

At least once a week, learn something new.

That's the personal motto and advice of Barbara Brown of Mayville, Moraine Park Technical College Class of 1981 and winner of the College's 2010 Distinguished Alumnus Award.

A registered nurse with 30 years of clinical experience, Brown has served as a Nursing Assistant program instructor at Moraine Park since 2007 and as a part-time instructor since 2000. Whether in a classroom, clinical setting or community venue, Brown generates an enthusiasm for learning and nursing by engaging and mentoring students.

"I am a first-generation college graduate and was guided by my instructors at Moraine Park who helped me overcome personal obstacles, one of which was my fear of making mistakes," said Brown. "I have since become aware of how making mistakes can help determine who you are, and what your strengths are. ... we have to get over our fear of the unknown and start saying yes to new challenges and opportunities that come our way."

She credits Moraine Park for helping her find her way in her career path. After high school she wasn't entirely sure what she wanted to pursue. "Moraine Park offered immediate training and was less expensive than most colleges," said Brown. "I became a nursing assistant first, went to work, and returned to Moraine Park to become a licensed practical nurse (LPN)."

While she worked as an LPN, Brown raised her four children. When her youngest was in grade school, she returned to Moraine Park for her associate degree. Later she earned a bachelor's degree in liberal studies and health psychology from Graceland University in Iowa and a certificate in stress relief practices.

Her latest "yes" is the pursuit of a master's degree in nursing education from Marian University, at nearly 50. "There are always new things to learn," said Brown. "Life constantly changes in health care."

Saying yes opened up many opportunities for Brown over the years. "I said yes to learning to care for babies on ventilators, for the head injured in rehab, for the dying in hospice. I said yes to opportunities to mentor new nurses, which led to a request to teach call staff for Moraine Park, which eventually led to my teaching full-time. I even said yes to a nursing administration assignment. I learned a lot about myself from that experience, such as how to communicate with superiors, how to make expectations clear for those you work with or teach, and that my passion for nursing was not fulfilled as an administrator."

In addition to her full-time teaching role at Moraine Park, she remains a part-time nurse at a long-term care agency. As such, she's mentored Moraine Park nursing students on the job. "I worked hand-in-hand with students in the clinical setting, where they practiced nursing skills," she said. "Clinical experience gives the students a real view of nursing and helps them develop critical thinking skills."

Moraine Park Dean of Health Sciences Kathy Van Eerden said Brown is "a strong clinical instructor and she is exemplary in how she organizes and conducts hands-on oriented classrooms." She asked Brown to lead youth workshops on health care, including last summer's mini camps for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Fond du Lac and Washington counties and this summer's Tech Knowledge College at Moraine Park.

With her children being older, Brown spends more time on community outreach. As a volunteer facilitator for Restorative Justice in Dodge County, Brown works with juvenile offenders and their victims, bringing them together to facilitate the healing process. She also provides services for Church Health Services of Dodge County, facilitates retreats for churches and the community, and has participated with Fond du Lac High School's Challenge Day.

"There are so many experiences available, and I learn something new every time," she said.

Brown urges everyone to relish new things. "Nowadays, so many people are afraid of making mistakes, but it is how we learn and discover ourselves," she said. "Be open and say yes to a new opportunity, whether it is waterskiing for the first time or volunteering at the local food pantry, planting a garden or mentoring a student. If you haven't taken the time to read a book for a while, or to sit and watch the stars at night with someone you care for, know that these too are 'yes' moments that can fulfill our lives and those around us."