

HENRY
BURY

Intelligencer

A nursing era came to an end when Rita Healey left Belleville hospital for the last time earlier this month.

The registered nurse from Tweed retired after 33 years in the profession.

What she wore to work every day is also what set her apart from her nursing peers.

Healey, 55, always donned the traditional white nursing cap that she proudly wore on graduation day, as well as the white dress uniform (never pants), white lab jacket, white nylons and even white nursing duty shoes whenever she reported for duty.

"I've always felt that wearing a complete uniform was part of the nursing profession and I feel like I look professional. It's an old habit," said Healey.

She never considered changing her attire or colour even after uniform regulations were relaxed for nurses in the 1980s.

"I just wanted to wear a white uniform...I wouldn't feel comfortable without wearing my cap and white uniform."

She did, however, sport some colour on her uniform Jan. 21, her last day on the job on Quinte 5. Her co-workers presented her with a corsage boasting three beautiful red roses which she proudly wore on her lapel during her last shift.

These same co-workers paid tribute to Healey on her last day by also wearing the traditional white nursing dress uniform and cap — even though some younger nurses had to make their own caps.

"That was so nice of them," Healey said. "I appreciate it very much."

Lorraine Moran, manager of Quinte 5, said Healey has been an exceptional nurse.

"She is special, and it's more than just her uniform. Rita has a passion and dedication

for the job. She loves what she does."

Moran also thinks "it's great" that Healey

chose to wear the traditional nursing uniform throughout her career.

"The patients like it because they know who the nurses are," she said.

A retirement dinner was also held Jan. 24 in Healey's honour and it was arranged by her nursing co-workers on Quinte 5.

Healey decided to become a nurse while still in high school. She spent three summers working with chronic care patients at St. Mary's on the Lake Hospital in Kingston "and I just knew that's what I wanted to do."

After finishing Tweed High School in 1968, she enrolled in the three-year registered nursing program at St. Joseph's School of Nursing in Peterborough that was literally attached to St. Joseph's Hospital.

Her first nursing job was at Prince Edward Community Memorial Hospital and, two years later, she came to Belleville General Hospital in May of 1973 and remained there until her last day.

She spent eight years in psychiatry but the bulk of her career was on Quinte 5, a 64-bed medical floor with patients ranging from juvenile diabetics to the elderly.

"The part I enjoyed the most about nursing is the direct patient care," Healey said. "You are doing bedside nursing and you're not at your desk, shuffling papers."

She said she has always tried to exhibit the qualities of understanding, patience and compassion when dealing with patients and has never taken personally any derogatory comments from patients or their families.

"When you're dealing with illness, it's upsetting for families and patients. And sometimes things are said," said Healey.

She won't miss the shift work associated with nursing.

"You miss Christmases and other special occasions and your kids' activities because you have to work. You have to make a lot of sacrifices when you're a nurse and now it's time to relax and just enjoy life while you're healthy."

But Healey said she wouldn't have traded her career for anything else.

"I can't think of another career that would have given me the same satisfaction," she said.

In retirement, Healey said she has "lots to do."

She plans on spending more time with her husband, Leo, and their two children and helping out on their beef farm. She also enjoys biking and reading.

"I'll miss my co-workers, certainly. But I won't miss the shift work."