



For immediate release — March 28, 2017

## **Founder of Uphill Both Ways to receive this year's Young Alumnus Achievement Award**

When she speaks to graduating students at Wednesday's Rise & Shine Breakfast, Janelle Pritchard (BN '12), recipient of this year's Young Alumnus Achievement Award, might tell them not to worry if they don't have everything in their lives planned out.

"For me, the biggest thing I've come to appreciate is that you don't need to have it all figured out. Just trust in the journey," says Pritchard.

That approach led her to establish Uphill Both Ways, a non-profit organization that has helped people in Nepal by funding the building of new schools and a hydroelectric plant and providing school supplies for hundreds of children. Plans are underway to build another school and, during her last visit in October 2015, Uphill Both Ways also set up health camps in conjunction with a hospital in Bhaktapur. Pritchard hopes to continue this work by bringing Canadian doctors and nurses to Nepal one day.

"Uphill Both Ways has taken on a life of its own. It all happened very naturally. A lot of the time I just feel like I'm along for the ride," she says. "All this work in Nepal has happened just because I've been open to opportunity."

Her dedication and leadership in founding and sustaining Uphill Both Ways has inspired others and has made a difference in the world. Her passion for helping the people of Nepal is infectious. For these reasons and more, the University of Lethbridge Alumni Association (ULAA) is pleased to honour Pritchard with the Young Alumnus Achievement Award for 2017.

"We are very proud to recognize Janelle with the Young Alumnus Achievement Award," says Randy Kobbert (BMgt '86), president of the ULAA. "Not only does she demonstrate excellence in her career as a nurse, she has shown true leadership in her humanitarian work in Nepal."

"I was definitely shocked," says Pritchard. "When I found out, I was honoured. But it seems kind of crazy because there are a lot of really incredible people out there."

Pritchard, who works as an operating room nurse at Rocky View Hospital in Calgary, was born and raised in Lethbridge. After graduating from high school, she wanted to spend a year backpacking in Australia. When she was preparing for the trip, her father told her about a hiking trip to Nepal being organized by a friend.

“He suggested doing some father-daughter bonding in the Himalayas and starting my trip off with a little bit of hiking in Nepal before I went to Australia,” she says. “The Nepal trip was kind of a fluke chance.”

The trip proved to be life-changing and Nepal and its people captured a place in her heart. A teacher in their hiking group expressed interest in seeing the school in a village and their trekking guide, who knew someone involved with the school, arranged a visit.

“They took us to this little shack. There were a couple of benches that the older kids could sit on, but the younger kids were sitting on the floor,” says Pritchard. “They had an old chalkboard but they couldn’t afford chalk. They had nothing. Seeing that was eye-opening. At the end of our trip, we all just pitched in a bit of money and we were able to buy tons of school supplies and then pay for a couple of men to carry it all on their backs up to this village. I saw how easy it was to make change and make a difference in somebody else’s life. We were told the headmaster cried when the stuff arrived. Seeing that impact just kind of sparked things.”

Pritchard has made four more trips to Nepal, one of them a few months after the earthquake in April 2015. Uphill Both Ways remains a small organization of five people, consisting of family members, friend Drew Andreachuk, and a contact in Nepal.

“Our contact on the ground, he was my original trekking guide, and it’s because of him that all this is possible,” says Pritchard. “Getting to be a part of their world for a little bit is pretty magical. I think my relationship with Nepal is going to be a lifelong one. It’s become my home away from home.”

To determine where the greatest need exists, the guide holds community meetings to figure out what’s most needed and if the community is willing to help by providing labour. Little by little, Uphill Both Ways has built trust within the Nepalese communities.

The skills and knowledge she gained during her time at the U of L have given her a foundation and proven their value halfway around the world.

“This isn’t a place where you come to get all the answers; it’s where you come to learn how to ask the big questions and to understand why they matter,” says Pritchard.

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