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## **Columbus Native Focuses on Others During Pandemic**

### **From New York City to the U.S. Virgin Islands, Nurse Keeps Fighting COVID**

**CEDARVILLE, OHIO** -- Her battle with COVID-19 began in New York City, shifted to Connecticut and now has her in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). Where Rachel Hartley goes next to fight the pandemic is a matter of divine design.

Hartley, a 2015 Cedarville University nursing and 2020 Master of Science in Nursing – family nurse practitioner (FNP) alumna, arrived in the U.S. Virgin Islands at the end of September on contract with the Federal Emergency Management Authority (FEMA). Hartley is originally from Columbus, Ohio and graduated from Worthington Christian High School.

After graduating from Cedarville University in 2015 with a bachelor of science in nursing degree, Hartley was awarded an OhioHealth Critical Care Nurse Fellowship from July to November 2015, serving at Riverside Methodist Hospital and Grant Medical Center in Columbus. She was then hired full-time and worked for two years as an intensive care unit nurse for Grant Medical Center. “It was top notch critical care training, and I am so thankful to have been a part of it!” Hartley said.

The USVI was hit hard by COVID in the spring, and the islands were shut down to tourists from March 25 to June 1. They reopened briefly during the summer, but closed again from August 19 to September 19.

Hartley works as an intensive care unit nurse at Schneider Regional Medical Center on the island of St. Thomas.

“The function of my job is the same as it was in New York, where I’m coming in as a contracted nurse to work in the ICU, helping with COVID patients,” she explained. “They were seeing a high volume of patients in the hospital and had to convert one of their floors into a COVID floor. They were still recovering from two Category 5 hurricanes that had come through.”

The number of cases is much less than when she served at Brooklyn Langone Hospital, but bed availability is also much less as well. And the hospital was understaffed.

Hartley is sharing a house with five other nurses caring for patients in the USVI, all of whom also served in NYC in different hospitals.

“There’s been discussion about the mental health effects of battling COVID on health care workers,” she said. “It’s been good to hear their stories and realize how this has changed us and changed our personalities. I’m thankful to the Lord for the opportunity to love these other nurses and help them process what the year brought.”

The situation with COVID is fairly calm right now, even with the islands opening again to tourism. “There still is a steady stream of COVID cases, a mix of mild to several, but no longer overwhelming the hospital,” she said. “The big thing is that cruise ships haven’t come back yet, so that’s what everyone is bracing for. The hospital is short staffed in general, so even though COVID hospitalizations have slowed down a bit, they still need lots of nursing help.”

Hartley’s current contract has her in the USVI until Thanksgiving. She plans to head back home to Virginia for the holidays to be with her husband, Taylor, who was able to visit her in the USVI, and catch up with family and friends. She also plans to take her FNP board exam. But after that?

“In January, Taylor and I will be off again, most likely to another COVID ICU crisis spot, or possibly something as an FNP,” she said. “Wherever the Lord leads!”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,550 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including its Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Master of Science in Nursing – FNP programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about Cedarville University, visit [www.cedarville.edu](http://www.cedarville.edu).

Written by Clem Boyd, Cedarville University

Photos provided by Rachel Hartley