

SIUE alumni-owned company G & G Anesthesia achieves explosive growth

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Graduate School alumni Kyle Griffith and Frank Grasso are making their mark in the local healthcare industry, achieving pioneering success in dual roles as nurse anesthetists and businessmen.

Cape Girardeau native Griffith set the business plan in motion for Edwardsville-based G & G Anesthesia, LLC, while he was pursuing his master's of nursing/nurse anesthesia at SIUE. At that time, the G & G stood for him and his fiancé, Erin. The classmates earned their advanced degrees in 2005 and got married the day after graduation.

A few years later, Grasso came through the SIUE School of Nursing (SON), earning a bachelor's of nursing in 2006 and master's of nurse anesthesia in 2010. Fittingly, the Pinckneyville native had the same superior clinical skills and zest for business, not to mention a 'G' last name, for Griffith to invite him to move the company under joint ownership in 2014.

"We always like to say our partnership is like gas and fire," Griffith said. "I had always wanted my own practice and the autonomy that comes with it. And I have always been business-minded. Frank shared that aspiration."

As Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs), Griffith and Grasso's company is breaking the mold of what's been the traditional approach to anesthesia care. G & G Anesthesia's model is CRNA focused, with the company now employing three anesthesiologists and 15 full-time CRNAs. The entrepreneurs have secured contracts with HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital in Highland, OSF St. Anthony's Health Center in Alton and Gateway Regional Medical Center in Granite City.

"As an anesthesia provider you typically either work for a hospital, for a national company or for a physician group," Grasso explained. "Now, there's an option to work for a CRNA-owned group, which is rare."

"Our practice is built off of mutual respect," Griffith said. "We have hired incredible physicians who serve as medical directors, but we allow our CRNAs to be completely independent and work on all types of cases, including obstetrics."

"Costs are going up and reimbursements are going down across the healthcare industry, and you can't have inefficiencies, which is too often the case. That's what sets us apart. We're able to have the strongest clinical staff around, bring in the best providers, but do it in a fiscally responsible manner."

"We understand that the best approach is a team approach, where we rely on the expertise of our anesthesiologists, but they in turn, also respect the expertise of our

CRNAs,” Grasso continued. “It’s a re-education regarding the stigma of physicians versus CRNAs. Kyle and I break down that long held divide and strongly believe in the need for mutual respect. The two can handle the same situations, but doing so synergistically is the beautiful thing about our model.”

Griffith and Grasso stress the productive powerful combination of exceptional clinical skills and exemplary interpersonal skills. The two are imperative attributes of their employees, the majority of whom are SIUE alumni.

“SIUE for us is a constant pipeline of incredibly qualified employees,” Griffith said. “It’s like a spring and the well is right here in town. We have great relationships with not only the students, but also the staff and administration.”

“The independence our instructors demonstrated intrigued me as a student,” added Grasso. “That, combined with the breadth of clinical sites the School provides students, are phenomenal contributors to the quality of students who have gone through SIUE’s nurse anesthesia program.”

“We are extremely proud of all of our graduates, but that is putting it mildly when we think of Kyle and Frank,” said Laura Bernaix, PhD, dean of the SIUE SON. “They are the epitome of what we hope for in our students when they leave us to go into practice. To not only be skilled and knowledgeable nurse clinicians, but also become nurse leaders in the advancement of healthcare is our desired outcome. Clearly Kyle and Frank are achieving this goal.”

G & G Anesthesia’s clinical sites serve as training opportunities for current students. The co-owners know firsthand how impactful such clinical opportunities are for students, and are constantly keeping tabs on those who may have the abilities to be a future asset to their company.

“We strive for leaders in every aspect of anesthesia,” Grasso said. “We want the A team.”

“Relationships with alumni like this serve a key role in both the quality of our clinical education and the appeal of our program to the prospective student,” said Andrew Griffin, PhD, CRNA, APN, assistant dean of graduate programs and director of the nurse anesthesia program in the SIUE SON. “The achievements of Kyle and Frank are also successes for our University and program. I am excited about expanding on future opportunities with G & G.

SIUE’s nurse anesthesia program is now a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program. Griffith and Grasso are in early discussions with the University to create a corporate

agreement that would allow their employees the possibility of enrolling in the post-master's option for that program with support from G & G Anesthesia. If realized, it could be one of the first of its kind for any anesthesia group in the country.

The innovative company's explosive growth is just the start of what the SIUE alumni aspire to achieve. Plans are already in motion for their next business venture, which will expand their model into pain management.

The [SIUE School of Nursing's](#) fully accredited programs are committed to creating excellence in nursing leadership through innovative teaching, evidence-based practice, quality research, patient advocacy and community service. Enrolling nearly 1,400 students in its baccalaureate, master's and doctoral programs, the School develops leaders in pursuit of shaping the nursing profession and impacting the health care environment. SIUE's undergraduate nursing programs on the Edwardsville campus and the regional campus in Carbondale help to solve the region's shortage of baccalaureate-prepared nurses and enhance the quality of nursing practice within all patient service venues. The School's graduate programs prepare nurses for advanced roles in clinical practice, administration and education.

By preparing the next generation of leaders in a knowledge-based economy, [SIUE's Graduate School](#) fulfills the region's demand for highly trained professionals. Graduate school offerings include arts and sciences, business, education, engineering, nursing and interdisciplinary opportunities. SIUE professors provide students with a unique integration of theoretical education and hands-on research experiences. Students can obtain graduate certificates or pursue master's degrees, and be part of a supportive learning and rich intellectual environment that is tailored to the needs of adult learners. The Graduate School raises the visibility of research at SIUE, which ranks highest among its Illinois Board of Higher Education peers in total research and development expenditures according to the National Science Foundation. Doctoral programs are available in the Schools of Education (Ed.D.) and Nursing (DNP). The School of Engineering and the Department of Historical Studies feature cooperative doctoral programs (Ph.D.).