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New SON dean hopes to define field's future

By *Ryan Poquette, OU Special Writer*

If you want to keep up with Linda Thompson, the new dean of Oakland University's **School of Nursing**, invest in a good pair of running shoes. She'll tell you so herself.

"I plan on hitting the ground running," Thompson said. "I would love to see Oakland's School of Nursing ranked as one of the top schools of nursing in the country."

She plans to get there with initiatives that reach out to young people and face the nursing shortage head on. She hopes to start immediately by developing a comprehensive strategic plan in conjunction with faculty, alumni, health-care leaders and the community.

Her experience and education give her the confidence to believe she can do it. Thompson came to Oakland from the University of Maryland, where she served as associate dean for policy, planning and workforce development in the School of Nursing. She served concurrently as director of the Center for Community Partnerships for Children and Families, a post she still holds. Other roles included serving as special secretary of the Maryland Governor's Office of Children, Youth and Families and director of the City of Baltimore's Office of Occupational Medicine and Safety.

In addition, she held teaching positions at the University of Maryland, Johns Hopkins University, Coppin State College and Hampton University in Virginia.

Despite her years on the eastern seaboard, Thompson considers her move to Oakland a homecoming. A Michigan native, Thompson earned her BSN and MSN degrees from Wayne State University in the 1970s. Oakland's School of Nursing, then in its infancy, attracted her attention.

"The first dean of Oakland's School of Nursing was an African-American woman," Thompson said. "It was one of those times when I was able to see a person of color in a leadership position."

This positive exposure helped inspire the young Thompson, who went on to earn master's and doctoral degrees in public health from Johns Hopkins University. In the two decades since, Thompson promoted policies and programs that improve the quality of life of vulnerable populations — most notably, America's youth.

Her commitment to promoting healthy children resulted in partnerships with academic institutions, government and community-based organizations. In addition, her seminal research regarding incarcerated youth was essential in the development of national policy that requires mental health assessments of all detained and adjudicated youth.

Thompson is interested in reaching out to area youth in her role as Oakland's dean, especially when it comes to getting students interested in nursing.

"How can I work more closely with the public school system, to build success in high school students so that they see nursing as a viable career choice?" Thompson asked, posing the challenge to herself.

Thompson also hopes to build interest in the nursing profession by adopting techniques used by other industries. Citing the automotive industry's massive reengineering process several years ago as one possible model, she asked: "How do we reengineer nursing so that it's a job that people really love and want to go to every day?"

Of course, Thompson noted that — while she has many goals — one person, regardless of motivation, cannot do it all.

"Most of my administrative experience has been in public policy and public administration in a political environment, and the way you succeed in those jobs is by using a participatory model of leadership," she said.

Thompson plans to use this holistic model of leadership at Oakland, too.

"I find out what the strengths are in all of the people who I work with, and then I work with them to build on their strengths so that

they succeed as well.”

SUMMARY

Linda Thompson plans on making Oakland University's School of Nursing one of the top nursing schools in the country by developing a comprehensive strategic plan in conjunction with faculty, alumni, health-care leaders and the community. Thompson began her new position Aug. 1. Thompson came from the University of Maryland, where she served as associate dean for policy, planning and workforce development in the School of Nursing.

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