

The Scenic Route

Navigating the Twists and Turns of a Dedicated Public Servant

BY KARA BISHOP



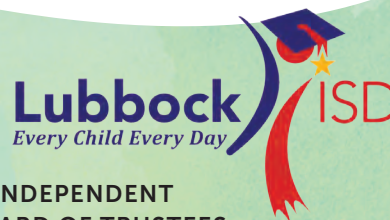
Nancy Neal, RN

"You may start out on a path, but if you're willing to take detours you can have some amazing experiences in life," said Nancy Neal, RN, (Nursing '85). As this year's Presidential Distinguished Alumni Awardee, Neal takes us down some monumental detours in her life as a public servant.



INTENDED PATH: ATTORNEY AT LAW

She wanted to go to law school, after nursing school, with a passion for education and health care driving her to be the voice for those who couldn't speak for themselves. However, a decision by the Lubbock Independent School District board of trustees sent her off course.



DETOUR 1: LUBBOCK INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES (1986-1992)

"I was very active in the PTA for my children's schools and was annoyed at a decision made by the school board, so I decided to run," Neal said. "If you don't like something, you should try to solve the problem—not just complain about it."

She served on the board for six years and was the first female president. During her tenure, a monumental piece of history still brings tears to her eyes.

"I was elected in April 1986, and in May, the Lubbock public schools were notified about the first child with HIV/AIDS who wanted to attend school (in the district)," she recalled, choking back emotion. "I was the first and only nurse to be elected and a fellow board member was a pharmacist, so we led the charge in seeing what we could do for this child. The child was either in second or third grade and HIV positive. We couldn't hide it from the community—all we could do was protect the child's name. Fortunately, we were able to find a way for the child to attend school for two full semesters before he died. I'm glad I had the nursing background ... it was just so important that there were people on the board who wanted this to happen ... It was a great moment in health care for Lubbock public schools."

Then Margaret La Montagne Spellings (named U.S. Secretary of Education under President George W. Bush), who Neal worked closely with while on the LISD board, asked Neal if she'd ever considered serving as a university regent. "The governor wanted people to serve who didn't have a tie to the university system, so Margaret gave him my name," Neal added, thus beginning her detour into higher education.

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

The rising STAR of Texas

DETOUR 2: TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM BOARD OF REGENTS (1997-2004)

"This is where I fell in love with higher education, to be honest," said Neal, with a smile in her voice. "I was not a big donor to Gov. George W. Bush. That's not how governors work. They wanted someone to serve as a regent who had something to offer. I was the first nurse to serve as regent—there had been physicians but no nurses."

She served on the TSU System board eight years, and, yes, was president for some of them. She was then appointed to The Higher Education Coordinating Board by Gov. Rick Perry for three years where she helped approve the Doctor of Nursing Practice degree for Texas nursing schools.

Then, the governor called her again.




DETOUR 3: TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY SYSTEM BOARD OF REGENTS (2009-2015)

"This was one of the most tremendous volunteer jobs for me, to say the least," Neal recalled. "I was the first nurse to be selected for this board as well. During my six years, I'm pretty sure I hold the record for 'person on the most search committees for the system!'"

She never did get that law degree; however, that didn't stop her from serving the Texas Tech University System and her community. Neal may not have achieved that initial dream, "but I wouldn't have missed the alternate paths I took for the world."

"Service is a component we all need to have in our lives," she adds. "I could stay at home, but my blessings have driven me to do something with my life ... not a J-O-B but an impactful purpose that serves others."

Congratulations Nancy on being selected for the 2017 Presidential Distinguished Alumni Award. You deserve it. 

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Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

T. CELESTE NAPIER, PHD, ('82)



School of Health Professions

MATT BARKER, AUD, ('04, '00)



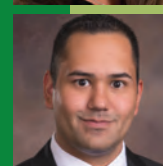
RYAN BREWSTER, MS, ('17)



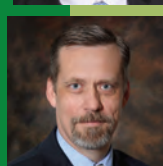
TOMMY HIGGINS, CRC, ('06)



MINDY HOFFMAN, ATC, ('06)



ELY PEREA, MBA, MSMP, ('08, '07)

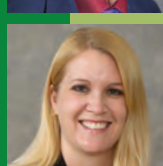


School of Medicine

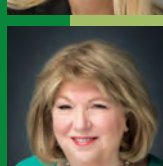
TIMOTHY BENTON, MD, ('94)



JOHN GRISWOLD, MD, (RESIDENT '86)



AMY THOMPSON, MD, ('04)



School of Nursing

GAIL ACUNA, DNP, ('16)



JAMES DICKENS, DNP, ('12)



MICHAEL MOON, PHD, MSN, ('87)



Full biographies for the 2017 Distinguished Alumni Award winners can be found online: ttuhsc.edu/alumni/distinguished-awards