

Mattila uses local training to aid the entire nation

By Megan Towle
Staff Writer

Lieutenant Jane M. Mattila, U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps emergency room nurse who currently works in Red Lake, Minn., went to school for nursing at the University of Maine at Fort Kent and began her work in the nursing field in Aroostook County. She worked at Loring and took Roy Woods' EMT course in Caribou and was on the Caribou Fire and Ambulance Department for two years.

A native of Minnesota, LT Mattila said she thought it would be fun to work with the underserved cultures in the United States. Minnesota, like Maine, has a Native American population that LT Mattila wished to work in, having taken her nursing preceptorship at Mic Mac Health Services in Presque Isle. Red Lake is, according to LT Mattila, one of only two sovereign reservations, meaning they abide federal and tribal laws only; they are self-governing.

The U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps provides highly trained and mobile health professionals who carry out programs to promote the health of

the nation, understand and prevent disease and injury, assure safe and effective drugs and medical devices, deliver health services to federal beneficiaries and furnish health expertise in time of war or other national or international emergencies. As one of the seven uniformed services of the United States, the Commissioned Corps is a specialized career system designed to attract, develop and retain health professionals who may be assigned to federal, state, or local agencies or international organizations.

"In order to be in the Commissioned Corps, you must meet fitness and weight criterion and have a four-year degree," LT Mattila said. "When I started out, I needed to lose some weight and now I go to the gym to keep myself fit. I got my degree in northern Maine."

As a part of the Commissioned Corps, LT Mattila was one of several emergency personnel who responded to a call regarding a school shooting in the spring of 2005 in Red Lake. LT Mattila, arriving about one hour after the immediate devastation, became the support the survivors, victims' families

and ER staff needed.

That day was an atypical one for LT Mattila who, with her colleagues, continues to work each day to provide health care services to members of the Red Lake community. They provide services to patients that range from pediatric to geriatric care. They deliver all levels of care, including injuries resulting from traumas, gun shots, assaults, cardiac arrests and automobile accidents. LT Mattila said that one of her most meaningful experiences serving as a Commissioned Corps officer in Red Lake happened the day a healed patient made a special trip back to the emergency room to say "thanks."

"A patient came up to me and asked if she could give me a hug," LT Mattila said. "She explained that I had 'saved her life' several months before and that she never forgot what I told her about living and how important she was to the people around her."

The patient survived a suicide attempt. LT Mattila helped coach her into getting ongoing mental health support.

"Red Lake, like Caribou is a small community and, as in most tight-

knit communities, has citizens that grapple with the stigma that often accompanies mental health issues. Unfortunately, because of this stigma, people are sometimes reluctant to seek help. They're afraid their problems will become known to the larger community," LT Mattila said.

"I told the patient, as I tell many psychiatric patients, that she was going to go to a 'camp for sad people' where no one will know her, won't repeat a word that she said, and where she might receive one piece of information that could save her life someday. I am glad that she was able to seek help," LT Mattila said.

"Being in public health services you have so many options for employment. I could go to work for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the bureau of prisons, the centers for disease control, or immigration. There are fascinating opportunities for nursing and with the Commissioned Corps, we are active duty, we can go anywhere in the world. We get all the benefits of the military," LT Mattila added.

Not only do Commissioned Corps officers have 100% of their relocating costs paid, they also have

options to have school loans paid for and have many opportunities to do research and work their way into different areas. Commissioned Corps officers serve as back-up for emergency medical professionals and, according to LT Mattila are, "the defenders of the nation's public health."

Commissioned Corps officers have been instrumental in responding to recent public health emergencies. More than 2,400 Corps officers were deployed to the Gulf Region before, during and after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, where they set up and staffed field hospitals and emergency medical clinics, treated sick and injured evacuees, conducted disease surveillance and worked closely with local and state health authorities to plan for long-term public health needs.

"Some people ask me about the incidents and want details. The worst things that happen in my job are the best things. It gives you a greater appreciation for what you have," LT Mattila said.

For more information on the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, email Mattila at jame.mattila@ihs.gov.



Contributed Photo
Lieutenant Jane Mattila of Red Lake, Minn., received her nursing degree from the University of Maine at Fort Kent, studied under Caribou Fire and Ambulance Chief Roy Woods, and worked at Mic Mac Health Services in Presque Isle before joining the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps in 1990. Today, Mattila says that there are many doors opening for nursing within the Commissioned Corps.

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