families.

Certified Nursing Assistants and other non-licensed employees can earn diplomas to become Licensed Practical Nurses. LPNs can earn degrees to become Registered Nurses. To date, 170 people have graduated from the program since it began in 2008. Several graduates are working in clinical management positions.

Each community nominates staff members, who are then given assessment testing. Selected participants can attend nursing school with tuition and books fully paid for by the facility where they work. Participants are given 30-hour work schedules while being paid for regular 40-hour schedules, allowing them additional time for classes and study without being penalized financially.

American Senior Communities provides a full-time mentor/counselor for the Opportunities to Nursing Excellence participants. Trecia Johnson, the educational coordinator, actively participates in the selection of students and helps them with every step of the nursing school journey. In addition, each student is encouraged and supported by the residents and staff of the senior care community where they work.

Addressing the Graduates, Shelia Guenin, HHC Senior Vice President of Long-Term Care, said, “You will make a difference in the lives of many people. You will positively impact the lives of so many of our residents and you will take these skills with you beyond your workplace. You will share your knowledge with all the people in your lives and become the medical encyclopedia for your family and your friends.”

This year’s O2NE Scholarship Program graduates also include Michelle Eyer, RN, of Avalon Village, Ligonier.

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