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Surprise revealed: Jacki Witt receives national award for her exceptional service, sacrifice and innovation

By: Heather Swan

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Jacki Witt, JD, MSN, WHNP, knew she was a finalist for a Cherokee Inspired Comfort Award, but she had no idea what was in store for her during what was supposed to be a faculty lunch on Sept. 25 with her University of Missouri-Kansas City colleagues.

Much to the surprise of Witt, a clinical associate professor at the UMKC School of Nursing, the lunch turned into a celebration to announce

that she had been named the 2006 Grand Prize Winner in the Advanced Practice Nurse Category for the Cherokee Inspired Comfort Award.

"They did a good job keeping it a secret," Witt said.

Cherokee Uniforms established the Cherokee Inspired Comfort Award in 2003 to honor nurses and non-physician health care professionals who have affected the lives of others through exceptional service, sacrifice and innovation.

Cherokee gives awards in five categories: Registered Nurses, Advanced Practice Nurses (a new category this year), Licensed Practical Nurses/Licensed Vocational Nurses, Student Nurses and other non-physician health care professionals. Witt was one of 11 award recipients. The 11 include a grand prize winner in each of the five categories, a top national winner in four of the categories and two other national winners. This year, Cherokee Uniforms received nearly 900 nominations from across the country.

For winning a grand prize, Witt receives an all-expense-paid cruise for two, a wardrobe from Cherokee Uniforms and Rockers Footwear worth more than \$1,000, a trophy, placement in Cherokee's 2007 Inspired Comfort Award calendar and national publicity.

Witt and her husband, Ron, are looking forward to their first-ever cruise.

"I've never won anything in my life, never a national award like this, that's for sure," she said.

Kit Smith, RN, Ph.D., associate dean of scholarship and community partnerships at the UMKC School of Nursing, nominated Witt for the award.

"Jacki has given so much to the community and the underserved," she said. "...She exemplifies the meaning of the award."

Smith said she was delighted but not all that surprised that Witt received the award.

"I wasn't surprised because she really deserves it more than anyone," she said.

In her nomination, Smith cited Witt's countless hours providing nursing care to underserved populations in Kansas City. She also wrote about how Witt and Sister Berta Sailer, Operation Breakthrough co-director, worked for years to establish a nurse-run adult clinic at Operation Breakthrough, Missouri's largest single-site child care and early education center. The Helen Gragg Adult Clinic opened in 2004 to provide convenient and accessible health care for parents (usually single women) when they pick up their children at Operation Breakthrough.

"We have been amazed by the response," Witt said.

Witt has been involved in women's health care her whole nursing career, starting in labor and delivery. In 1985, she became a women's health nurse practitioner. Besides teaching full time at UMKC, Witt volunteers at the Helen Gragg Adult Clinic and she sees patients at Truman Medical Center in the OB-Gyn department as needed.

"Interacting with women at different ages and stages in their life and working on health issues and health-related issues gives me a great deal of satisfaction," she said. "...You have quite an impact on a family if you can influence a woman in her approach to health care."

For those who want to nominate someone for next year's Cherokee Inspired Comfort Award, the 2007 nomination period will be open from March 1, 2007, to May 31, 2007. Submission forms and guidelines will be available on Cherokee Uniforms' Web site, www.cherokeeiniforms.com.

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