They are always on the lookout. Crookston’s RiverView staff pharmacists, Brittany Novak 2011 and Ashley (Walton) Sparby 2009, are always looking for teachable moments and opportunities to share information. “It’s a big part of the work we do as pharmacists,” says Novak. “We are concerned with patient safety with regard to medication and sharing what we know helps ensure our patients are using medication correctly.”

Sparby and Novak met at the University of Minnesota Crookston when they shared a shift at the information desk in the Sargeant Student Center. “I liked Brittany right away,” Sparby says. “We were interested in the same field and we just hit it off.”

The two came to their interest in pharmacy in very different ways. “I was interested in veterinary medicine until I fainted watching a hysterectomy on a cat in high school,” Sparby smiles. “I knew right then that surgery probably wasn’t for me, but that didn’t change my interest in the medical field. Toward the end of high school, I began looking at pharmacy as a potential field of interest.”

As a fifth grader, Novak’s father was diagnosed with lupus, and she saw the powerful effect medication had immediately and over the long term. “I wanted to know more,” Novak says. “I became interested in how and why the medicine worked and its effects on the human body.”

Both Novak and Sparby love working in a smaller hospital where each day is varied and one never has an opportunity to be bored. “If I could study in just one area, I am particularly interested in infectious disease,” says Sparby and Novak agreed. “I would add emergency medicine to that list as well,” Novak says.

Both Novak and Sparby looked at much larger undergraduate programs, but the two biology majors decided that the U of M Crookston was the best fit. They credit their success in part to the encouragement and push they received from retired Associate Professor Pam Elf (1997-2014). “She was a constant cheerleader for us and helped set us up well for graduate school,” Sparby says.

“Lisa Samuelson, director of student activities and Pam Elf were great role models, and we both benefitted from working with them,” says Novak.

Sparby, originally from Middle River, Minn., works part time at RiverView and part time at North Valley Health Center in Warren, Minn., where she lives with her husband Adam 2009.

Novak, who works full time at RiverView and grew up in Dahlen, N.D., enjoys the shifts she spends with Sparby. They have the U of M Crookston in common as well as the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy, which Novak proudly points out is the number two pharmacy school in the country.

These two young doctors each have what it takes and mixing a degree from the U of M Crookston with their lifelong friendship results in a compound that is a prescription for success.