

A Lifetime of Service: Gene Miner's Journey through Nursing

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Gene Miner is a student in USU's RN to BSN nursing program.

Gene Miner first stepped onto USU's campus in the early '60s. Now, after more than 50 years of service and experience, he is back to finish what he started.

Miner graduated from Highland High School in Salt Lake City and came to Utah State in 1967 with big plans: his first semester, he registered for 20 credit hours in the intensive pre-med program.

"It was not smart for a beginning freshman," said Miner. "I ended up with a .1 grade point average, and after two quarters of that, I decided I wasn't ready for college yet."

Miner enlisted in the Marine Corps, where he served for six years in the Philippines and in Okinawa, Japan before returning to Utah and joining the Salt Lake City Fire Department. He was stationed at one of the busiest stations in the valley, where he got a crash course in the life of a first responder with local fires, accidents, and emergencies. As if the life of a fireman wasn't enough to

keep him busy, Miner took up counted cross stitch during downtime at the station rather than wasting time watching TV. "I took a lot of flack for it," he recounted, laughing.

Though his original educational plans didn't go as expected, Miner never shied away from the opportunity to learn during his 20 years with the fire department. He earned an associate's degree in fire science through Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) and completed paramedic training, enabling him to become a paramedic captain.

Miner attributes his proclivity for service to his parents; his mother was a nurse, and his father was a construction electrician who also sang in various events in Salt Lake as part of a barber shop chorus. Even Miner's brother has followed in this pattern of service, first as an RN and now as a paramedic captain himself.

Unfortunately, not everything passed down through the Miner family has been an asset to Miner's career. "My dad had his first heart attack at 33 and died at 44," said Miner. "Can't do anything about bad genes." Miner had coronary bypass surgery in 1996, at which point he retired from the fire department.

Refusing to entirely leave the work he loved, Miner enrolled in the nursing program at SLCC and obtained an associate's degree in nursing. Miner's experience spoke volumes about his abilities. As a new graduate, he was hired into the emergency department at St. Mark's hospital in Salt Lake City without being required to complete medical-surgical time. "The director decided that since I'd already been doing this for 20 years, they'd just bring me to the other side of the door," he said.

It was a natural transition for Miner; after years of transporting patients to the ER, he was well-prepared to step into the role of receiving patients and continuing their emergency care. Miner's experience as a first responder also gave him the perspective to advocate for the wellbeing of first responders themselves. This mindset aided him to become an EMS liaison for nine fire departments in the valley, a position he held for five years.

"One of the biggest things that I never got as a paramedic was knowing what happened to my patients. We just dropped them off at the door," said Miner. To help the response teams he coordinated with receive closure on the patients they helped, Miner wrote a summary of the follow-up care provided to the patients brought to the ER, which was posted daily in each station. Miner also set up a snack bar for first responders so they could grab coffee or food during long night shifts. EMS teams at St. Mark's

are now celebrated with a dedicated day of recognition and appreciation to help them feel valued as front-line professionals.

Miner also helped establish an official disaster response team for the hospital, which has now broadened to a full-fledged response team that runs active shooter trainings, bomb search drills, and natural disaster preparation and education.



The online RN to BSN program is part of USU's growing nursing department.

When the EMS liaison position was moved to the Mountain Star division, Miner was offered the opportunity to move up the chain, but he declined, not wanting to leave the team he worked with for 26 years. Instead, Miner moved to a PRN (or "as-needed") nursing position, working in departments across the hospital to fill in for other personnel and lend an extra hand in emergencies. He still works with the disaster response team and has given instruction in the trauma unit and other areas of the hospital.

After his years of dedication to the medical field, Miner decided to return to USU to formalize his wealth of experience. He is now enrolled in the Registered Nursing to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN to BSN) program. "I applied for Utah State's RN to BSN program thinking that they'd laugh at my application when they looked at my old transcripts, but I graduated with honors from SLCC," he said. "They decided to take a chance and put me in the program, and I've made it through two semesters so far... I'm glad I came back to Utah State to do it."

Carma Miller, head of the department of Nursing in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services, spoke highly of Miner and his contributions as a student in one of her classes. "His perspective is insightful and important," she said. "I love how he models the professionalism of an experienced nurse in his interactions with students who are new to the field of nursing."

When asked what he would most like beginning nursing professionals to understand, Miner said, "It's a calling.

There's only certain people who can do it. If you're in it for the money, you're in for a big surprise. You've got to love people and you've got to love finding a way to make them healthy, even if it's difficult."



Miner hopes to move into behavioral health and help patients with complex needs.

Miner will complete his BSN in 2023, and he is already planning his next steps. Because of his close relationship with his nephew, who is diagnosed with schizophrenia, Miner hopes to move into behavioral health to advocate for better treatment of patients with specific mental and psychiatric concerns. "They're some of the most abused of our patients because people don't understand where they're coming from," Miner said. "You have to understand that what they feel is real to them." To that end, one of his semester projects focuses on non-violent, verbal de-escalation training as an alternative to physical or chemical restraints for patients with complex needs.

In his spare time, Miner is helping build a twin home for his brother and nephew, and he is involved in a salon renovation on Main Street in Logan. He is also working with close friends from the Wellsville volunteer fire department to establish a free-standing emergency department in the rapidly-growing Wellsville area. This unit would help meet emergency needs in Cache Valley cities that are farther from hospitals, such as Hyrum, Providence, and Mendon.

Following in his father's footsteps, Miner has been a part of the same barbershop chorus since he returned from his military service. He has sung in nursing homes and other venues around the valley, providing another kind of service to the community. "People don't understand how strong a thing music is," he said. "I think music is probably the first and last thing you hear your whole life." This year, he will receive his 50-year pin for his dedicated membership in the chorus.

Miner also enjoys marathons—he has completed six so far, and he is hoping to find time for at least one more

before he turns 80—and golfing, boating, and fishing with his three sons.

Though he teases the staff at St. Mark's about eventually needing a walker to come in to work, it seems there is not much that could stop Gene Miner from pursuing his passions. "I like to stay busy," he said. "Retiring is changing jobs for me. If I run out of projects, I'll just come up with another one."