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From Housekeeper to Nurse, Phoebe RN Starts Nursing Career at Age 69

Albany, Ga. – At an age when most folks are enjoying retirement, 69-year-old new college graduate Loretta Mack is just starting her career as a registered nurse at Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital.

“The Lord has a plan for me. I think that all of us are here for a purpose, and my mission is not over. I have things to do and people to take care of,” Mack said recently while on a quick break during her second week caring for cardiac patients on the hospital’s fourth floor.

Mack moved from Washington, DC to Albany in 2008, looking for a more affordable cost of living and a better environment in which to raise her grandson. “I knew I had to do better by this child. My sister was here, and she said, ‘come on.’ That’s what we did, and I’m so glad. Everything I ever wanted happened here in Albany, Georgia,” she said.

Mack had been a stay-at-home mom for years, but after arriving in Albany, she renewed her certified nursing assistant (CNA) certification and began working as a home health aide. In 2014, she joined the Phoebe Family in the hospital’s environmental services department before accepting a position as a CNA on the cardiac unit. She was beloved by her patients and co-workers, many of whom often told her she would be a great nurse.

“I love people. I love taking care of people. It’s a passion of mine,” Mack said. “My mother passed away at age 54 while she was in nursing school. I thought it would be great if I could go back to school, but I said, ‘I’ve never been to college. I’m just too old.’”

With the encouragement of her family and colleagues, Mack took advantage of Phoebe’s employee education assistance program and enrolled at Albany Technical College at age 65. After completing her prerequisites there, she was accepted into the nursing program at Albany State University.

“Most of the other students were in their twenties. I was definitely the oldest one, but everyone was very helpful and sometimes it worked to my advantage. When we would go over medications, I would be like, “oh yeah, I take that,” Mack said with a laugh.

Mack graduated with her nursing degree in December, passed her nursing board test in January, then went through Phoebe’s Nurse Simulation Training and Education Program (NSTEP) before finally being able to work as a nurse in the same unit where she began serving as a CNA six years ago.

“It’s really cool. Phoebe employees just gathered around me and cheered me on. It’s like the whole hospital was waiting for me to graduate. They were so proud of me, and they let me know it,” Mack said.

Mack is excited to celebrate her first National Nurses Week (May 6 – 12) as a registered nurse, and she is proud to serve as a role model for others who may be considering a nursing career later in life.

“You’re only as old as you feel, and I feel pretty good,” she said. “I’d tell others you can do it no matter what age you are, but you have to do it because you feel it. You have to have a passion for it.”

Mack says she doesn’t normally have a big celebration for her birthday, but her family and friends are already planning what she calls a “blowout” in July to mark her 70th birthday and recognize all that she has accomplished. And, this year, she can’t wait to celebrate.

“I’m the happiest I’ve ever been. I’m living my best life. That’s it in a nutshell.”

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