

Debra Herold (Akerly) Alumni Feature

Name: Debra Herold (Akerly)

Graduation Year: 2002

Job Title: Nursing Director, University of Iowa Community Clinics and Outreach

Organization/Company Name: University of Iowa Health Care

Location of Employment: Iowa City, Iowa

Job Responsibilities: As the Nursing Director for the University of Iowa Community Clinics and Outreach, Debbie Herold manages the operations of 45 ambulatory clinics throughout Iowa, overseeing 600 staff and 700,000 clinic visits. Her responsibilities encompass strategic planning, enhancing leadership, and developing initiatives to improve healthcare delivery and staff engagement. She has successfully led major acquisitions, financial management, and healthcare compliance, contributing to substantial growth and efficient patient care management. Additionally, Debbie's role extends to advising on enterprise-wide projects and representing off-site nursing in broader organizational committees, ensuring the integration of strategic initiatives and innovations across the health system.

Describe your journey since graduating from Prairie High School, including any significant career milestones or educational achievements. How did your experience at Prairie prepare you for your current endeavors?

Since waving goodbye to Prairie High School, my academic pursuits led me to the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where I not only majored in Biology with a minor in Chemistry but also excelled as the captain of the track and field team. I worked hard and garnered national recognition as a runner-up in the triple jump and received All-American and Academic All-American honors. In 2005, I earned the title of Outstanding Athlete at the North Central Conference Outdoor Track & Field Championships.

Due to my academics and background in athletics I transitioned into a role within an environmental toxicology research lab, culminating in the inaugural publication in the Journal of the American Water Resources Association (JAWRA). My educational journey then took me to the University of Iowa College of Nursing, where I earned a Master of Science as a clinical nurse leader in 2009, marking the start of my career at the University of Iowa. During my tenure at the University of Iowa, I was recognized for my professional contributions to healthcare, including the 100 Great Iowa Nurse, the University of Iowa Physicians Clinical Innovations Award for her response to COVID-19, and recognition from the Daisy Foundation as a Daisy Nurse Leader.

In a patriotic pivot, I joined the 132nd Air Force National Guard in Des Moines, Iowa, in 2022 was later commissioned as an officer supporting the Medical Group in the 132nd Wing by 2024. In 2023 I received the Airman of the Year for the 132nd Wing Staff, Distinguished Graduate at the Military Command and Control Technical School, and Basic Military Training Honor Graduate.

I am also currently pursuing a Doctorate in Nursing in Health Systems/Administration.

Throughout all these milestones, the values and experiences from Prairie High School—teamwork, accountability, and the pursuit of excellence—have remained the bedrock of her leadership style.

What are some of your favorite memories from your time at Prairie? Did you participate in any extracurricular activities or clubs? How did they impact your experience? What staff member or class had the biggest impact on you and why?

My most cherished moments at Prairie are tied to the vibrant sports culture, where I participated in varsity volleyball, football cheerleading, track and field, and basketball. It was on these teams that Debbie embraced the essence of resilience and the collaborative spirit of teamwork. Under the guidance of Coach Doser, I had the honor of serving as the starting point guard for the school's first girls' basketball team that reached the State Tournament in 2001. On the track, I garnered a series of all-state accolades. These extracurricular pursuits greatly enriched my high school days, honing my leadership capacity.

Mr. Ramaker and Mr. Behrens left an indelible mark on Debbie's educational journey, sparking a deep-seated enthusiasm for science and math, which would become cornerstones in her professional life.

What advice would you offer to today's high school graduates as they embark on their own paths beyond high school?

To the graduates, embrace every challenge as an opportunity to grow. Your path may not be linear – expect twists and turns – but you can achieve your dreams with resilience and a clear vision.