

features

Care around the clock

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It is early in the morning, she knows as she rolls over to look at the alarm clock. The sun has not even begun to peek through the blinds in the apartment bedroom, which usually wakes her and her roommate with its glare.

Her home away from home is quiet as she pulls herself out from under the warmth of the navy-blue florals of her blankets and into the bathroom.

After brushing her teeth and washing her face to wake up for the day, she slips into her uniform. Her scrubs, a comfy cotton blend of navy and her grey tennis shoes set her in motion for the day as she works her way to the kitchen.

It is dark everywhere, no one else awake.

It is Saturday morning and the laughter from the night before still seems to hang in the air, her friends draped all over the living room furniture laughing, drinking and watching one another make their best attempts at Just Dance.

The kitchen smells of orange Ajax from the clean dishes in the sink from Friday’s dinner as she makes her way to the coffee pot. The clean of orange is soon taken over by the scent of a fresh roasted cup that will linger in the air until her roommates wake up to her being long gone.

As she makes her way out to her car, she can see the first lights in the sky still a fade off in the distance. She pulls her coat closer around her and makes her way to her grey Mazda parked across the street.

The same car that brings her from home to school, small town to small town, takes her on her early morning drive each weekend.

On these mornings, Autumn Fox is not a nursing student at Ashland University; she is a caretaker at The Good Shepherd nursing home.

Just two days earlier, it was also her ride to Medina to work a 12 hour shift at the hospital as part of her clinical rotation for her nursing degree.

Three days, 36 hours a week, no matter the location, Fox is caring for people no matter



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY: BETHANY BASCUS
Fox and Bascus in their AU scrubs as they head to labs and clinicals for the day.

where she goes.

After a short drive under the cover of the morning sky, she checks in at work. Her long brown hair pulled back as she puts on her face mask, face shield and every piece of PPE that protects her patients and herself.

Only after she makes sure she can protect her patients does she begin her day of helping other people through theirs.

“Think of your typical day,” she said. “You get up in the morning, you get dressed, take a shower, you usually do an activity until lunch — study or read a book — then you have lunch. After you have lunch, you just kind of hang out — maybe on your phone, watch TV — like your classical Saturday at home. I go in and I help people do that.”

Making her way down the halls of the rehabilitation unit, she knows almost every resident in her assigned sector. They go about their day just like everyone, but they have a helping hand along the way.

After giving them a little ‘good morning’ and checking on how they are doing, she gets to work.

“I help them brush their teeth, I help them get dressed, I help them shower,” she said. “Their day is no different than any day of you or me or anyone else, I’m just there to physically hold their hand and help them and if they can’t do it, I do it for them.”



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY: AUTUMN FOX
Fox begins her weekend early in the morning with scrubs and a smile.

The residents in the facility need her help to get through the day. Sometimes, she is all they have.

“It’s surreal,” she said.

It is not just that they do not have family to see them, it is because the coronavirus pandemic has made it impossible.

“There’s no family,” she said. “I hardly ever talk to my family, which in nursing school they always tell you the family is part of your patient.”

In this way, the patients are missing a vital part needed for their health and well-being — something that cannot be fixed with medication or surgery.

This grim aspect carries on past the weekend, all the way through to Thursday morning when Fox gets up early to do more of the same care, but this time in the hospital setting.

This time, she is not alone.

Thursdays she is accompanied by her roommate and fellow nursing student Bethany Bacus. They get up at 5 a.m. on Thursday and make the trip to Medina to practice in the hospital setting.

Through the masks and protective goggles of more PPE, Fox sees more of the same that she just saw last weekend, and is about to see in two days: an absence of family as a form of medication.

“It’s really hard,” Fox said.

The halls are empty for nurses, doctors and patients as they make their way around trying to help others and stay afloat during the pandemic.

“You don’t have that family interaction which is putting so much more pressure on the patient to where they’re not getting better as fast as they can, and you can visibly see it and how isolated they are,” she said.

Because of this, the nurses and medical professionals around the hospital become the patient’s temporary family in their temporary home. Even nursing students jump in, taking on all the full responsibilities of a nurse though their training has just begun.

“You definitely take the few extra seconds to talk to them than you normally would,” Fox said. “Even on a busy day, just letting them know that someone’s there.”

After the long 12 hours, barely a break in the middle to eat or use the restroom, the pair heads back to their Ashland apartment where they are able to take a load off the long day, usually with friends.

Their cozy apartment is usually filled with familiar faces

for Thursday night movies or dinners together.

The sofa for two crowded with four as they relax with a good movie in good company. The smell of popcorn hangs in the air, dinner long since passed for friends in different majors who ate while clinicals were still happening.

All of the busyness and stress from the day is soon replaced by the quiet din of laughter and inside jokes that fill the apartment and sets the tone for a relaxing Friday.

“On Fridays neither of us have any classes so if I know that we’ve got all of our studying done and we did all of our work, I’ll always make an effort to be like ‘do you want to get some lunch or go for a walk?’ Something like that,” Bacus said. “She doesn’t really get that time on the weekend because she’s working, and she misses out on doing the whole friend thing”

Just as soon as Friday comes, it is gone again and it is back to clinicals, work, class and lab all over again.

Being on the go all the time keeps Fox busy, and there is always something to do.

Between classes over zoom, labs on the Mansfield campus, work at The Good Shepherd and going home to her family in Wellington or to see her nieces and nephews in Vermilion, she is always on the go.

This also means she is always around people, giving masked

smiles to friends, family and patients at every turn.

“My entire job is being social,” she said.

After a long week of providing care to others and getting her own education, the social burnout starts to take its toll.

“You’re never really alone, and in this part of my life, I’m never alone,” Fox said. “There’s always somebody right around the corner. Always.”

While the aspect of a support system is important to Fox and her well-being, it can also be challenging to keep up with. While her friends are in the apartment often, she does not always get to see them.

“I find it hard to keep up with friends because I’m constantly busy,” she said.

People may want to get dinner, “I have class.”

Someone may want to hang out Thursday, “I have clinical” so not until after.

Friends want to watch the game Sunday afternoon, “I have work.”

“I have one day off a week and I guard that day with my life because I need time alone,” Fox said.

Just as it seems there is time for friends in the midst of a busy schedule, there is one day left and that one is on reserve for much needed self-care.

“You’ve got to know how to take care of yourself to do this or figure it out fast,” she said.

People who are friends with Fox would never know about the struggle to make time for everything, because she seldom makes it known.

“Autumn has her own problems, but she doesn’t bring it to the surface because she doesn’t want it to be a burden on other people,” Bacus said. “She is just always willing to give her time and effort and anything that she can to help other people.”

Everything becomes worth it when Fox realizes that everything she is doing is for the benefit of her future and the chance to help someone who truly needs it.

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PHOTO SUBMITTED BY: AUTUMN FOX
Fox in her PPE in the midst of a 12-hour weekend work shift.