



# Health Matters

Health and Wellness Information for Our Community



## Clinic Hours

Lopez Island Medical Clinic is located in Lopez Village at 103 Washburn Place.

Clinic hours:  
Monday–Friday,  
8:30 am– 5:00 pm

To schedule an appointment, call 468-2245 during regular hours.

Medical emergency?  
Dial 911.

[www.lopezislandmedical.org/](http://www.lopezislandmedical.org/)

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## 23 Amazing Years

# Cathy Doherty Retires

**J**uly 30, 2015. Today is Nurse Practitioner Cathy Doherty's final day caring for her Lopez patients. Wrapping up all the final details, she left the clinic at noon, picked up her grandson Nolan, and arrived for our interview.

Settling in a chair, Cathy helps Nolan, age 2 ½, remove a few toys from his backpack. He ignores them and perches instead on her lap. As she talks, he puts his hand on her cheek.

"I'm having a hard time today," Cathy says. "I keep wondering why I'm retiring. I feel like crying all the time. I love everyone here and I love the job." She takes a slow breath. "I liked being at work this morning. Everyone is being looked after, being taken care of. I know our patients are all in great hands at the clinic, there's no doubt about that. I'll just miss the interaction with this community. I'm not leaving for any adverse reason, it's my age (I'm 68!) and my need to spend more time with my children and grandchildren." She slips an arm around a now-wiggly Nolan.

In addition to seeing more of her two grown children and four grandchildren on Lopez and her daughter Robyn in Portland, Cathy still has two teens still living at home, Jonathan, 15 and his sister Shay, 19.

What else does retirement hold for Cathy?

For starters, she's off to Camp Nor'wester on John's Island tomorrow to work a 6-day shift as relief nurse practitioner for the campers, a job she's done for 20 years. "Camp ends on August 18 and then I'll *really* retire," she pauses, "well, except we have an exchange student arriving from Mexico two days later!"



Cathy and grandson Nolan

Cathy laughs at the disbelief on my face. "Nobody believes me, that's true! George will stay with us a year and go to school here. I know it's unusual, but for me having three teenagers at home will be great. Our community is a wonderful place for teens. Once the kids are in school, then we'll see what retirement brings." She does have a trip to Eastern Europe planned with a college roommate next spring.

When she moved to Lopez in 1990, Cathy commuted to two off-island nursing jobs: Planned Parenthood in Mt. Vernon and Orcas Clinic. One day a friend encouraged her to consider Lopez Clinic. She was hired in 1992. "They wanted a women's health-care specialist here," she remembers. With her master's degree in maternal-child nursing from the University of Washington, Cathy stepped right in, working part-time with Dr. Dengler, Lopez Clinic's first physi-

*continued on page 2*

# Cathy Doherty: 23 Amazing Years

continued from page 1



Cathy Doherty just before retirement

cian. "Dr. Phillips was here too, everything was covered, it was good."

We turn back to the present moment and her feelings about providing medical care for Lopez islanders.

"The job of a healthcare provider is very intimate," she continues. "People put all their trust in you. There are such private things we talk about. If patients

are not confident with their provider, they're not going to give all the information and they may not follow through. When trust is there, people have a better chance of staying healthy. That's what I've treasured the most, the trust this community has had in me."

"I want everyone to know I appreciate all the kindness I've been shown here, too. It's something you don't get very many places. Even when people were really ill and feeling bad, they were tolerant of all my questions."

It's true that seeing Cathy sometimes involved a delay in the clinic waiting room. It was something islanders came to expect...and appreciate. One island woman put it this way: "When I saw Cathy, I always knew she would take all the time she needed to listen and understand my issue. That's an amazing quality in a healthcare provider. So for me, a short wait beforehand wasn't a problem. I knew Cathy was tending to someone else and when it was my turn, she would give me 100 percent of her attention. What a gift."



Cathy with Dr. Dengler when the new wing of Lopez Clinic opened, 1994

Cathy laughs, "It's true, I hate to be rushed! I'd be so intent on helping I'd forget the time. I tried to get longer appointments, but there were always so many people to be seen. After a while, someone would knock on the door, and remind me of the time. Preventative healthcare is my passion, to find problems early or before things go wrong. Preventative services are often not available in rural community and so we are very fortunate. Bob and Christine are also into prevention in a big way."

"The staff enabled me to do a good job. They are exceptional. And our pharmacists, too. Without the help and support of Rick and Marge, I don't think we would have such a good practice. They are there all the time for consultations. I called them even on the weekends and they would come in and help patients. They are amazing. My life at the clinic would have been a lot different without the love and support of our staff and our pharmacists."

Dr. Wilson had this to say about working with Cathy for more than 18 years. "I enjoyed every minute of it. She gave wonderful medical care to thousands of patients and made herself available to anyone who needed her help. I saw her frequently go beyond the limitations of her job to help people in all kinds of circumstances. It's going to feel really weird coming to work and not seeing Cathy here. She will be missed by all the clinic staff, her many, many patients, and me. We will do our best to drag her back to the clinic whenever we can."

Lucky for Lopez, that's part of the plan. Cathy will pinch hit for Dr. Wilson or Christine when the need arises.

After more than an hour, Nolan is getting a little fidgety. "We better take a break!" Cathy says, starting to gather up his trucks and toys. After buckling him into his car seat, she pauses to reflect on the importance of this day: "Over the years, I've taken care of most

everyone's families on this island. I just want to say thank you to our community for having me as their provider."

*Editor's note: A community-wide farewell celebration for Cathy will be held at LCCA this winter. Stay tuned to Lopez Rocks and Islands Weekly for more details.*

## Our New Nurse Practitioner

# Lopez Welcomes Christine Burnell

It has been an eventful summer for Christine. Her oldest son Josh graduated from the University of Washington Medical School on May 2<sup>nd</sup> and began his residency in family medicine. Her youngest son Ari graduated June 6<sup>th</sup> from Chimacum High School. The following week, Christine herself graduated with a Doctorate in Nursing Practice from the University of Washington.



**Christine Burnell, DNP, joins the Lopez Clinic team**

Within the month, the family moved onto their 1936 classic wooden sailboat in Shoal Bay. Christine began working full-time at the Lopez Clinic on July 7<sup>th</sup>.

Somehow Christine makes it look easy.

Meeting between appointments at the clinic one busy day in mid-August, her warmth and calm fill

the room. Life is settling down nicely, she explains. She and her husband Ken, their golden retriever, Buddy, and five chickens have found a house on the south end of the island. Her 4-day-a-week practice at Lopez Clinic is starting off well. “The community has been very welcoming. The staff is incredibly supportive. It’s already wonderful.” Christine’s eyes twinkle when she talks. It’s obvious she’s happy here.

Cathy and Christine worked together for a few weeks to make the transition as smooth as possible. “Christine has just slipped right into the job,” Cathy says. “She’s competent, kind and knowledgeable and flexible...all qualities you really need on the island. And she’s excited about working here, which is wonderful. I’m really happy she’s come to us, she’s great!”

A nurse practitioner for 18 years, Christine had her own private practice in Port Townsend from 2005 - 2013. But she also had a long-time dream of getting her doctorate in nursing, and a few years ago the timing was right. She was 55 at the time. “Some of my colleagues thought I was crazy because of the time and expense,” she smiles. “But

I’m a life-long learner. I love the bravado of young people, studying with them at the University was perfect. We had classes twice a week.”

Not satisfied to “just go to school,” she also worked in a community mental health center in Port Townsend as part of the administrative leadership team, providing oversight and policy development for the medical support staff, seeing clients one day each week.

Christine heard about the position at the Lopez Clinic last December. She had considered teaching, but the pull to return to family practice was stronger. Ken and Christine have always called the San Juan Islands “the jewels of this wonderful state.” Lopez seemed like an excellent fit for both of them.

Christine had originally graduated from the University of Washington in 1997 with a Master’s Degree in Nursing as a Family Nurse Practitioner. Her doctoral studies took an additional two years and put three initials after her name: DNP, Doctor of Nursing Practice. She explains that she is not a physician. The additional degree deepens her skills in evidenced-based practice, population health, health policy and health systems and furthers her commitment to nursing as a profession. Her doctoral project involved creating a blueprint to integrate primary care with mental health for those with serious mental illness, a passion she plans to continue developing.

She is interested in tracking health trends on Lopez, which is becoming possible with the clinic’s new electronic medical records (EMR) system. For example, determining how many Lopez patients have diabetes, how many of those are using best practices to deal with their condition, and exploring what additional support the clinic can offer. Prevention is central to her medical approach.

“I love being in family practice, all of it really: women’s health, men’s health, primary care, and of course, working with children. In my early days as a nurse practitioner, I worked with tribal communities in the Northwest and got to see a lot of kids doing primary care, well-child check-ups, immunizations, much like we do here on the island. Also I enjoy continuity: following my patients and their families in the long term, seeing that they are all well.”

Looking ahead, Christine feels very positive about becoming part of the Lopez community. “There is something about island living,” she says, “where people care for one another and watch out for each other. My greatest hope is that I can impact lives in a positive way to help prevent illness and accidents and provide the best care possible for individuals and their families.”

# Health Matters

Catherine Washburn Medical Association  
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