

Vol. 18, No. 2 / Spring 2022

Heart to Heart

A publication of St. Tammany Health System



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WINNER OF 10 WOMEN'S CHOICE AWARDS

St. Tammany Health System is empowering women like never before. Throughout our system, fellowship-trained specialists and subspecialists work with the highest level of technology available to provide more accurate diagnostics, less invasive care, and faster recoveries for everything from general surgery to specialty care. Together with our partner Ochsner Health, we're giving women on the Northshore many ways to live stronger and better.

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Melissa Hodgson, executive editor
Mike Scott, editor and senior writer
Tim San Filippo, cover design and art direction
Jan Budenz, editorial assistant



Gratefully Yours

Everything is coming up daisies this spring at STHS



Joan Coffman, FACHE

“Here inside STHS, we are consistently seeing a manageable census of COVID patients, well in balance of our other patients’ conditions and procedures.”

Welcome to spring! Flowers are in bloom, including the DAISY Awards, which here at St. Tammany Health System is a new program for recognizing our nurses. Check out the back cover of this issue for details.

But that’s not all spring has to offer on the good news front. As of this writing, the latest COVID variant, omicron, has declined around the state, prompting something akin to normalcy in our local communities. Here inside STHS, we are consistently seeing a manageable census of COVID patients, well in balance of our other patients’ conditions and procedures.

Blessedly, this means we have relaxed our mask and visitation polices for vaccinated colleagues and guests. Visit StTammany.health/Visitors or ask your provider for details on our latest policies before your next visit.

This issue of Heart to Heart delves into just where we stand these days with COVID, and it introduces you to our very own “Piano Man,” along with exciting innovations for breast cancer surgery, home care, diagnostic imaging and lung cancer diagnoses.

We hope you enjoy this quarterly peek into the exciting world of your hometown community health system. We live our values of safety and service each day just for you and your family.

Gratefully,



Joan M. Coffman, FACHE
St. Tammany Health System President and CEO



WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

St. Tammany Health System President and CEO Joan Coffman, far left, joins other members of the health system’s leadership team to celebrate nine new certified nursing assistants welcomed in January to the STHS family. All nine recently completed a customized training program at Northshore Technical Community College underwritten by Tri-Parish Works, which covered tuition and fees, and by St. Tammany Health System, which provided a stipend for the students during their training.

BA.2 BASICS

Data on COVID-19 in Louisiana, as of Apr. 1, 2022.

The latest COVID variant to catch the attention of public health officials is a subvariant of omicron known as BA.2, which, according to the CDC, accounted for about 72% of all new COVID-19 cases on April 6 – up from 55% a week earlier. While BA.2 appears to be more contagious than previous versions, health experts say there's no reason to panic, as the illness it causes is no more severe illness than the previous omicron strain. Additionally, with more people being vaccinated or having been previously infected, there's a higher level of immunity in the general public.

TIME FOR ANOTHER BOOSTER?

Vaccinations are key to protecting us from COVID. Here's the latest from the CDC on COVID booster shots:

Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna

Who should get a booster and when?

Everyone 12 years and older should get a booster five months after completing their primary vaccination series.

Who should get a second booster? Adults 50 and older are eligible for a second booster at least four months after getting their first booster.

Johnson & Johnson/Janssen

Who should get a booster and when? Adults 18 years and older should get a booster at least two months after receiving their initial J&J/Janssen vaccine.

Who should get a second booster? Anyone who received the J&J/Janssen shot for their primary vaccination and first booster, as well adults 50 year and older who received the J&J/Janssen vaccine, regardless of what type of booster they received.

75.12% of patients hospitalized for COVID-19 at St. Tammany Health System's Covington hospital who have not been fully vaccinated, as April 8.

Sources: St. Tammany Health System, Louisiana Department of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; CovidActNow.org

'Are we done with COVID?'

Infections are down, but how long will they stay that way?

By Mike Scott, mScott@stph.org

It was on March 13, 2020, that St. Tammany Health System diagnosed its first COVID-19 patient, and just more than two years later, encouraging signs are emerging in our collective fight against the coronavirus.

Mask mandates are being lifted, at-home tests are more available than they've previously been, vaccinations are nudging upward while infection rates – along with hospital admissions for COVID – are going down.

It's enough to have more than a few people asking the same question: Are we done with COVID-19?

"Well, you're asking the wrong question," said Dr. Mike Hill, St. Tammany Health System's infectious disease specialist. "You might be done with COVID, but the question is whether COVID is done with us."

There's no question that the omicron variant is in retreat. Three months ago, on Jan. 12, nearly 72 people were under COVID care at STHS's Covington hospital, the most since early September and enough to fill nearly a third of the hospital's bed capacity.

On the weekend of April 2, the hospital's inpatient COVID count was zero.

So, yes, this could be the beginning of the end of the pandemic. But it could also be merely the calm before another COVID storm.

"There's always a chance another, more virulent variant could emerge that could drive up infections again," Dr. Hill said. "Remember spring 2021? On Easter Sunday, we had zero COVID inpatients for the first time since the pandemic began. And then along came the delta variant in summer 2021, bringing with it a surge in infections.

"Once delta began to wane, many people again thought we were through the worst of it – and then along came omicron."



Vaccines and testing are two of the keys to keeping COVID in check, health experts say. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

While it's too early to say for sure, there's some thought among health experts that COVID might be beginning to transition from a pandemic phase to an endemic phase, meaning it goes from being widely present to being present in specific regions, making it easier to control.

Think localized outbreaks of influenza or West Nile virus.

That being said, Dr. Hill cautions against getting complacent, as there are no guarantees another disruptive variant won't emerge this summer.

"The key to COVID is to take the necessary steps to protect you and your family," Dr. Hill said. "You know the saying: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. That's still true.

"Now's the time to stock up on at-home test kits, now that they're much more available. If you haven't gotten your vaccine or your booster yet, do that now, too. And, of course, mask when warranted, particularly when attending large, indoor events, and always practice good hand hygiene.

"If we all do that, together, then we might one day be done with COVID once and for all." ■

LEARN MORE about COVID-19 in our community, from daily infection rates to the latest St. Tammany Health System visitors policy, at StTammany.health/COVID19.



Nurse Practitioner Caroline Barkerding is part of St. Tammany Health System's new Primary Wellness Home Care program, introduced in late 2021 to provide annual in-home wellness visits to Northshore residents. (Photo by Tim San Filippo / STHS)

STHS introduces Primary Wellness Home Care program

Annual visits come at no out-of-pocket cost to most patients

By Mike Scott, mscott@stph.org

In its ongoing efforts to improve population health measures across the Northshore, St. Tammany Health System has expanded its Home Health Department to include a Primary Wellness Home Care program, which offers patients an annual wellness checkup in the comfort of their own home.

The program — which comes with no out-of-pocket cost to Medicare Part B participants — isn't intended for patients in need of emergent care, but rather to substitute for a patient's annual in-office wellness check-up, said STHS Nurse Practitioner Caroline Barkerding.

"There's a lot of advantages to doing annual wellness visits in the home," Barkerding said. "Primarily, it allows us to take care of patients that might have trouble getting into the office, whether due to disability, transportation concerns ... and we're able to make sure they're getting the care they need."

As part of the in-home wellness check, an STHS care provider will:

- Review the patient's medical history.
- Discuss management of any chronic diseases, such as high blood pressure or diabetes.
- Review what medications the patient is taking.

- Check routine vital signs.
- Conduct a health risk assessment, which Barkerding said "essentially paints a picture of your daily routine as well as your function status."
- Conduct a cognitive and memory assessment.
- Conduct a depression screening.
- Conduct a nutrition assessment.
- Assess whether the patient might be at risk for falls.

The provider will also help the patient create an advance care plan — or update it, if they already have one — which spells out a patient's desires if they are no longer able to communicate that themselves.

St. Tammany Health System's Primary Wellness Care Program, and its growing Home Health Department as a whole, is a key part of a focused strategy intended to improve population health on the Northshore by taking healthcare directly into the community.

"About 20% of healthcare really is managed by the physician or in the hospital," said Dr. Mike Hill, STHS's vice president of quality and utilization management. "That means 80% is outside the traditional healthcare model, and that's what we're trying to touch on, getting to that other 80%." ■

POP QUIZ!

How well do you know healthcare?

So you think you know healthcare? Put your knowledge to the test with this quiz about the various divisions of St. Tammany Home Health and Hospice, the nationally recognized home health department of St. Tammany Health System.

Match each numbered description below to one of these home health services lines:

- a) Home Health
- b) Hospice
- c) Palliative Care
- d) Transitional Care
- e) Primary Wellness Home Care

Answers are at the bottom of the page.

1) This newest division of the STHS Home Health Department was introduced in fall 2021 and provides an annual in-home checkup — at no out-of-pocket cost to Medicare Part B participants — to support and complement a patient's regular doctor's care.

2) This division of the STHS Home Health Department is devoted to the improvement of quality of life for people with serious, life-limiting conditions by addressing the many stressors that can accompany such illness, such as pain, fatigue, fear of the unknown and loss of independence.

3) This division of STHS Home Health provides supportive care to terminally ill patients and their families in the home through an interdisciplinary team that addresses physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs.

4) This division of STHS Home Health provides routine healthcare, nutrition therapy and more to patients while allowing them to continue to enjoy the familiar surroundings of their own home.

5) This division of STHS Home Health sees trained care providers following a patient's care in their own home for at least 30 days after their hospital discharge to ensure the patient continues to improve and to avoid a return trip to the hospital.

Answer key: 1) e; 2) c; 3) b; 4) a; 5) d



Al and Charlene Templet, pictured during a five-day, 150-mile bike ride on the Great Allegheny Passageway bike trail in Pennsylvania, are used to spending time outdoors. On a whim, the Tempelts participated in a free skin cancer screening last spring sponsored by St. Tammany Health System. That screening very well might have saved their lives. (Photo provided by Al Templet)

He did it on a whim. It may have saved his life.

Skin cancer patient says screenings are simple, painless and important

By Mike Scott, mscott@stph.org

Al Templet knew it was there. His daughters made sure of that, teasing him about it when they went to the beach or the pool.

But that weird freckle on his chest was merely that, right? A weird freckle. Nothing to worry about.

“Didn’t bother me. It wasn’t raised or anything. Just a dark, weird-shaped freckle,” the 61-year-old Metairie resident said. “I guess I’ve been having it for years.”

And that made a certain amount of sense. After all, he and his wife have enjoyed the outdoors together for years. Freckles happen.

The thing is, not all freckles are created equal. That’s a lesson Mr. Templet learned in March 2021 when — after participating in the Tour De Lis charity bike ride — he and wife Charlene decided to take advantage of a free skin cancer screening sponsored by St. Tammany Health System for race participants at the Mandeville Trailhead.

“I went in the little tent they set up,” he remembered. “They had the nurses and doctors there, and the nurse right away saw the freckle on my chest and said, ‘Oh, let me get the doctor.’”

That doctor was Covington dermatologist Dr. Brianna McDaniel, who, at a subsequent office visit, removed the suspect freckle and sent it off to be tested.

“Early detection of melanoma is so important because if it goes untreated, it will metastasize. But if it’s detected early, it has a very high cure rate.”

—Dr. Brianna McDaniel

It was melanoma, a serious form of skin cancer, but one with a very specific weakness.

“Early detection of melanoma is so important because if it goes untreated, it will metastasize,” Dr. McDaniel said.

“But if it’s detected early, it has a very high cure rate.”

During a follow-up visit, Dr. McDaniel spotted another, smaller suspicious area on Mr. Templet’s forearm that she also tested. That one turned out to be basal cell carcinoma, another type of skin cancer.

She safely removed both, as well as skin cancer detected on Mrs. Templet.

With May being Skin Cancer Awareness Month, the Tempelts’ story is a particularly timely cautionary tale, illustrating how skin cancer screenings can save lives.

When it comes to skin cancer, Dr. McDaniel said, patients should remember to look for areas on their skin that fit the “A-B-C-D-E” rule, which represent the five chief warning signs of melanoma.

“A” stands for asymmetrical. If a spot is asymmetrical, consider it suspicious.

Same goes for spots with irregular borders — that’s “B” — that might be jagged or scalloped.

“C” is for color, and refers to spots that are multicolored or changing colors.

“D” is for diameter. Beware spots that are bigger than a pencil eraser.

And “E” is for evolving. “Really, you need to watch for anything that’s not healing up after a few weeks or is changing,” Dr. McDaniel said. “If I had to pick one of the five, that’s the most important.”

If you detect a suspicious spot that fits any of the above rules, Dr. McDaniel recommends making an appointment to see a board-certified dermatologist. (Find a list of board-certified dermatologists in your area at the American Academy of Dermatology website, www.aad.org.)

Even if you don’t have what you think is a suspicious spot, Mr. Templet encourages people to get screened anyway.

After all, he thought his weird freckle was of little concern. It turned out to be a big deal.

“You should always get a screening,” he said. “For me it was painless and free — a free screening they were offering. The spot on my chest which was melanoma? You can die from that.” ■

5 signs of heart attacks in women

By Dr. Bekir Melek, Covington Cardiovascular Care

Many people imagine a heart attack like they've seen in the movies. But that dramatic grasping of the chest is not necessarily an accurate picture of what warning signs you should be aware of.

Heart attack symptoms can even differ between men and women. While men show more classic signs of a heart attack, women usually suffer much more subtle symptoms. Below are five warning signs you may not know that could signal a heart attack in women.

1) Pain in the arms, back, neck or jaw

Chest pain is a tell-tale sign of a heart attack, but the pain associated with a heart attack isn't always centrally located, especially in women. The pain can radiate from your arm, back, neck or jaw and be sudden or gradual. It may also seem to come and go before becoming intense. The pain may even wake you up from a deep sleep. As a rule, you should pay special attention to any sudden, unexplainable pain above your waist and report it to your doctor as soon as possible.

2) Difficulty breathing

Shortness of breath is often the first warning sign of a heart attack in women. This shortness of breath usually comes on without any added physical activity. This could mean you suddenly feel like you've run a marathon while sitting at your desk.

3) Sweating

It's normal to break a sweat in the gym or while dealing with a stressful situation. However, if you start sweating without any physical activity or other stressors, it could be a warning sign of something wrong. This symptom is typically described as feeling like breaking into a cold, nervous sweat. This warning sign can often be overlooked because many women blame this perspiration on hot flashes or their menstrual cycle.

4) Dramatic fatigue

Extreme fatigue can be a heart attack symptom in women. If you feel like you can't accomplish your normal day-to-day activities or move from one room to the other, it may be a sign of something more serious than simply being tired.



Chest pain is the classic sign of a heart attack, but there are other warning signs — such as radiating neck pain — that could suggest a heart attack in women. (Stock photo)

5) Stomach pain or nausea

A heart attack in women can also take on a variety of gastrointestinal symptoms. Some people describe it as feeling like heartburn or a stomach ulcer. Many women report feeling extreme abdominal pressure, or a weight on their stomach, as if someone is sitting on them.

If you think you may be experiencing a heart attack, it is essential that you do not delay emergency care. It's also important to note that if you are experiencing a healthcare crisis, you should not attempt to drive yourself to the hospital. Doing so could result in a car accident, injuring yourself and possibly others. Do not hesitate to call 911 if you are in distress.

Most importantly, remember that you know your body and symptoms better than anyone else. Don't dismiss what you may feel. If you or someone you love is experiencing any of the above symptoms in a new or unexplainable way, you should contact your doctor as soon as possible. ■

Dr. Bekir Melek is a cardiologist at Covington Cardiovascular Care, a department of St. Tammany Health System. Schedule an office visit with him at StTammany.health.

STAT!

Quick hits from the STHS newsroom

Women's Choice has again ranked St. Tammany Health System among its **Top 100 hospitals in America** for patient safety and service. The health system also earned distinctions for best breast center, mammography imaging, cancer care, heart care, minimally invasive surgery, obstetrics, orthopedics, stroke center and women's services. ... In March, STHS's New Family Center received the **2022 Louisiana Birth Ready Designation** from the Louisiana Perinatal Quality Collaborative ... Readers of Edge of the Lake magazine have again named St. Tammany Health System the **best hospital in western St. Tammany Parish**, as well as recognizing STHS for best home health and hospice care Congratulations to **Dr. Mark Jones**, the recipient of the St. Tammany Quality Network Medical Director's Award for fourth quarter 2021. ... Congratulations also go to **Dr. McCall McDaniel** of STHS's Bone and Joint Clinic, one of four winners of the Professional Women of St. Tammany's 5th annual Women's Choice Awards. ... The American College of Cardiology in December awarded **Transcatheter Valve Certification** to STHS's minimally invasive heart valve replacement program. ... STHS President and CEO **Joan Coffman** has been elected an at-large delegate to the American Hospital Association Regional Policy Board 7. ... In February, Sophisticated Woman magazine named St. Tammany Health System the best hospital in the parish. Additionally, **Dr. John D'Hemcourt** was named best anesthesiologist and **Dr. Ralph Millet** was named best for internal medicine. ■

“When you’re doing these things, you’re not doing it for recognition. You do it out of love.”

– STHS Security Lt. Fred Booker

Meet ‘The Piano Man,’

STHS’s musical security guard finds joy in sharing his talent

By Mike Scott, msscott@stph.org

Fred Booker goes by a lot of titles. Some call him Dad. Some call him Coach. Some call him Lt. Booker.

But to visitors at St. Tammany Health System, he’s “the Piano Man,” a sobriquet the security officer earned for his habit of spontaneously stopping to tickle the ivories of the mini-grand piano in the lobby of the health system’s Covington hospital.

“It always gets a positive response. It seems to make people happy,” Lt. Booker said with a smile recently. “If they don’t need me on a post or on a unit, I’ll go play for 10 minutes or so. Sometimes, I’ll walk past the front desk and they’ll say, ‘Go play us something,’ and so I play them something. It’s relaxing. It’s a stress reliever.”

It’s also just one of the myriad ways in which Lt. Booker has dedicated himself over the years to serving others.

“Let me tell you, Lt. Booker is St. Tammany Health System personified,” Security Chief Kenny Norris said. “He’s professional, he’s capable, he’s dependable, but he’s also deeply compassionate, a genuinely nice guy.”

Visitors to St. Tammany Health System clearly felt that as they arrived at the hospital on a recent Thursday afternoon.

As he noodled on the keyboard, Lt. Booker got at least two thumbs-ups from passersby, along with innumerable smiles and a playful exchange with a hospital colleague pretending to look for a tip jar.

Another passerby asked if he takes requests, which, it turns out, Lt. Booker doesn’t do — but not because he doesn’t want to.

“I never played a piano until I started working here,” he said. “I just play what I hear in my head. If you ask me to play a song, I don’t think I could. I just play what’s in my head.”

Growing up in Hammond, he was a sports kid, not a music kid, he said. His big brother played in a garage band, however, and Lt. Booker remembers playing around with their musical instruments when they took breaks.



St. Tammany Health System’s Fred Booker isn’t your ordinary security officer. He’s also a talented musician who often can be found playing the hospital’s lobby piano, purchased in 2004 as part of St. Tammany Hospital Foundation’s Healing Arts program. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)



His brother quickly realized the younger Booker had a gift and urged him to pursue it. By the time he was a freshman in high school, Booker had taken up the tuba and the trombone. He soon added drums to play in a gospel group, then bass for an R&B-focused garage band.

Despite his innate musical talent — which he suspects may have come from his grandfather, who played upright bass as part of a church choir — playing professionally was never in the cards. After graduating from high school and two years at Southeastern Louisiana

University, he joined the Army, then segued into a 33-year career with the Hammond Fire Department.

When he wasn’t working, he coached youth sports for more than 28 years — including coaching his own football-playing sons: former New Orleans Saints defensive back Fred Booker Jr., Arizona Cardinals cornerback Robert Alford and former SLU defensive backs coach Duriel Adams.

In 2011, he retired from the Fire Department but quickly realized retirement wasn’t for him. “I was going nuts,” he said — which brought him and his musical talents to St. Tammany Health System.

That longtime dedication to serving others, in addition to being one of the central tenets upon which STHS was founded in 1954, recently saw Lt. Booker earn the city of Hammond’s Wilbert H. Dangerfield Award for his years of service to the community.

“That was huge,” he said, pausing from the piano. “When you’re doing these things, you’re not doing it for recognition. You do it out of love.” ■



Dr. Angela Buonagura, a breast surgeon operating out of the St. Tammany Health System Women's Pavilion, discusses a groundbreaking new technique in the treatment of breast cancer during an office visit. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

STHS unveils innovative breast surgery technique

It is first in region to offer Magtrace procedure

By Mike Scott, mscott@stph.org

Already established as the premiere location for comprehensive breast care on the Northshore, the St. Tammany Health System Women's Pavilion in Covington has added to its services a pioneering new procedure designed to spare some breast cancer patients an unnecessary underarm surgery.

The Women's Pavilion is the only location in southeast Louisiana — including the greater New Orleans and Baton Rouge

metro areas — to offer the procedure, known as delayed sentinel lymph node biopsy.

"We're so excited to be offering this procedure," said Dr. Angela Buonagura, a breast surgeon operating out of the Women's Pavilion's Breast Disease and High-Risk Clinic as well as St. Tammany Cancer Center, a campus of Ochsner Medical Center. "If we can do less surgery to help these patients and decrease the

associated risk, that's what we want to do — and that's what this procedure does."

Delayed sentinel lymph node biopsy, which Dr. Buonagura has been conducting since fall 2021, is used primarily for patients diagnosed with ductal carcinoma in-situ, or DCIS, an early form of breast cancer that accounts for one in every five new breast cancer diagnoses.

One of the surgical treatments for DCIS is a mastectomy. Traditionally, it has also been standard practice to conduct a separate surgery to remove a number of lymph nodes — located under the arm — as a safeguard in case the cancer has spread to them.

"That was very drastic," Dr. Buonagura said. "Most of the time we don't need that much surgery, because typically there's not cancer in the lymph nodes."

On top of that, removal of lymph nodes can come with complications, including a painful, life-altering condition called lymphedema, in which an arm or leg swells due to a build-up of fluid that is supposed to flow through the lymphatic system.

With delayed sentinel lymph node biopsy, a surgeon injects a special lymphatic tracing fluid — called Magtrace — designed to mark any at-risk lymph nodes.

Unlike other tracing fluids, Magtrace is magnetic, which makes it detectable for much longer than previous tracing products. Because of that, surgeons using Magtrace can wait until tests are conducted to indicate whether the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes. If it has, a limited number of targeted nodes are removed. If it hasn't, none are removed.

"And even though it's better to take out fewer lymph nodes, it's even better not to take out any," said Dr. Buonagura, who estimated roughly 20% of her patients are candidates for the Magtrace procedure.

Research from Uppsala University Hospital in Sweden and University Hospitals Cleveland has shown that the delayed sentinel lymph node biopsy procedure has reduced surgical interventions in 78.3% and 87% of cases respectively. It has also reduced costs to the healthcare system by 24.5% for women without invasive breast cancer.

That, says Dr. Buonagura, is no small thing.

"It's always good to do less surgery if we can," she said. "If we do less surgery, it's better for the patient." ■

Interested in delayed sentinel node biopsy? Call St. Tammany Health System's Breast Disease and High-Risk Clinic at (985) 773-1515. No referral is required.

Dr. Vernon Palmisano joins Mandeville primary care clinic

The family medicine practitioner specializes in vertigo – and in table tennis

By Mike Scott, mScott@stph.org

Dr. Vernon Palmisano, a board-certified family medicine practitioner specializing in vertigo treatment, has joined the St. Tammany Physicians Network primary care clinic in Mandeville. He is the ninth physician associated with the Mandeville practice.

Dr. Palmisano, now in his 33rd year of practice, comes to St. Tammany Health System after 27 years with Ochsner Health. Most recently, he has been instructing family medicine residents as part of LSU School of Medicine’s Rural Family Medicine program in Bogalusa.

The move to western St. Tammany Parish brings him closer to his two granddaughters – 2 years old and 2 months old – but that’s not the only reason he joined STHS.

“I’m a people person. It was an easy decision for me,” Dr. Palmisano said. “The long-term relationships, the contact with the patients, the intimacy, the friendship aspects of it, for sure.”



In addition to being an avid table tennis player, Dr. Vernon Palmisano – who is one of the newest members of the St. Tammany Health System care team – is an expert on the historical underpinnings of the Easter story. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo/STHS)

In that regard, he’s somewhat “old-fashioned,” by his own description.

“Where medicine is going now, we’re being evaluated on whether we’ve ticked off all the boxes and we’re not really listening to the patient,” he said. “I’m old-fashioned. My goal and my drive is to treat ‘the least of these.’ You know that great Bible verse? ‘When did we feed you? When did we clothe you?’ That verse has been my main verse most of my career.”

Dr. Palmisano is a respected authority on vertigo, a field he entered after a traumatic fall several years ago that left him with lingering dizziness.

While researching vertigo, the Metairie native – who graduated from De La Salle High School, Millsaps College and

LSU School of Medicine— learned that one of the more effective therapies for dizziness is table tennis. So, he took it up. Today, when not working, he can be found polishing his table tennis skills as a player on the National Table Tennis Tour.

“I fish and hunt a lot, too,” he said, “But my love is table tennis. ... I play the best of the best of the best, any age,” he said. “I played the number four and five women in the United States not long ago. They kicked my butt, but it’s fun.”

Dr. Palmisano and wife Judie live in Mandeville. They have three children. ■

Dr. Palmisano is now accepting new patients. To book an appointment, call (985) 898-4001, use MyChart or visit StTammany.health/STPNMandeville and click “Schedule Now.”

Simply the best



Dr. McCall McDaniel, center, of St. Tammany Health System’s Bone and Joint Clinic, was one of just four winners, from 14 women nominated, at the Professional Women of St. Tammany’s 5th annual Women’s Choice Awards luncheon in February. Pictured, from left, are STHS’s Erin Strain, Cindy Ingram, Danielle Najpaver, Dr. McDaniel, Dionne Williams, Myra Robbins and Dr. Pat Torcson. (STHS photo)

Laissez les bon temps rouler



St. Tammany Health System Nursing Supervisor Brent Blazeovich tests out his throwing arm before riding in his first-ever Mardi Gras parade in March. Blazeovich represented the health system in the Carnival in Covington parade, which invited one person from each of the parish’s four hospitals to ride on a ‘Hometown Healthcare Heroes’ float as a sign of support for frontline caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Photo by Mike Scott/STHS)

Leading the way

STHS first in state to offer groundbreaking cancer diagnostic

By *STHS Communication Department*

St. Tammany Health System has become the first in Louisiana to offer Body Vision Medical's C-Arm Based Tomography (CABT) that produces intraoperative CT imaging for earlier and more accurate lung cancer diagnosis.

"We are excited to bring this highly advanced diagnostic technology close to home for our patients," STHS Pulmonologist Dr. Ricardo Blanco said. "It enables us to visualize and pursue lesions such as ground glass opacities and other challenging lesions that without this technology are some of the hardest cancers to diagnose."

Body Vision's CABT produces real-time intraoperative imaging so that pulmonologists can see the actual lung lesion and its location during a diagnostic bronchoscopy procedure, enabling them to biopsy from smaller, more difficult-to-access lung lesions at an earlier stage.

This image-guided biopsy dramatically increases the likelihood of an early, definitive diagnosis for potential lung cancer patients and improves the probability of timely treatment and patient survival.

Pulmonologists are challenged to obtain diagnostic tissue from suspicious lung lesions due to the fact that they cannot see the lesion and its location during biopsy. Body Vision's CABT imaging allows pulmonologists to see the actual lesion and lesion location intraoperatively in real-time so that they can precisely navigate to the lung lesion and visually confirm that they are indeed taking tissue samples from within the lesion during biopsy.

There is no other technology readily accessible to pulmonologists that enables this kind of image-guided biopsy that has been clinically proven to maximize the likelihood of obtaining a conclusive diagnosis.

According to the American Lung Association, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in the United States with an average five-year survival rate of only 18.6%. If lung cancer is detected early, however, as a stage one disease, the five-year survival rate is between 68 and 92%. ■

STHS unveils 10-year plan for diagnostic innovation

By *STHS Communication Department*

St. Tammany Health System and Siemens Healthineers have announced a 10-year value partnership designed to improve care delivery and ensure the highest quality imaging across all STHS diagnostic facilities systemwide.

STHS is the first community-based health system to pioneer the innovative program, which is more typically found in larger, multi-hospital systems.

Already a recognized leader in advanced medical technology, STHS struck this unique strategic agreement with Siemens to bring the latest diagnostic technology and treatment options for every disease type to west St. Tammany. This also gives STHS additional research and technology capabilities, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) software applications.

"We always focus on delivering the highest quality, safest and best care

for our patients close to home," said Melonie Lagalante, assistant vice president for Diagnostic and Outpatient Services. "This Siemens Healthineers agreement embodies our vision to improve the lives of patients with compassion, innovation and partnership because it means we can ensure consistent programming on equipment from Mandeville to Folsom and everywhere in between."

Addition of the Siemens Healthineers technology will improve patient access to high-quality care and open new career opportunities at STHS through workforce development. The digital health solutions and performance improvement initiatives inherent in this strategic relationship will improve operations for patients and providers in the STHS network. ■



The Excelsius GPS robotic system is designed to assist neurosurgeons in spine surgeries. (Image via Globus Medical)

STHS adds ExcelsiusGPS to its robotics arsenal

By *STHS Communication Department*

St. Tammany Health System has announced the purchase of ExcelsiusGPS, adding to its robotic surgical arsenal elevating the level of neurosurgery expertise available on the Northshore.

This platform technology provides robotic guidance and navigation to neurosurgeons, improving safety and accuracy through improved visualization and streamlined workflow. ExcelsiusGPS is the world's first technology to combine a rigid robotic arm and full navigation capabilities into one adaptable platform for accurate trajectory alignment in spine surgery.

ExcelsiusGPS is Globus Medical's advanced technology solution designed to enhance safety and improve efficiency for patients, staff and surgeons in the operating room.

The neurosurgery program at STHS is part of its long-term joint operating agreement with Ochsner Health. In partnership, these two leading health systems represent the most complete system of care focused on improving access to highly specialized care such as robotically assisted brain and spine care.

"Together, Ochsner and St. Tammany are committed to providing the highest quality of care for our patients and staff and look forward to the exciting opportunities and undoubtable impact ExcelsiusGPS will bring to the field of spine surgery, robotics and navigation," Seth Hayes MD, Ochsner neurosurgeon, said. "We plan to use the system for a broad range of procedures and anticipate less invasive surgeries for our patients using this technology." ■

“Come with me, and you’ll see a world of pure imagination.”

– Gene Wilder as Willy Wonka, in “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory”

GOLDEN TICKET

THE Gala 2022 to channel Willy Wonka

By *STHS Communication Department*

Philanthropy and the fantastical will collide this spring at St. Tammany Hospital Foundation’s signature fundraiser, THE Gala, which this year will celebrate a certain top-hatted confectioner with a particularly wondrous chocolate factory.

With the theme “Step Into Your Imagination,” THE Gala 2022 will take place Oct. 13 at Tchefuncta Country Club in Covington – and it will take its cues from author Roald Dahl’s “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.”

“We always like to surprise our community when supporting St. Tammany Cancer Center each year. THE Gala is our perfect opportunity to do just that – creating a whimsical theme that keeps donors and attendees wanting to come back each year,” St. Tammany Hospital Foundation Specialist Melanie Rudolph said. “‘Step Into Your Imagination’ seemed like the perfect escape for our fundraiser this year, especially after the last two years of COVID.”

Proceeds from the candy-coated evening will go toward St. Tammany Health System’s cancer care services, including at the newly opened St. Tammany Cancer Center, a campus of Ochsner Medical Center, and its integrative, one-stop-shop approach to whole-patient care.

As in years past, the evening will feature food, drinks, live and silent auctions, entertainers and more. (No word yet on the availability of lickable wallpaper, Everlasting Gobstoppers or Fizzy Lifting Drinks.)

Also as in years past, the evening is presented by longtime St. Tammany Hospital Foundation supporter HUB International.

“We have all been inspired as a local company with the efforts to improve cancer care in our community,” HUB International’s Kevin Gardner said. “Most people in our region and across our state have either had a family member or close friend afflicted with cancer and facing the difficult decision on next steps. This usually has left them leaving our area, seeking care in other states, and adding the challenge and stress that goes with

THE GALA 2022

What: St. Tammany Hospital Foundation’s signature fund raising event, with proceeds benefiting St. Tammany Health System’s cancer care programs. The theme this year is “Step Into Your Imagination.”

When: Thursday, Oct. 13.

Where: Tchefuncta Country Club in Covington.

Details: Visit TheGalaNorthshore.org.



this difficult diagnosis. Over the last decade, through significant investments, strategic business partnerships and hard work, we have all witnessed a transformation in healthcare delivery in our area. Today, families have the choice of getting treatment close to home with state-of-the-art facilities and health care professionals associated with our own cancer center.”

Golden tickets, as well as sponsorships and additional information about THE Gala 2022, are available online at TheGalaNorthshore.org. ■

‘TRULY BLESSED’: Foundation celebrates health system volunteers

By *Mike Scott, mscott@stph.org*

They’re key members of the St. Tammany Health System care team, they make a positive impact every day at its Covington hospital – and they don’t collect a dime of pay for it.

They are the STHS volunteers, a giving army of community members whose generosity is being saluted this month by St. Tammany Hospital Foundation leaders.

“National Volunteer Week is April 17 to 23, and, honestly, we don’t think that’s nearly enough time to celebrate the generosity

and selflessness of all of those who donate their time to help realize the STHS mission,” Foundation Executive Director Nicole Suhre said. “Can we just declare all of April to be STHS Volunteer Month? I would support that.”

Those volunteers include a wide range of people, from the foundation’s Board of Trustees, made up of 17 community leaders who donate their time to govern, strategize and fundraise for the foundation; the foundation’s B.E.E. volunteer squad, or “Best Ever Employees,” a team of nearly 200 STHS colleagues who have signed up to learn about volunteer needs the foundation has for its events and functions; the foundation’s all-volunteer Healing Arts Committee and special event committees; and the health system’s Patient-Family Advisory Council.

(continued on next page)

Twin outreach campaigns spotlight heart health

Monthlong efforts emphasize education, early detection

By Mike Scott, mscott@stph.org

Fresh off the success of the inaugural United in Pink breast cancer campaign in October, St. Tammany Health System's Be Well Bus hit the road again in February for American Heart Month — and with a giant red sofa in tow this time — to raise awareness, provide community screenings and educate the community on heart health.

As part of the United in Heart Health campaign, the bus and its roving team of care providers attended 10 community events across west St. Tammany — more than two every week — and conducted 339 free carotid ultrasound screenings.

“The response was tremendous,” said Anne Pablovich, the health system's community health coordinator. “Many people know that high cholesterol and high blood pressure are bad and that tobacco use puts them at greater risk for many diseases, but something about seeing the plaque in their artery on the ultrasound screen is a wake-up call to many.”

By sharing the education and resources available, the hope was to offer a next



St. Tammany Health System's Be Well Bus, a 40-foot mobile medical clinic, hit the road for American Heart Month in February, providing more than 300 free carotid ultrasound screenings at 10 events. (Photo by Tim San Filippo/STHS)

step for anyone concerned about the results of their screening, Pablovich said. “Education and awareness are key factors to early detection, which we know is the best chance we have to fight any health issues,” she added.

That emphasis on education and awareness was also the basis of St. Tammany Hospital Foundation's Red Sofa Campaign, which ran concurrently with, and in cooperation with, the United in Heart Health program.

A social-media driven initiative, it saw the team bringing a plush red sofa to locations throughout the community as a way to encourage local residents to keep heart disease and stroke awareness at the forefront of their day-to-day lives.

“We are thrilled with the outcome of the Red Sofa Campaign,” said Andrew McIver of Southern Interior Solutions, which donated the traveling sofa in 2021



Representatives of Southern Interior Solutions present a check to St. Tammany Hospital Foundation as a sponsor of the 2022 Red Sofa Campaign, a social media-driven initiative intended to encourage local residents to keep heart disease and stroke awareness at the forefront of their day-to-day lives. (STHF photo)

and serves as presenting sponsor of the 2022 campaign. “Over 300 screenings completed by bringing awareness to Heart Health Month makes us proud to be a small part of the effort. Any opportunity for early screening across the Northshore is a win for us all.” ■

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The most conspicuous group of STHS volunteers, however, are the 63 members of the St. Tammany Hospital Guild, a group founded in 1955 to support the caring work of the hospital's frontline care providers daily.

“They do everything and in nearly every part of the hospital,” STHS Volunteer Coordinator Shirley Primes said. “We are truly blessed to live in a community in which such generosity is valued — and at St. Tammany Health System, we definitely value all our volunteers.” ■

Learn more about STHS volunteer opportunities at StTammany.health/Volunteer. Those interested in donating four hours one day a week can also contact STHS Volunteer Coordinator Shirley T. Primes at (985) 898-4008 or sprimes@stph.org. For volunteer opportunities with St. Tammany Hospital Foundation, contact Doug Walker at (985) 898-4174.



Members of the St. Tammany Hospital Guild in February presented hospital and foundation leadership with their annual donation, this year in the amount of \$41,000, generated by sales at the hospital's guild-run gift shop. The gift brings the guild's cumulative giving to the foundation to \$416,600. (STH Foundation photo)

A man on a mission

Outgoing STHF Board member Rock Kendrick isn't done yet

By Mike Scott, mscott@stph.org

Rock Kendrick won't stop.

The nine-year member of the St. Tammany Hospital Foundation's Board of Trustees left the board at the end of 2021, having served his limit of three three-year terms, including as board chairman in 2016 and '17. But he's not done yet.

Not by a long shot.

"Anyone who spends five minutes with Rock can see his passion for healthcare and St. Tammany Health System," outgoing Board Chairman Will Trist said of Mr. Kendrick's time on the board. "It was an honor and privilege to serve with him. His impact on our foundation has been awesome to witness."

But while others might be content to hang it up and slow things down, there's too much the longtime respiratory therapist still has to do – more people he wants to help heal.

"Quality healthcare directly benefits the overall wellbeing of the residents as well as helping to influence economic and community development," he said. "To a great extent, I believe it is important and an obligation to invest in one's community hospital because the impact on healthcare affects each of us and requires a collaborative effort."

While he said he will continue to support the mission of the foundation, he also hopes to continue his service to others through his other passion: going on medical missions to such places as Guatemala, India, Haiti and Uganda through his home church, First Baptist Church of Covington.

Since 2001, Mr. Kendrick has taken dozens of such trips, serving as a team leader to help provide medical and dental care, malnutrition treatment and vocational training to the people living there. He's already planning his next one, a return trip to Uganda.

"Uganda ignited a passion and calling for a vulnerable population devastated by civil war and the AIDS epidemic," Mr. Kendrick said. "Millions of children



ABOVE: Former St. Tammany Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees member Rock Kendrick performs a checkup on a child during a medical mission to Uganda. BELOW: Ugandan children line up for a meal served as part of one of the medical missions Kendrick attended through his home church, First Baptist Church's of Covington. (Photos provided by Rock Kendrick)



were left orphaned, destitute and struggling to survive ... with no hope for the future. We serve to help transform lives and communities for Christ by providing medical care. "

It's all really an extension of the same passion for healthcare that saw him serve on the St. Tammany Hospital Foundation board over the past decade.

Asked which of the foundation's programs he's most proud of, he singled out two.

The first is the Little Grant, Big Impact program, which provides funding for

small projects identified directly by care providers at St. Tammany Health System that might otherwise fall through the cracks.

The other project holding a special place in the heart of the Marine Corps veteran is the Honor Red, White and Blue program, which recognizes military veterans at the time of their admission to STHS's Covington hospital on through to their time of discharge – including a solemn, closely choreographed ceremony in the event of the death of a patient who is also a veteran.

"Here in St. Tammany Parish and the surrounding areas, we are privileged to have an award-winning, world-class hospital," Mr. Kendrick said. "So, because of the impact STHS has on our community it is an honor to help contribute to the mission and vision of the foundation.

He continued: "I believe each of us has a servant heart. Although my tenure with the Board of Trustees has come to an end, I will continue to shout out the mission of St. Tammany Hospital Foundation but hope to continue serving others through my church's foreign missions and wherever God leads me." ■

A simple question

‘Why St. Tammany Health System?’ Glad you asked ...



STHF Executive Director Nicole Suhre

“It is our duty to share why we believe individual, business and community leader investment is essential in the success of a thriving and growing healthcare system.”

Recently I was asked, “Why should the community donate to St. Tammany Health System?”

I have to admit at being taken aback by the question. Not because it wasn’t a perfectly appropriate one but because it stumped me. When you are deeply ingrained in an organization, and for me that is 16 years, sometimes you forget to look at things from the outside in. The job of the Board of Trustees and staff of St. Tammany Hospital Foundation is to solicit and provide philanthropic support for the healing work of the health system we serve. We do this day in and day out without question because we believe in the work we do. But are we also focused enough in reminding the community members that support us why they should believe in it, too?

Being asked “why” reminded me that it is also our job to tell our story, every day. It is our duty to share why we believe individual, business and community leader investment is essential in the success of a thriving and growing healthcare system. If the “why” isn’t immediately evident, then we have more work to do!

I shared with each of you that our foundation embarked on a strategic planning journey last year. This year we will begin sharing what we have learned and implementing the steps of that plan to help our foundation support the work of our health system at the next level. It is our commitment to the community members who make our work possible to articulate our mission and your role in it.

It is the longstanding belief of St. Tammany Hospital Foundation that keeping St. Tammany Health System healthy keeps our community healthy, and we sincerely thank each and every one of you for your support of our mission, for the trust you place in our work and for your unwavering commitment to world-class healthcare for our Northshore community.

2022 is already shaping up to be a great one for our organization! Our board and team are excited about the numerous initiatives STHS has asked for our support on, and we are committed to providing new avenues of involvement for our donors to make a meaningful impact.

Thank you for challenging us to always answer the “why” in every request we make and story we tell. Together as partners, we will continue to make a difference in healthcare for years to come.

Sincerely,

Nicole Suhre, CFRE
STHF executive director

Foundation Calendar Save the dates!



World Autism Month April 1-30, 2022

St. Tammany Health System is again recognizing World Autism Month in an effort to increase understanding and acceptance. Proceeds raised by the foundation as part of the campaign will support the health system’s efforts to better care for those with autism in our community.

Details: STHfoundation.org/Autism

Get Lucky! Golf Tournament April 28, 2022

Join St. Tammany Hospital Foundation on the links at Beau Chene COUNTRY Club in Mandeville for the 11th annual Get Lucky! Golf Tournament presented by Refreshment Solutions, held to raise money to support the healing work of St. Tammany Health System. Event includes food and drink on the course, as well as a fully catered golfer afterparty.

Details: STHfoundation.org/GolfTournament

GiveNOLA Day May 3, 2022

The local day of giving returns. This year, funds raised through it for St. Tammany Hospital Foundation will support the St. Tammany Parenting Center and STHS’s Pediatric Rehab department as they provide proper fitting and installation of specialized car seats to children with disabilities and/or special medical needs.

Details: GiveNOLA.org/SupportSTPH



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