

Bellevue
Public
Schools



Alumni
Spotlight



Dr. Nicole Shonka

Bellevue East, 1993

Bellevue East graduate Dr. Nicole Shonka (Weber) is the Medical Director of The Buffett Cancer Center at UNMC in Omaha. She is also an Associate Professor of Neuro-Oncology and has been named the 'Top Teacher' for ten of the last twelve years. Nicole recently took some time to share her journey from her years at Bellevue East to her appointment as Medical Director of one of the most advanced cancer treatment centers in the United States.

What high school did you attend and when did you graduate?

Bellevue East, 1993

Who are a couple of your favorite teachers?

Rosemary Lucky - Junior English, because she was tough and really prepared us for college expectations.

Kim Brown - Physics, because he challenged us to use experiments to understand concepts.



Mrs. Lucky



Mr. Brown

Were you involved in any sports or clubs?

I was a winter Bellevedette - which was dance squad - for basketball games, which I always loved watching. I played soccer during my sophomore year and then stopped when I began waitressing.

Did you have a favorite place to hang out?

I remember hanging out at the Warrior Fitness Center on base with other military dependents, and at Taco Bell on Galvin Road.

Could you share a favorite memory from your time in high school?

I still laugh thinking of the fringed one-piece purple dresses we sometimes wore for Bellevedettes, along with the sole-less mocasins and headbands with feathers. Not only were they pretty ugly, they were incredibly politically incorrect.

Did you have other family that graduated from Bellevue schools?

Brother Ryan Weber, class of 1994 and Sister Lisa Weber, class of 1988 - both Bellevue East

Where did you attend college, what was your major, and when did you graduate?

I went to UNO and majored in psychology. I graduated 1997 and then went on to medical school at UNMC.

Please share about the path you took from college graduate to being the Medical Director for the Buffett Cancer Center.

Since my undergrad at UNO, I've been at UNMC since volunteering in the Emergency Room in 1996 off and on. I attended medical school there and did an Internal Medicine residency there as well. I was a hospitalist in Boulder, Colorado for a couple of years while my husband - another East grad, Chris Shonka - finished his Ph.D. program.



Then it was back to UNMC for Oncology & Hematology fellowship training. After that, I went to MD Anderson Cancer Center for a second fellowship in Neuro-oncology to focus on brain cancer. I returned to UNMC in July 2010 as faculty.

I've always enjoyed learning how things work and found myself more involved in my Division at work. When my Division Chief was elected to a national association and was going to be gone quite a bit she asked me if I'd 'be willing to help out'. This evolved into being named Medical Director of the Clinic and Infusion Center, first at the Peggy Cowdery and then when we moved in 2016, the Fred and Pamela Buffett Cancer Center.

Could you share a unique or memorable moment from your years in medicine?

There are really so many wonderful, inspiring people who have come into my life in medicine - patients, caregivers, and families but also colleagues.... I tell anyone who asks me how I can treat cancer for a career that I get to see people prioritize what is most important in life, and that makes me grateful every day.

If you chose a different path out of high school than medicine, what would you be doing now?

I'd have gotten a Ph.D. in psychology.



What is your proudest professional accomplishment?

I received a National Institute of Health (NIH) R01 grant this summer for \$2.5 million over 5 years, for my lab's research in glioblastoma.

Have you been recognized with any awards in your professional career?

Yes, I've received a Top Teacher award at UNMC for 10 of my last 12 years there in addition to my R01 grant. I've also been on the American Society of Clinical Oncology CNS tumors education committee and sit on the National Comprehensive Cancer Network's (NCCN) CNS guidelines panel.

Could you share a little bit about your family?

I'm married to Chris Shonka, fellow East grad of 1993, and we have one human daughter (age 11) and two furry children.

What is your proudest personal accomplishment?

Vegetarianism. Ok, maybe not, but as an avid animal advocate, I hope to inspire others. Also, avoiding social media. Doug Seaman had to be appointed to me and Chris to keep us updated about our class reunions.

What advice do you have for current students in Bellevue Public Schools?

Take advantage of this time in your life - expose yourself to different careers and ask adults to let you shadow them at work. This is a time to explore your interests and get ideas for what you'd like your future to look like.

Find your passion. This may or may not be college right after high school - this could be a year or two to volunteer and see the world. You'll be more likely to excel in any higher education when you already have a goal in mind.

Links

US News & World Report Bio on Dr. Shonka

<https://health.usnews.com/doctors/nicole-shonka-476737>

Omaha World-Herald Story on Dr. Shonka saving the life of a father of 4 with a rare brain tumor (may need to subscribe to read).

<https://bit.ly/nicole-shonka-miracle>

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About Us

The Alumni Spotlight is a recurring feature on the Alumni Association Facebook Page. If you know of a Bellevue graduate that we should shine the spotlight on, please reach out to us at bps.alumni@bpsne.net and they will be considered for a future column. Continue to invite your friends and family to Like and Follow our Alumni Association page: <https://www.facebook.com/BPSAlumni1>

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