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**Highline College honors longtime nurse and Army veteran**

Sandra Cravens Robinson named as 2016 Distinguished Alumna Award winner

DES MOINES, Wash. — Back in the early 1960s, 18-year-old Sandra Cravens had wanted to be a nurse ever since she could remember, so when she was accepted into a three-year nursing program, she gladly parted with \$950 in tuition and headed to Portland, Oregon, to begin classes. When she first arrived on campus, she was greeted by the dean of nursing with, “Oh, I didn’t know you were Negro.” Cravens lasted about three months in that setting.

The all-white interview panel of another nursing school—this one in Seattle—was reluctant to enroll her because of her “big hair,” thinking she was better suited for waitressing. They consented to letting her “try” the one-year program for licensed practical nurses (LPN). She took this opportunity seriously, and in her words, “prayed, buckled down and worked hard.” She successfully passed the LPN boards.

Fortunately, she was not deterred by early doubters and discrimination, and after a nearly 50-year career in nursing, Sandra Cravens Robinson has been selected as the 2016 Highline College Distinguished Alumna for her outstanding contributions to the community and country through the field of nursing. She will be presented with the award during the college’s commencement ceremony on June 16 at the ShoWare Center in Kent.

A 1966 graduate, Robinson was the only student of color in the first class of Highline’s Nursing program, a two-year program for registered nurses. Highline’s RN program was a natural next step after earning her LPN license. According to Robinson, she wasn’t the target of any discrimination at Highline, even though the student body was predominantly white in the 1960s.

Robinson’s achievements are many: nearly 50 years in nursing, 20 years in the military and several academic degrees. Born in Philadelphia and raised primarily in Seattle’s Central District, she has lived in Spanaway for the past 18 years.

“We are honored to have Ms. Robinson as the college’s 2016 Distinguished Alumna,” said Dr. Jack Bermingham, President of Highline. “As a graduate of the inaugural class of Highline’s

Nursing program 50 years ago, she manifests a crucial link between our history and our values. Her accomplishments and service have made our world a better place.”

Education has always been important to Robinson. She went on to earn her Bachelor of Science in nursing in 1975 from Seattle University; Master of Divinity in theology in 1978 in Atlanta, Georgia, through a church-sponsored program; and Master of Science in nursing through the Army in 1993 from Medical College of Georgia in Augusta.

She entered the military in 1982 at the age of 37. During her celebrated career, she served as a clinical nurse specialist in psychiatry and Dean of the Army’s sole psychiatric nursing program. She was stationed in several locations across the U.S., including Georgia, Hawaii, Texas, Washington state and Washington, D.C., and served overseas in Korea. She retired from active duty in 2002 as a Lieutenant Colonel.

After retiring from the Army, she continued to work in nursing, including 10 years at Madigan Army Medical Center as a civil servant until retiring from full-time work in 2014.

After Madigan, she began work as a licensed mental health counselor on a part-time basis in a private practice. She has opportunity to use her nursing skills frequently in the care of her clients and others.

Active in her church, she is an evangelist missionary serving in her local congregation, in the district and in the state.

“I am honored by this recognition. I thank God for His many benefits,” said Robinson in talking about the award from Highline. “He has blessed me to be a blessing to others of which I am truly grateful to Him.”

Education continues to play an important part in her life. Now at 72, she is nearing completion of a doctorate in psychology from California Southern University through an online degree program.

“Highline marks the launching point for my nursing career. There are different opportunities presented in this life with many choices. When we take time to hear from the Lord, He always leads with purpose and a plan,” said Robinson.

The Distinguished Alumnus Award honors a former Highline student who has made outstanding contributions through community service, noteworthy professional achievement and/or recognized leadership.

Former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, who attended Highline in 1968–69, was the first recipient of the award in 1990. Other past honorees include Ezra Teshome, agent with State Farm Insurance and TIME magazine global health hero; Dr. Linda Petter, a local health care advocate; and Junki Yoshida, founder and CEO of the Yoshida Food Group.

For more information about past honorees, visit [alumni.highline.edu/distinguished/](http://alumni.highline.edu/distinguished/).

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**Attachments:** two photos

**photo 1:** Sandra Cravens as a Highline College nursing student in 1965

**photo 2:** Sandra Cravens Robinson

*Highline College was founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County. With nearly 17,000 annual students and 350,000 alumni, it is one of the state's largest institutions of higher education. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education and bachelor's degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida, former NBA player and current TV analyst/commentator Brian Scalabrine and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.*