

## Annandale's Melissa Bray-Erickson Minnesota Nurse of Year

By Tom Westman  
Staff Writer

On Friday, Oct 23, 2020, Annandale resident Melissa Bray-Erickson received the March of Dimes Minnesota Nurse of the Year Award in the 'Women's Health' category; which includes nurses who practice in obstetric clinics, gynecology, antepartum hospital units, labor, and delivery and post-partum.

"I am shocked that I was chosen to receive the Women's Health Nurse of the Year Award," Bray-Erickson said. There are so many days I wish I could do and be more, if only there were more than 24 hours in a day.

"All nurses deserve this type of reward as what they do daily is nothing short of heroic."

The annual awards ceremony provides the Minnesota community with a way to recognize local nurses who are on the front lines of caring for families. Nurses play a critical role in advancing the March of Dimes mission to fight for the health of every mother and baby. The awards are supported by M Health Fairview, United Health Group, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare, Medica, North Memorial Health, CentraCare, HealthPartners, HDR and Leighton Broadcasting.

### 22 years

Bray-Erickson has been working in obstetrical nursing for the past 22 years at a variety of facilities from the small community hospital to a large urban obstetrical care unit. Her current work as a Nurse Clinician, Birth Center began in 2013 at CentraCare St. Cloud

Hospital.

"I am responsible for perinatal quality and safety," Bray-Erickson said. "I write and review nursing practices and policies, review data trends and look for opportunities for improvement."

Bray-Erickson also performs critical incident debriefs and participates in 'Care for the Caregiver', where she is trained to come alongside staff after they have been involved in a stressful situation.

"I have the opportunity to help staff cope and move through the stress and difficulties they experience after critical events," Bray-Erickson said.

Bray-Erickson also lists the following work-related outside activities: Perinatal Expert Consultant with the Minnesota Hospital Association (MHA), MHA Perinatal Safety Committee, Perinatal Quality Collaborative, the Maternal Mortality Review Committee through the Minnesota Department of Health, member of numerous professional nursing organizations and serves as the current Minnesota Chair of the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses.

### Nurse

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She is a present member of ANA, AWHONN, MOLN, AORN, ASPAN and Sigma Theta Tau professional nursing organizations, and serves as the



Melissa Bray-Erickson

current AWHONN Minnesota state chair. Bray-Erickson was featured in the book "The Call of Nursing" written by William Patrick. Molnlycke Speaker's Bureau

"I have the opportunity to go all over the country and speak to other nurses and surgeons about best practices in the operating room and how I did an evidence-based project by implementing a unique and novel surgical site infection reduction bundle at CentraCare's St. Cloud Hospital," Bray-Erickson said. Mother ill

"I had a traumatic event with my mother (Constance Bray) when I was about 12, and I did not know what to do to help her, all I could do was scream," Bray-Erickson said.

In Bray-Erickson's late teen years she hesitated about becoming a nurse because of her mother's Multiple Sclerosis.

While in high school she took a class called 'Opportunities in Emergency Healthcare' where she learned CPR and first aid.

"I found I enjoyed the things I was learning so I went on to get my EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) license," Bray-Erickson said.

After high school, she worked at Mercy and Unity hospitals in the emergency room. She also worked at the Minneapolis Star Tribune in occupational health.

Bray-Erickson soon married and began having children, then went to New York to obtain her RN license.

"I was not sure that if I became an RN, I would be up to caring for my mother and I felt that would be the expectation, Bray-Erickson said. "As it turned out that did happen in 2014 and I needed to step in and care for her."

Her mother, Constance Bray, did succumb to the disease in 2015.

"Because I was an RN, I was able to help her and to make the last year of her life more



comfortable. My being an RN did positively help her and me to cope with the events that occurred at the end of her life, so it was a blessing.”

## Most rewarding part

“It used to be helping individual women one to one during one of the most challenging experiences any woman can go through,” Bray-Erickson said. “Being the voice and face they would never forget and is the one who made it all a little easier.

“Now, with that professional experience along with my own experiences, I can influence and improve women’s health care from a broader perspective with a larger impact than one person at a time. Now I can positively affect women in the region, state and even nationally.”

## Challenges

“Change is hard for everyone,” Bray-Erickson said. “A large part of my role is identifying issues and or areas for improvement and coming up with either evidence to support change or implementing a new novel idea using a ‘Plan Do Study Act’ cycle.

“Stress is common among nurses and healthcare workers for a variety of reasons.” Healthcare workers are present with people as they walk through some of the most difficult experiences life has to offer. When you have heard a woman scream out in pain because she has learned her baby has died, it is a sound that will resonate in your mind for the rest of your life. Holding young men and women as they cry and grieve the loss of an infant and or pregnancy and crying right along with them makes for some difficult days.

“Of course with all that comes the joyous moments. The sound of the newborn’s first cry still gives me goose-

bumps and is awe-inspiring. That moment will never get old.”

## Resilience

“Resilience is one of the most beneficial skills to possess in nursing,” Bray-Erickson said. “Knowing the science and mechanics of how the body works along with medications and therapies is great, but if you are not resilient, all those skills, in the end, will be wasted.

“Resilience often is not taught in education but should be taught. It will help you make it through the tough times, as they will come in your personal and professional life. Being able to cope and ultimately come out of those on the other side intact, if not improved, is the key to success in life and nursing.

## Family

Melissa Bray-Erickson is the daughter of Leonard and his wife, Elaine Bray of Annandale. Bray-Erickson was born in Fridley and grew up in Spring Lake Park. She graduated from Spring Lake Park High School in 1991. She did PSEO (Post-secondary Enrollment Option) at Anoka Ramsey Community College 1989-91. In 1998 she received an Associate of Science Nursing Degree from The State University of New York at Albany; Bachelors of Science Nursing degree, Western Governor’s University, an online university 2011. In 2012 Bray-Erickson earned a Masters of Science Nursing Education, also from Western Governor’s University, Salt Lake City.

Bray-Erickson has lived in Corinna Township for 15 years. She is the mother of four children: Teddy Erickson, 2013 AHS graduate, St. John’s graduate. He is currently on active duty Army 1st Lieutenant at Fort Bragg 82nd Airborne. Bennett, 2014 AHS graduate,

St. Cloud State University graduate, currently Army National Guard, 2nd Lieutenant, lives with wife Rebecca (Segner) Erickson in Dassel, Ethan is a 2017 AHS graduate, currently Army ROTC MS4 cadet at St. John’s University, math major and a senior. Isabella (Bella) Erickson, 2020 AHS Graduate, currently Army ROTC MS3 Cadet (Junior year) at Northwestern University, a psychology major with plans for law school.

## When not working

“When I am not working you will find me gardening, DIY projects, canning, preserving, crafting, spending time outdoors, photography, the gym, golf, ziplines and generally looking for my next challenge,” Bray-Erickson said.

## Grateful

“I am incredibly grateful for all the nursing mentors whom I have learned from along the way,” Bray-Erickson said. “Their influence on my life and career has helped me to become the nurse I am.

“The opportunities St. Cloud Hospital has provided me and allowed me to take some of the calculated risks have greatly benefited the patients we serve and for that, I am grateful every day.

“The leadership team I work with are not only fun to be with but have supported me through many ups and downs and I could never thank them all enough.

“My kids and family have put up with many years of mom sleeping all day, being gone at odd hours and holidays, and being tired after a rough day at work.

“Finally, without my faith, my ability to do the things I have done would not have been possible. I give all the credit to God.”