To Jeanne Long, RN, becoming a manager has been a “silver lining.” It’s been a way to take her life experiences, including a devastating injury from a car accident, and put them to good use.

Long is manager of surgical services at Clarian West Medical Center, Avon, Ind, a new hospital that she helped to build from the ground up.

She will be honored as OR Manager of the Year Oct 19 to 21 at the Managing Today’s OR Suite conference in San Diego.

As OR Manager of the Year, Long receives an all-expense paid trip to the Managing Today’s OR Suite Conference and will be introduced at the opening session.

She will also receive a scholarship from Kimberly-Clark Health Care to attend the 10th Georgetown University Healthcare Leadership Institute July 9 to 14, 2006, in Washington, DC.

Long had a chance to apply for her position while the hospital, which opened in December, was still on the drawing board. Part of Indianapolis-based Clarian Health Partners, Clarian West is built as a “healing sanctuary.” Long saw it as an opportunity to apply what she says nurses have always been taught—to take care of the mind, body, and spirit.

“The idea was to get away from the traditional hospital that was cold, white, and stainless steel to something that is warm and comforting,” she says. All of the rooms are private, and there are stone fireplaces and a garden with waterfalls and fountains.

The new surgical suite has 5 ORs and 3 procedure rooms. With volume growing, the hospital is adding 3 more ORs and planning further expansion.

**Soothing music**

As part of the hospital’s planning team, Long introduced a music therapy program for surgical patients, who can choose to listen to soothing music in the preop and postop rooms.

“When I did research, I was amazed at the effect music has on patients’ anxiety levels, heart rate, and blood pressure,” she says.

She has also introduced a staffing model where the same nurse assesses outpatients before their surgery and discharges them afterward, following the philosophy of relationship-centered care.

Long insisted that the staff had to be part of the planning process. “[The planning team] kept wanting us to map out a work flow. But I said, ‘You can’t do that until your team is on board.’” That entailed melding a team recruited from 7 or 8 other hospitals to create what she calls the “Clarian West way.” Long is a firm believer in shared leadership, saying, “There is no other style that works.”

While helping to build the new hospital, Long returned to school to finish her BSN. “People told me I was out of my mind,” she says, but she’s made it work.

**Grace under pressure**

Surgeon Barry L. Eppley, MD, who wrote on Long’s behalf, noted the “personal sacrifice” she has made “to bring the operative services at Clarian West to be the shining jewel for all local hospitals to emulate.” He says Long worked 70- to 80-hour weeks to see the project through.

“Jeanne will always ask for input on decisions and then initiate a plan of action. She has embraced the team concept to the fullest,” said a letter sent by Diane K. Horner, RN, BSN, CNOR, CPSN, on behalf of 54 members of the staff.
The letter cited Long’s upbeat personality, fairness, and inclusive leadership style as qualities that make her stand out.

“Her employees are always willing to go the extra mile for her, because that is how much we believe in her,” the letter said.

Long is quick to credit her entire team, called the “Blue Crew,” including the OR charge nurse, Michael Tucker, RN, and the postanesthesia care unit charge nurse, Cindy Ratcliff, RN. The team’s motto is, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

The hospital’s president and CEO, Al Gatmaitan, was also enthusiastic, writing that 6 months after the hospital’s opening, “Jeanne’s hard work and leadership—and real grace under pressure—are evident: Our surgeons are satisfied, our outcomes are excellent, we have a 0% vacancy rate in surgical services, and our patients report that their care is exceeding their expectations.”

Robert T. Gill, MD, the OR medical director and director of anesthesia, added, “In my 10 years at Clarian Health, I have yet to meet an individual who puts more of herself into her work than Jeanne.”

Way back after accident

For Long, management was a way back after the car wreck, which caused severe injuries to her cervical spine. Ultimately, the injuries made it impossible for her to continue staffing the long post-trauma reconstructive cases that she loved. She has had a long interest in plastic and reconstructive surgical nursing.

When a colleague suggested she try management, Long found she loved that, too. Building a new hospital was a way for her to take her commitment to nursing a step further.

“It feels good when you have a vision of what you want a hospital to be, and then patients, families, and visitors tell you that they sense that feeling from the time they walk in the door,” she says.

Management has been a way for Long to weave together the rich layers of her life experiences—as the sibling of a sister with a serious illness, as a student, as a surgical technologist early in her career and then as an RN, surgeons’ practice manager, clinical coordinator, and trauma patient herself.

“I basically feel I have been reborn and have got back what I lost,” she says.

The OR Manager of the Year honor adds to other awards Long has received. In 1992, she was named Employee of the Year at Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis, selected from 3,000 nurses. She has also been Nurse of the Year for the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgical Nurses.