

## Shanley Deacon “Serves” as NDSU Pharmacy Faculty Member and Opioid Risk Program Team Member

By John Klocke



*Heidi (Fritz) Eukel '02*

More than 450,000 people in the US have died due to opioid overdose since 1999, with an estimated 128 deaths every day. Shanley alum Heidi (Fritz) Eukel '02 serves on the ONE (Opioid and Naloxone Education) Program Research Team. An educational initiative, the team that Eukel helped develop for pharmacists screens and educates patients receiving prescription opioids in community pharmacies across North Dakota.

Eukel, an example of a Shanley graduate blazing a new trail in the medical profession, points to the success of the academic rigor at Shanley High School. We sat down to an interview with her this past winter. “With my work there have been many interviews, but honestly, this

interview as an alum of Shanley is one I’ve been most excited to do,” Eukel said.

Shanley was a high point in her educational journey, according to Eukel. “The high academic challenge and family-like atmosphere Shanley offered me as a student paid off in my college educational pursuits. I can’t say enough about the edge it gave me.”

That preparation led Eukel to six-years of study at NDSU’s School of Pharmacy/ College of Health Professions where she graduated in 2008 earning her doctor of pharmacy degree. She is a full professor in NDSU’s Pharmacy Practice Program, educating more than 1300 students over the past 15 years. Heidi designs hands-on

simulations for students to practice skills to become a pharmacist in a state-of-the-art fully licensed pharmacy on campus. Her educational simulations give students the opportunity to learn in a simulated but realistic pharmacy setting. This setting covers many career options, allowing them to practice and make mistakes in a safe and supportive environment.

Eukel has fond memories of her Catholic education that she began in 6th grade at St. Anthony's and then continued at Shanley. Her class was the last graduating class in the old Shanley High School building. "I remember a lot of sentimental things about those last days at the old Shanley, most notably, sitting on the front steps on graduation day with my dad, Shanley class of 1976."

She notes that her education was well-rounded in all areas, central to her life and her future. "I was in student council, played volleyball, and was involved in theater. I had many opportunities to learn leadership, service, and faith."

There were teachers that made a difference in her educational journey too. "Mike Hagstrom, my religion teacher at Shanley, was a huge mentor" said Eukel. "He really instilled in me my passion for serving others. He connected us with senior residents of Rosewood on Broadway (now SMPH St. Catherine's North) where we would spend time regularly with them. He helped us develop a 'servant's heart.'" Eukel said that experience in serving others shaped her life. "I still remember the feeling of helping others through our class service projects and Key Club. That spirit of service has stayed with me."

That same service aspect is woven into her work with her pharmacy students. "We need to develop empathy in our students and the skills to build relationships with patients to have optimal outcomes."

Eukel connects deeply with her students and challenges them with real-world scenarios like explaining a medication error to a patient, discussing end-of-life-care, and de-escalating difficult situations.



*Heidi Eukel '02 works with students in the NDSU pharmacy simulation lab*



*Heidi Eukel instructs fellow Deacon Alum Alicia Iverson '14 in pharmacy simulation lab*

“The individualized education I received at Shanley was critical to my work with students. Having educational support from teachers like Mr. Murie who challenged me to learn advanced math at home on my own, made a huge difference. The overall connectedness to the teachers made for a rich learning environment for me and I thrived in it. I strive to create that for my current pharmacy students.”

Part of Eukel’s current job outside of teaching focuses on research. “I found that I was missing patient connections I had before becoming a teacher, and I looked for ways to use my research to impact patients through the work of others.”

Her research helped build the ONE Program that educates pharmacists across the state of North Dakota, and gives them important screening tools for patients who are sent home with pain medications (opioids). “We were sending patients home with these powerful pain medications, and the education program we developed helped us educate patients properly about the

potential addictions or overdose that could form. The program we developed with the team helps to screen patients to determine which patients might be more vulnerable to the effects of the opioids. Some patients need more education and special tools.”

With over 9,000 patients receiving the screening in North Dakota, one research study she conducted demonstrated 25% of patients were at risk for addiction. “Some patients needed more education; some were given a lock box system for their medications; and still others could benefit from naloxone to aid in preventing overdose”

This groundbreaking research has now been so successful in North Dakota that other states such as West Virginia and Idaho have asked to use the program in their states. Her research and hard work are having a national impact. “It is such an honor to see the program grow to reach more people across the nation with the hopes of preventing opioid addiction or overdose.

This proud Deacon became a wife and mom along the way. She and her husband, Tony, have twin boys, Nolan and Jayce in fourth grade and daughter, Kittson, in first grade, all at Trinity Elementary. Heidi is a very proud JPII Schools parent and lights up as she speaks about her children's experiences at Trinity.

"I always felt my Catholic education was special and now that I am a parent, I see an entirely new dimension," said Eukel. "Each of my children are greeted by name as they walk in to school each day and I know almost all of the children in each of their classes. I absolutely love being able to stay connected with JPII Schools through Trinity—volunteering on the playground, helping with the color run, serving at the Family Fun Fair, and leading the PTO. There truly is every opportunity to be involved with the education of our children and serve the JPII community."

Even when she toured Trinity, she was so surprised when the Director of Enrollment, Lori Hager, recognized her as Heidi Fritz. "She greeted me with a hug and I couldn't believe she remembered my name."

Eukel points to many benefits of having her children at St. John Paul II Catholic Schools. "There is connectedness for us. It's family. It's a village where the families share common Catholic values. And service starts from the time the students are young. We feel like we're all in this together. It's the little things you see, like the kids giving Christmas gifts to the school cook, or the 4th grade boys designing and selling fidgets to raise money for their Lenten service project recipient."

The experiences Heidi and Tony have had are experiences she hopes every family has

through the JPII Schools. "I've benefitted so much from my Catholic education, and I know it's a sacrifice financially for parents. For us it was probably the best decision we ever made as parents."

As Eukel looks around her parish community and within her graduating class, she sees so many outstanding alumni from her class are now doing amazing things in their careers as well. "So often we as parents think of the cost of education but when I see all these successful classmates, it gets me thinking more about the return on the investment in Catholic education."

When asked for an example of the difference it makes for her kids she thinks for a moment and smiles:

"Picture this. I'm driving a bunch of stinky ten-year-old boys from Trinity home after hockey practice with the Angels, the local hockey team for parochial school students. We stop at Taco Johns for an end-of-the-season treat and I order 20 tacos. As the wrappers start to crinkle, they all suddenly stopped and said, 'Wait! We need to pray before we eat.' So, there we were in a fast-food parking lot; sweaty, stinky and squirmy; and they STILL took time to praise God!"

Heidi's experiences and her family's have been full of blessings at St. John Paul II Catholic Schools. Now as she makes life-changing differences for patients through her students and pharmacists around the state and the nation, we have no doubt the Eukel children will be following in mom's footsteps of service, faith, and eternal significance.

"I thank God for the blessing of Catholic education for me and for my family."