

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

J. Marilyn MacQueen Rising Star Award Winner



**Christina Bishop, PhD, F(ACHI)
Midwest Transplant Network**

What year were you awarded the J. Marilyn MacQueen Rising Star Award? 2004

How has your role evolved since receiving the award?

Since receiving the J. Marilyn MacQueen Rising Star Award, my role has evolved significantly in both scope and impact. At the time, I was deeply involved in the technical and operational aspects of HLA testing as a bench Technologist. Today, as Chief of Laboratory Services at Midwest Transplant Network, I lead a team that supports multiple transplant programs, and I'm responsible for strategic planning, quality assurance, and innovation across our lab services.

The recognition from the award gave me the confidence to take on more leadership responsibilities and pursue a PhD. It also positioned me to advocate for improvements in workflow, technology adoption, and staff development. I've become more involved in mentoring emerging professionals and contributing to broader conversations in the transplant community about best practices and future directions in HLA.

Explain if and how the award opened up any new opportunities for you (mentorship, networking, training, etc.)

Receiving the J. Marilyn MacQueen Rising Star Award was a pivotal moment in my career. It not only affirmed the work I had been doing in HLA but also opened doors to new opportunities I hadn't anticipated. One of the most meaningful outcomes was the expanded network it gave me access to—leaders and peers in the field who have become collaborators, mentors, and sounding boards.

Through the visibility the award provided, I've been invited to participate in more professional panels and working groups, which has deepened my understanding of emerging trends and challenges in HLA. The award also encouraged me to pursue additional training and leadership development, knowing that others saw potential in me. It gave me the confidence to take on broader responsibilities and advocate for innovation and excellence in our lab services.

What continues to inspire you about working in HLA? What inspires me most about working in HLA is the direct impact our work has on saving lives. Every test we run, every consultation given, contributes to someone's chance at a successful transplant—and that's incredibly powerful.

I've had the privilege of seeing how our lab's work translates into real-world outcomes. Whether it's matching a kidney for a child or helping a heart transplant move forward for an adult, the science we practice is deeply human. I'm also inspired by the complexity and evolution of the field. HLA is a dynamic intersection of immunology, genetics, and technology. There's always something new to learn, and that constant growth keeps me engaged and motivated.

But perhaps most inspiring is the team I work with. Seeing young professionals grow into confident, skilled technologists—and knowing I played a part in that journey—is incredibly rewarding. It reminds me that our work isn't just about today's patients, but also about building the future of transplant science.

What advice would you give to someone just starting to pursue a career in HLA? Start by cultivating a strong foundation in immunogenetics and molecular biology—these are the cornerstones of HLA work. Seek out opportunities to shadow experienced technologists or other mentors to gain hands-on experience. Certification through organizations like the American College of Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics (ACHI) is invaluable, so aim for that early in your career.

Equally important is staying curious and open to learning. The field evolves rapidly, and being adaptable will serve you well. Don't hesitate to ask questions, join professional societies, and attend conferences—those connections can lead to mentorship, friendships, and open doors you didn't expect. Finally, remember that your work directly impacts lives. Keeping that purpose at the center of everything you do will fuel your passion and commitment.