

Plates to Raise Money For Higher Nursing Education
Thursday, July 16, 2009, Vol. 124, No. 138
TOM WILEMON | The Daily News | Memphis

The state of Tennessee later this year will begin issuing specialty license plates in honor of nurses, but nurses first must choose a final design for the tags. The Tennessee Nurses Association has three prospective designs circulating on www.tnaonline.org. The tags will carry the message "Nurses Change Lives" and a depiction of a lit oil lamp, an image that is a symbol for the profession. Half of the \$35 fee for the specialty tags will go to The Tennessee Nurses Foundation. The Legislature approved the specialty tags this year.

"Now, our task is to choose the design," said Sharon Adkins, executive director of the statewide advocacy organization for nursing. "The law actually goes into effect Aug. 9. At that time, we will begin soliciting purchases. As soon as we have 1,000 purchases, we will begin to get the license plate into production." The association previously tried and failed to have a specialty tag approved, but this time the organization got signatures from more than 1,600 people saying they would purchase the tag. Any vehicle owner can purchase the plate.

"My husband is going to buy a tag," Adkins said. "This could be something to do for a family member or friend. It does not say, 'I am a nurse.' It just says, 'Nurses Change Lives.'"

The nurses foundation will use the money raised for several of its initiatives.

"The Foundation provides money for nursing scholarships for nurses to advance their education," Adkins said. "We provide money for nursing research and also for leadership development. One of our programs is the Tennessee Nurses Professional Assistance Program. Revenue that we gain from that will all go to the Foundation for those purposes and to help nurses all across the state."

There should be a big pool of interested purchasers. Tennessee has licensed about 76,000 registered nurses and 44,000 licensed practical nurses, Adkins said. Most of them don't belong to the TNA, but you don't have to be a member to vote for the tag design. Anyone who is interested in purchasing the tag can vote.

"We're very excited about the potential here," Adkins said.

The money raised will help ease a long-standing nursing shortage by providing educational incentives for clinical nurses to become instructors.

"We have got more people than ever applying to nursing school, but we have faculty shortages and shortages in educational resources," Adkins said. "Schools have really not been able to expand their capacity in a fashion that is able to accept more students. It's a real problem. One of the things that the Foundation is very interested in is having nurses go back and get masters' degrees and go into faculty positions."