

Illini Community Hospital has no less than 13 registered nurses who are Pike County natives. They're invested in caring for their communities, and the hospital is invested in helping them grow professionally so they can maintain long, fulfilling careers there.

"Living in a rural area, it's not always a big attraction to stay," said Illini nurse manager Alyssa Heavner, RN. "So, when you find people who are dedicated to staying near their hometowns, career growth and development is important."

Hiring right also plays an essential role, said Susan Chenoweth, MSN, RN, the hospital's Administrative Director of Nursing. Department leaders have prioritized selecting talent who fit the hospital's culture, which she described as accountability and respect.

"Teamwork is expected and valued," Chenoweth said. "We don't work for individual departments. We work as one whole unit."

With three pillars—growth, development and cultural fit—the Illini Community Hospital has had success in building a vibrant and engaged nurse workforce. The story of Heaven Utterback and Bailey Ottwell is a perfect example. The two worked as certified nursing assistants (CNAs) at the Liberty Village of Pittsfield nursing home during high school. The hospital hired Ottwell, who in turn suggested Utterback apply—at Heavner's recommendation. Both women are now on staff as licensed practical nurses.

"It's a homey atmosphere," Utterback said of working at the hospital. "We all work well together, know each other pretty well and can depend on each other. Everyone was great about helping me through school, working with my schedule."

Ottwell got a sense of what working at Illini Community Hospital would be like during a tour as part of her high school anatomy and physiology class. She had always heard good things about the hospital. Experiencing it firsthand, Ottwell said the work environment, teamwork and the care the nurses provide make working there a positive experience.

Deme Batchelor, another homegrown nurse, noted the hospital's size is also an important factor. She joined the staff as a CNA as well.

"I felt comfortable as a new graduate nurse here," she said. "I was ready and able to get out on the floor."

Each of the three women plans to earn their Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing & Health Sciences and continue to provide care to their community at Illini Community Hospital.

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