



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Good Shepherd Hospice nurse practitioner finds fulfilling work serving Polk County**

**BARTOW, FLA.** – In September, 1981, Amy Bruce was one of the many babies born that year at the old Bartow Memorial Hospital on East Main Street. At the time, her parents had no idea that decades later, the old hospital building would come to play an important role in her adult life and professional career.

Amy had a typical rural upbringing in Bartow, with family and extended family close by. She took dance classes and played tennis. She participated in Bartow High School student government, cheered for the Yellow Jackets, was elected to the Homecoming Court and was salutatorian for her graduating class.

Since she was young, around 3 or 4, Amy knew she wanted a career in medicine. After high school, she enrolled at the University of Florida, taking pre-med classes. Late in her freshman year, Amy realized that another area of healthcare – nursing – truly appealed to her. She changed her major and hasn't looked back.

Amy received her bachelor's degree in nursing from UF in 2004 and planned to work a few years before starting an advanced degree to become a nurse practitioner. But at that time UF was gearing up a nurse practitioner program, and Amy was in the right place to continue her education.

While attending graduate school, Amy also worked at Shands Hospital in Gainesville. Later, she took a position in a physician's office in Ocala, and she was on track for a satisfying and fulfilling career. Amy was adamant about two things – she didn't want to move back to Polk County, and she didn't want to work for a hospice organization.

According to Amy, “Throughout my life I’ve found myself placed in situations with great opportunities. I don’t know if it’s fate or a higher power, but I’ve learned not to ask questions and just keep plugging along. Being able to become a nurse practitioner is a great example of that.”

Another example – while at UF, Amy started dating her future husband, Ben Fort. Ben also is from Polk County, and his family has a long history in Fort Meade where his grandfather ran a pharmacy and his father is a dentist. Amy and Ben dated and later became engaged. After their 2007 marriage, the young couple found the pull to move back to Polk County became much stronger. They decided to move back to the Bartow/Lakeland area, where Amy looked for a healthcare position in the community. But even though she was moving back to Polk County, Amy was still set against one thing – she didn’t want to work for a hospice. But once again she found herself face-to-face with another unique opportunity.

Amy’s parents attended high school with Jan Heidel, who now works as the patient care manager at Good Shepherd Hospice’s George C. Forsythe Hospice House in Auburndale. Jan arranged a casual meeting for Amy with Susan Moffitt, a nurse practitioner with Good Shepherd Hospice. “I just wanted to dispel any myths Amy had about hospice care,” explained Jan. “I had a feeling that Amy would look at things differently after she talked to Susan.”

In her conversation with Susan, Amy learned that the care delivered by hospice professionals struck a chord. Susan told her that hospice care addresses the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of patients and their loved ones as they face the challenges of end-of-life issues. Amy was intrigued, so she applied for a position with Good Shepherd Hospice.

Her career path veered toward the past when Amy went for the job interview and discovered Good Shepherd Hospice operated in the old Bartow Memorial Hospital building – the very building where she was born.

“I had no idea where Good Shepherd Hospice’s Bartow office was located,” remembers Amy. “Imagine my surprise when I found out it was the same place where I was born.”

In 1999, a new Bartow Memorial Hospital – now know as Bartow Regional Medical Center – opened with great fanfare. The old building on East Main Street was converted into office space, with Good Shepherd Hospice operating on the first floor.

In August, 2007, Amy started her nurse practitioner position with Good Shepherd Hospice and has found her experiences rewarding. "I'm so appreciative I'm able to serve the community in which I was raised," said Amy. "People know me, they know my parents, and it's gratifying to be able to give back."

In the course of her day, Amy visits patients with life-limiting illnesses, generally in their homes. She monitors their conditions, orders supplies, arranges for other hospice services and provides ongoing support and education for patients and their loved ones. As a nurse practitioner, Amy can also collaborate with a physician to perform assessments, diagnose medical conditions, prescribe medications and order lab tests and imaging services.

According to Amy, it might surprise many people to know that her days are filled with happiness. Now that she's worked at Good Shepherd Hospice for nearly two years, she can focus on an area that she feels is lacking in healthcare – education. Her duties allow her to "educate people on their disease process and what to expect."

"Death and dying is very scary for patients and their families," she reflected. "With the proper education and preparation, death and dying can be a beautiful and peaceful process for all involved."

And for the young woman who didn't want to move home or to work for hospice, she couldn't be happier. Amy has come to appreciate the small-town life and the importance of family. Her mother thinks "it's hilarious" that Amy's working in the same building where she was born and is glad her oldest daughter is nearby.

Amy feels that it is an honor to care for her patients during a very vulnerable time. She has helped people during the darkest times, providing an extra-personal touch that isn't usually found much in today's fast-paced healthcare world. Her patients have ranged from family members to a former elementary school teacher. "Sometimes having someone to listen is all people need," said Amy. "By working at Good Shepherd Hospice, I feel I have a chance to change the way we approach the end of our lives, while helping patients make the most of the time they have remaining."

**About Good Shepherd Hospice**

*Good Shepherd Hospice is a community-based, not-for-profit organization that supports and serves approximately 700 patients each day in Polk, Highlands and Hardee County as they face the challenges of life-limiting illnesses. Healthcare professionals and trained volunteers embrace the Good Shepherd Hospice mission to make the most of life by relieving the suffering of patients and their families affected by end-of-life issues. The organization has been a part of the community since 1979 and is a 2008 recipient of a Circle of Life Citation of Honor Award. Good Shepherd Hospice is the only local agency offering hospice programs accredited by the Joint Commission, the nation's premier healthcare accrediting body. The United Way of Central Florida partially funds the community programs offered by Good Shepherd Hospice. For more information, please visit the website at [www.goodshepherdhospice.org](http://www.goodshepherdhospice.org)*



**Amy Fort 1 Photo caption:** Good Shepherd Hospice nurse practitioner Amy Fort stands in front of the old Bartow Memorial Hospital on East Main Street, where she was born. Good Shepherd Hospice now occupies some of the first floor in the converted building, and Amy now finds herself working in the same building where she was born.



**Amy Fort – Michelle Grosse 2 Photo caption:** Amy Fort, left, a nurse practitioner with Good Shepherd Hospice consults with Michelle Grosse, a Good Shepherd Hospice RN. Amy was born at the old Bartow Memorial Hospital on East Main Street. The Good Shepherd Hospice Bartow office operates in the converted building, so Amy now works in the building where she was born.