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Mary Ellen Benzik : Distinguished Achievement Award - Natural Sciences

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2005 Distinguished Achievement Award - Natural Sciences

Mary Ellen Benzik, M.D. '84

“I love being a mom. Hanging out with my kids, just being a part of their lives...is the most important job I have been entrusted with.” What better credential could one want from a family practice physician?

Mary Ellen earned her Doctorate of Medicine in 1998 in Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. After completing her Family Practice Residency at MacNeal Hospital in 1991, she began her family practice career at Dayone Family Healthcare in Battle Creek, Michigan, where she continues to work. During these 14 years, she has co-founded a primary care office practice, which has grown from three to 12 providers. What stands out in Mary Ellen’s career is her deep involvement in trying to bring better family practice care, and especially obstetrical care, to her community.

As she says, “The thing I value most about my life is the opportunity to impact the lives of other people.” And impact people’s lives she surely has. For the past 14 years, she has been a volunteer physician for the Special Olympics; a member of the Kellogg Health Plan Board; and for two years she served as Chairman of the Family Practice Department of the Battle Creek Health System. At present, she is a board member for Integrated Health Partners, a volunteer physician for resident training at the Kalamazoo Center for Medical Students, and a volunteer physician facilitator of the Community Obstetrical Plan of Battle Creek. This past March she joined the Family Health Center to help alleviate circumstances that saw the number of obstetricians and family practice physicians in Battle Creek decline from 18 to seven!

For some time now, Mary Ellen has played an active role in finding solutions to the city’s obstetrician shortage. Upon joining the Family Health Center, she said, “It’s really exciting for me to continue to do O.B. as a family doctor. It’s a part of the family doctor position. It’s important to continue that tradition.” Dr. Benzik’s dedication to her career and community are highlighted by her receiving the 1999 SCEA Good Apple Award for commitment to Special Olympics, the 2003 Volunteer of the Year Area 25 Special Olympics Award, and the 2003 Golden Apple Award for Outstanding Faculty at the Kalamazoo Center for Medical Studies.

Mary Ellen “just wanted to be a physician. I couldn’t envision life without medicine... The path has been more challenging than I had planned...but the view from the top has been 100 times more rewarding than I could have ever imagined.” Of St. Norbert College, she says: “...the

feeling of community and connectedness stays with me today.” Of her teachers and mentors, she points to Dr. Klopotek who “was always there for you. He let us know the realities of life, but gave us faith in ourselves;” Fr. Conrad Kratz “nurtured the God center in my life;” and Dean Rankin who, when she served as co-coordinator for graduation in 1984, “made every student feel their opinion mattered.”

Her advice to others echoes her own life: “have passion for whatever you do, personally or professionally.”

St. Norbert College

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