

Intro

Welcome to Certify It. Today we're taking a moment to reflect on all the incredible guest who joined us throughout 2025. This year, we had the honor of speaking with so many inspiring individuals who are hustling every day to advance health care education from high level executives in the senior living industry to educators that are shaping the next generation of health care professionals, to even students who are pursuing their dreams.

Every guest has been a vital part of our journey and continuous growth. We are so grateful for all of the conversations, insights, and stories that have been shared with us throughout the year. And while we're excited about the amazing guest we have lined up for 2026, today, we invite you to look back with us at the highlights of 2025. We would also like to take this time to thank our sponsor, Propel Insurance, who without them, this podcast would not be possible. Thank you for your support and we can't wait to see what's next here at the Certify It Podcast.

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01:10 - 03:01

Doug Bryant

the reason, one of the reasons that we even the foundation, Hillcrest Foundation, thought about birthing an education center was because one of your employees, Chloe Hurst. Yes. Who actually, during Covid 19 was an activities assistant. Yes. And had a desire to be able to help more than she was. Can you tell me a little bit about Chloe and about that story of how she closed missing and a.

Ellen Lamkey

Chloe is an excellent example. She started, like you said, in activities, just her demeanor, just her, the way she talked to the residents, the way she cared about them, was wonderful. We talked to her about, hey, you know, have you ever thought of going back to school? No. Not really. I've never had the financial opportunity because let's face it, the economy is not the absolute easiest, for people to not work a full time job and still make it.

So we're like, yeah, we can help you with that. She went to school, become a CNA. Excellent CNA. Her residents adore her. Then we're like, when are you going back to school? In our yearly evaluations? That is one question I kind of put into all the yearly evaluations. So what's your next step? What do you see yourself wanting to do?

She's like, well, I don't know if I could be a nurse. I was like, you really could be. You're smart enough to. So she went to school. She graduated in December, from LPN school, and she is now training and waiting to get her test date for her LPN license. And she's going to work about six months there and then go back to are in school because now she wants to be an RN. That to me is seeing how she's come from entry-level all the way up. She will be an excellent nurse.

03:01 - 05:02

Doug Bryant

It's even more important now. You know, there was just a Mercer study that came out this week where they're saying that in 2028, we're going to have 30,000 more rounds in the nation than what we need.

However, in rural communities in rural areas. And Tennessee is one of those in 2028, even though we're going to have 30,000 more nationwide in Tennessee, we're going to still be short about 3000. Wow. And I think what we do with introducing people to health care and giving them pathways to get into health care. That's really the way we're going to be able to grow those nurses, because a lot of our students, even here at the Mason Center, may start in something that is non-degree related.

Like CNA classes or medication aid. And then that's where they get they birthed that passion for taking care of people. And they'll go on to become nurses. And that's I think that's really going to be a good way for Tennessee to, to grow people into, to nursing to hopefully not have that 3000 nurse shortage that they're projecting in 2028.

Kensey Zimmerman

Absolutely.

Doug Bryant

a big topic of conversation anymore, student loan debt and how that can be so burdensome. And there's tons of opportunity, like, you're saying, and it's just connecting students with those different resources to be able to take that next step. If health science is something that they want to do. Being able to connect them to resources, to help them take the next step so they don't end up with all of that, student student debt?

Kensey Zimmerman

Absolutely.

Doug Bryant

And that's one thing that we do here with our different financial pathways that we have when students come to us and they decide, hey, I do want to go to CNA training. We have health care partners that we're able to connect them with. And those health care partners actually will pay for their training. So if they come in and they can't afford to do that, they'll pay for their training in exchange for a certain amount of time worked after graduation.

Kensey Zimmerman

Yeah.

05:02 - 07:25

Doug Bryant

So if I've listened to this today and I'm a listener of the podcast and everything still sounds like, yes, that is something I really want to do. What is the how does students find us and how do they apply? What does that process look like? You can go to our website and we have applications that are on there, that you can apply for the different courses that we have.

Brandi Cox

Once I receive your information, if sometimes we get people who are like, I can't afford to get through the course, do you have financial help? And I'll send them in the wrong direction and I'll help them out in that way. And then we get you signed up for the class. And what are those different financial resources that are out there if, if I can't afford to just pay cash to go to the course, and we have different partners that we work with, and some of these partners will sponsor the students to go through class.

We have we have had facilities who, pay their students just to come to class because we all have bills. We all have to pay our bills, and we can't really afford to take a week, let alone a month off, to go to class, without having means to pay our bills. So, a lot of facilities understand that.

And they'll sponsor these students and they'll pay for them an hourly rate to come to class. They'll pay for them to take their test. So that's one option that we have, for financial aid as well. And we also have a discount rate on the program right now. It is a 50% sign on discount if you send your application in through the website.

And you pay cash, which we have our definition of cash on the website as well. Then you get a 50% discount right now

Doug Bryant

your office is shares a wall with me on. And sometimes I overhear things, and and I'm like, not that I mean to. I'm not eavesdropping, but, you know, you just can't help but, to hear certain conversations. And it's always very interesting, the the students that you get to talk to and the different ways that they found us and, and how they, they end up here. And it's just it has to be rewarding on your side to, to be able to help someone meet the goals that they have.

Brandi Cox

Yes. It's very rewarding. Especially when you see somebody who is, struggling, don't know what they want to do with their life. And they come and see us, we get them in to see in a class. And then two years later, they're nurse, that is the most rewarding part of my job.

07:25 - 09:13

Doug Bryant

So there's also the lab portion and the clinical portion. We do have a lab here with a full med cart. What was that experience like. And how did that help you when you went to take your test?

Michael Burris

The lab experience was very helpful. It made the class easier and give you more understanding. Once you get hands on and once you get hands on, I think that's where most of the learning starts. So the test during the book work was fine, but I enjoyed getting in the lab hands on, learning about the meds, learning the correct procedure, and just that part of it.

Doug Bryant

So you were able to come here because of a partnership that we have with Shannondale?

Michael Burris

Yes.

Doug Bryant

Where they sponsored you to come through?

Michael Burris

Yes.

Doug Bryant

The course and then you'll be working with them?

Michael Burris

Yes.

Doug Bryant

When you get certified. So we appreciate that partnership with Shanondale of Maryville and, I know we've got some other of your coworkers that are in our current class right now. We love working with partners. That is a way that people can come in. We also have a way that if you didn't have the financial means to take the class, we can hook you up with a partner.

Well, and connect you with, with a partner that can, help with that. So. But we're just so excited for you in the future. And we're excited about, you know, the, the ability that you're going to have to make a huge impact on the residents that you've been serving in a different way than the way that you have been doing it. Right. And we're just so excited for what the future holds for you.

Michael Burris

Yes, I'd say if there's any any CNAs that are interested in doing something different, I definitely recommend them coming to the Mason center and trying the medication. A program is definitely a life changer and adds a little bit more to being just a CNA.

09:13 - 10:08

Doug Bryant

So, how did the fact that we have a full lab help you do the classwork, and prepare you for the exam?

Tiffany Schuster

I'm a very hands-on person, so when doing the things in the lab and the exam and going to clinicals was the best part for me because it felt like I was actually doing it, rather than just kind of picturing it while I was studying and things like that. So I feel like that hands-on learning really like sticks it in people's brains so that when they go to do it, oh, I've already done this before. It's just muscle memory at that point.

Mid-Roll

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10:08 - 11:00

Doug Bryant

Tell me a little bit about if there's people out there that are on the fence about whether they want to do this or not, or they're trying to figure out where they, you know, maybe they've decided I want to become a CNA, but there's so many options out there. Why would you recommend someone come in and do it here at the Mason center?

Tiffany Schuster

This place feels like you guys are a family you like. You talk to each other like you've known each other for years, even if you haven't. And every person who comes into this place is welcomed with a smile and made sure to feel comfortable. And so I think that it's even if you don't actually continue to do the work because it's not for you, it's always worth it to try something new. And especially when you've got so much support behind you to make sure that you can just try to succeed, I think it's worth a shot.

11:00 - 11:51

Doug Bryant

When you were looking for a partner for your medication aide, what drew you to the Mason Center?

Dava Snyder

I have worked with a number of members of your team, and I've found the organization and the team members to always be at just a high caliber. They represent them well themselves. Well, always do what you say you're going to do. Follow through. You know, if you make that commitment, just like you said earlier, it's a done deal.

We're not going to go back on our word. So I consider, Mason Center and all of the team members that I've met so far to be just good people that are in the health care industry working for the same cause that we have just the betterment of individuals and the betterment of care of our elders. So I felt like Mason Center was a perfect partnership for us.

11:51 - 14:09

Doug Bryant

So many of the CNAs go on to be LPNs and are it's a lot of times that CNA role is the starting point for someone's career in healthcare. So how do you encourage that growth.

00:12:03:08 - 00:12:25:11

Sue Casey

So I always tell them that, you know, if you choose to be a CNA for the rest of your life, that's fabulous. That's wonderful. However, if you if you feel a little bit like you want to progress to something else, you know, there's always the sky's the limit with nursing. You can always do so many things in health care in general and with our students.

You know, we have several that have gone on. And I always have my, new class when we get to a building that, they've gone on and they've started at the Mason center and then NLP and now and we have several and I always have them talk to those people because it's wonderful. They want they give them, you know, the push and the positivity that they need that, you know, you can do this, you know, and and when they're like, you know, I didn't think I could ever do that. And I, you know, barely passed CNA class or I could barely do. And here they are on a med card and that, you know, it's good for the students to see that.

Doug Bryant

One thing. Before we go that I want, I would like to ask you is if there was one piece of advice that you could give a prospective student that's sitting out there on the fence, whether they want to be a CNA or not, they're not real. Sure, they may be a little nervous. What is that one piece of advice that you would hope sticks with people that choose to pursue a career?

Sue Casey

Well, just do it. You know the sky's the limit in anything you can do. And if you're at a job where you don't feel like you're changing lives every single day, if you don't get up in the morning and love what you do, if you're just like, oh, I'm going to work, oh, I can't wait for Friday. Oh, I can't, you know, in all the years I've worked, I never, ever felt like that.

I loved my job every single day. I loved going to wherever it was that I worked. And I think you always have to feel that passion. And if you want to be a CNA, that's a great place to start and there is never going to be another job where people need you as much as they need you, or that you feel the gratification that you feel. So just come on and apply and get in here.

14:09 - 14:22

Doug Bryant

So looking back at your journey up to this point, because you're not finished yet, you still got you start clinicals on Monday. So we're excited about that. What's been the biggest success in your odds that you've seen for yourself?

Brittany Burris

Probably. To this point, I feel like the tests have been my biggest success because I got my first test back. I was like, oh my, I missed like two. I was like, I didn't think I was that smart, that I could do it. And then it just kept getting better and better.

Doug Bryant

So how long had it been since you had taken the test? Lord, if somebody gave me a test right now, I would freak out. Just because it's been so long since I've had to take one.

Brittany Burris

It's probably been like ten, 12, 13 years. So I definitely wasn't in that mindset of right off the bat.

Doug Bryant

So Sue has helped you get there?

Brittany Burris

Oh, for sure.

Doug Bryant

So, how does your instructor make a difference in your learning?

Brittany Burris

So Sue has been absolutely great as an instructor. I feel like all of her experience mixed with like, all the rules and all the procedures and certain, order that you have to follow. Like it? I don't feel like you could have one without the other. And me be able to, like, learn as quickly as we have.

Doug Bryant

We have a hands on skills lab here. Completely set up, just like a resident room. How do you feel that the setup of our classrooms and the the resources that we have available for students helps you in in preparation?

Brittany Burris

Oh, it's definitely a great. Sue actually told us too, that some of the sheets and blankets and stuff we get from that are from actual facilities that they send us, so that the fact that we're working with actual stuff that we'll be working with in clinicals, that helps a lot.

15:47 - 16:41

Doug Bryant

Can you share a little bit about what made you decide? And if you have a story about why you decided, okay.

Brittany Hudson

I've been a CNA for 17 years. Most CNAs there have been a CNA that want to go do something different, would pursue LPN or R.N., but there is now in Tennessee this intermediate level

between the two CNA and nurse that is called medtech. What made you decide that that route was the best for you? Being a single mother have two kids and just a time. I don't really have that much time to go to school for a whole year. So doing this program really helped me change and change my career.

Thank you for joining us today. This has been Certify It, the podcast for advancing your career in care. You can find Brittany's story as well as stories of other students and instructors at the masoncenterknox.com.

Outro

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