



# Heart to Heart

A publication of St. Tammany Health System



## Handled with care

STHS's tiniest patients get fancy new digs as new NICU opens

Plans for new surgery center announced, p. 7  
Health system spotlights its 'Unsung Heroes,' p. 8  
Longtime Folsom physicians retire, p. 10  
Meet the foundation's new board members, p. 11

AMERICA'S TOP 100 HOSPITALS



# MANY REASONS

What was founded in 1954 as a small, rural hospital has grown to become a regional health system with talented and experienced specialists, world-class technology and all the accolades that go with it. This year alone, St. Tammany Health System has received a raft of recognitions, including Women's Choice Awards for cancer care, breast care, heart care, stroke care, orthopedics, minimally invasive surgery and obstetrics. What's more, we're the only hospital in the Greater New Orleans area to receive a five-star rating from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

MANY stars. MANY innovations. MANY reasons to choose St. Tammany.



**St. Tammany**<sup>SM</sup>  
HEALTH SYSTEM

WORLD-CLASS HEALTHCARE. CLOSE TO HOME

\*Among the Best 100 Hospitals for Patient Experience in 2021 for medium-sized hospitals, as ranked by Women's Choice Award.



**MISSION**

We are the heartbeat of our community, caring for our patients and their families with excellence, compassion and teamwork.

**VISION**

We will strengthen the health of our community with compassion, innovation and partnership.

**VALUES**

Teamwork. Trust. Compassion. Quality. Innovation.

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

- John A. Evans, Chairman
- James L. Core, Vice Chairman
- Thomas D. Davis, Secretary-Treasurer
- Wilson D. Bullock III
- Edgar J. Dillard CPA
- Merrill Laurent MD
- Sue Osbon PhD

**EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP**

- Joan M. Coffman FACHE, President & CEO
- Sharon Toups FACHE, SVP/Chief Operating Officer
- Kerry Milton BSN RN MSHA, SVP/Chief Nursing Officer
- Patrick J. Torcson MD MMM, SVP/Chief Medical Officer
- Sandra DiPietro MBA, SVP/Chief Financial Officer
- Carolyn Adema SPHR, SVP/Human Resources
- Margaret Collett RN JD, VP/Chief Compliance Officer
- Craig Doyle, VP/Chief Information Officer
- Michael K. Hill MD, VP/ Quality and Utilization Management
- Jack Khashou M.ED MS, VP/St. Tammany Quality Network

STHS complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability or sex. STHS does not exclude people or treat them differently because of race, color, national origin, age, disability or sex. STHS provides free aids and services to people with disabilities to communicate effectively with us. If you need these services, contact the Patient Relations Department at 985-898-4669.

**St. Tammany Health System**  
(985) 898-4000 | StTammany.health  
1202 S. Tyler St., Covington, LA 70433



**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

- Liz Healy, Chairman
- Kevin Gardner, Vice Chairman
- Darci Senner, Secretary-Treasurer
- Laura Brown
- Joan Coffman, FACHE
- Penny Dastugue
- Paul Davis
- Chip Lavigne
- Mary Lee
- Timothy A. Lentz
- Renee Maloney
- Sunny R. McDaniel, DNP, APRN
- Becky Carson Parks
- Norma Richard
- William P. Trist
- James Woodard MD

**St. Tammany Hospital Foundation**  
(985) 898-4171 | STHFoundation.org

Heart to Heart magazine is a quarterly publication of St. Tammany Health System  
Vol. 18, No. 1; Winter 2022

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



# Gratefully Yours

## Welcoming 2022 with compassion, innovation and partnership



Joan Coffman, FACHE

**“ We are carrying forward into this new year our longstanding commitment to strengthen the health of our community with compassion, innovation and partnership.”**

With the new year comes the promise of new opportunities, new successes and new innovations.

At St. Tammany Health System, we are carrying forward into this new year our longstanding commitment to strengthen the health of our community with compassion, innovation and partnership.

Compassion is the core of who we are and how we go about the business of care. Innovation is the engine that drives us into the future and keeps us out on the forefront of medicine. Partnership is the key to successfully engaging our medical community in improving the overall health of our Northshore community.

This issue of Heart to Heart carries that vision into your home. I hope you enjoy reading about our unsung heroes, our workforce strategy, community outreach and exciting innovations in care.

We are the heartbeat of our community, caring for our patients with excellence, compassion and teamwork, and everything you see in this issue is part and parcel of that mission for you and your family.

Gratefully,



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



### BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

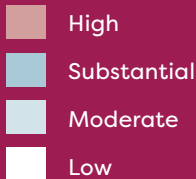
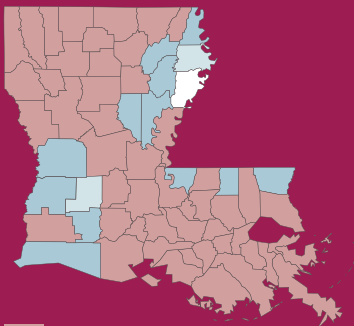
STHS President and CEO Joan Coffman, center left, and Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton, center right, meet with members of the all-volunteer St. Tammany Hospital Guild and the five recipients of the guild's fall 2021 staff scholarships. The scholarships, funded partly through sales from the guild-run gift shop in the hospital lobby, are issued twice annually and are worth \$1,500 each. (Photo by Mike Scott / STHS)

# OMICRON UP CLOSE

Information on the omicron variant  
of COVID-19, as of Jan. 1, 2021.

## LOUISIANA OUTLOOK

The shaded parishes below indicate the community risk of COVID infection on the state's four-point scale.



## 7-DAY COVID POSITIVITY RATE

St. Tammany Parish: 23.08%  
Washington Parish: 14.62%  
Tangipahoa Parish: 8.03%  
Orleans Parish: 24.18%  
Jefferson Parish: 25.74%

## VACCINATION RATES

St. Tammany Parish: 54.1%  
Washington Parish: 39.6%  
Tangipahoa Parish: 43.7%  
Orleans Parish: 65.5%  
Jefferson Parish: 61.8%

# 77%

of patients hospitalized for  
COVID-19 in Louisiana who have  
not been vaccinated, as of Jan. 3.

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

# Omicron has arrived

What you need to know about the latest COVID-19 variant

By Mike Scott, [mScott@stph.org](mailto:mScott@stph.org)

Well, they're certainly not the kind of headlines any of us wanted to see going into the new year:

"Weekly COVID hospitalizations in Louisiana more than double as omicron surges."

"Louisiana tops 1,000 COVID-19 hospitalizations."

"Omicron cases continue to climb."

That being said, experts are learning more about the omicron variant of COVID-19 with each passing day. That being the case, we sat down with Dr. Mike Hill, St. Tammany Health System's infectious disease guru, to find out what we need to know about omicron.

## HERE'S WHAT WE LEARNED:

### How easily does omicron spread?

Very. Based on data collected so far, experts say the omicron variant appears to spread much more easily than previous COVID-19 variants, although they stress that they are still collecting information. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suspects those with omicron can spread the virus to others even if they are vaccinated or have no symptoms.

### Will omicron cause more severe illness?

Again, it's still early days. Omicron was only first detected around Thanksgiving and was first found in the United States in early December. That being the case, further study is needed to know for sure if omicron infections, and especially reinfections and breakthrough infections in the fully vaccinated, cause more severe illness or death than infection with other variants.

### Do vaccines work against omicron?

Early data suggests vaccines are at least slightly less effective at stopping omicron. But, as with previous variants, early indications are that vaccines do, indeed, protect against severe illness, hospitalizations and deaths resulting from omicron. If nothing else, the emergence of omicron further emphasizes the importance of vaccination and boosters.



Although vaccines don't appear to be quite as effective against the new omicron variant of COVID-19 as they were against previous variants, experts say those who are fully vaccinated — including receiving a booster shot — are less likely than the unvaccinated to contract it and even less likely to contact a case serious enough to warrant hospitalization. (Photo by Tim San Filippo / STHS)

### Will treatments work against omicron?

Scientists are working to determine how well existing treatments for COVID-19 work. Based on the changed genetic make-up of omicron, some treatments are likely to remain effective while others — such as some monoclonal antibody treatments — are less effective.

### How can I protect myself from omicron?

Get the vaccine. Get the vaccine. Get the vaccine. And if you've already gotten the vaccine, get your booster. It's really as simple as that. Not only are vaccines the best protection we have against severe COVID-19 infections, but with every person who gets vaccinated, the likelihood of new variants emerging are reduced.

Also, remember that mask-wearing remains an easy and effective line of defense against all variants, especially in indoor settings. Good hand hygiene is another tried-and-true way to protect yourself.

We've got the tools to beat back this latest variant. We've just all got to commit to beating it together. ■



Members of a new paid apprenticeship program at St. Tammany Health System are tested on their knowledge of various medical instruments as part of their training to become full-time Sterile Processing specialists at the Covington hospital. (Photo by Michelle Milner / STHS)

# STHS apprenticeship program launches six new careers

By Mike Scott, [mscott@stph.org](mailto:mscott@stph.org)

One had been working in food service. Another worked in retail. And thanks to a new apprenticeship program at St. Tammany Health System, they and four others are now part of the health system's surgical team.

Those six new hires made up the first class of an STHS program aimed at training entry-level job candidates to become Sterile Processing specialists. By the end of their paid apprenticeship, which lasted 12 to 16 weeks and was conducted entirely in-house, they were invited to join the hospital's surgical peri-operative team, identifying and sterilizing the necessary medical instruments for the Surgery Department and other procedural areas.

According to STHS Director of Sterile Processing Michelle Milner, who championed and implemented the program with AVP-Surgical Services Nancy Ledet, it is a unique one.

Usually, Milner said, incoming Sterile Processing specialists are paired with an experienced tech to learn the ropes. The new STHS program, however, also trains them in basic medical terminology and basic anatomy, in addition to instrument identification and sterilization techniques.

That includes dedicated classroom time with hands-on access to

instruments – something not available in online training courses – as well as instruction from the International Association of Healthcare Central Service Materiel Management textbook and workbook.

“Additionally, the apprentices will rotate through all specialties in the Operating Room to observe cases so they can better understand the impact their roles have on overall patient care,” Milner said.

Upon completion of training, successful candidates are promoted to the position of Sterile Processing specialist and receive a year to obtain their professional certification, although Milner said the STHS program is designed to set them up for success – and even advancement in the health system if they choose to pursue that route.

“Our hope is that this program will act as a pipeline to feed interest in other opportunities throughout the organization,” Milner said. “This entry-level position may spark interest that prompts them to pursue other careers such as surgical techs, radiology techs and nurses.” ■

Learn more about STHS's Sterile Processing specialist program, and how you can become a part of it, by visiting [StTammany.health/careers](https://StTammany.health/careers), clicking “job openings” and searching for “sterile processing.”

# STAT!

Quick hits from the STHS newsroom

For the 12th consecutive grading period, St. Tammany Health System received an **A for patient safety** from the independent watchdog the Leapfrog Group. ... STHS's standalone Emergency Department in Mandeville received Press Ganey's 2021 **Guardian of Excellence Award** for placing in the 95th percentile or above for patient experience. ... The health system's **Coumadin Clinic** has been recognized by the Anticoagulation Forum for its commitment to providing the highest level of care to patients taking antithrombotic medications. ... Seven STHS physicians were named to Louisiana Life magazine's 2021 list of the state's top doctors: surgeon **Dr. Jacob Daigle**, pediatrician **Dr. Robert Faucheux**, family medicine practitioner **Dr. Mark James**, pediatrician **Dr. Linda Keefer**, family medicine practitioner **Dr. Nathalie Kerkow**, pediatric orthopedist **Dr. McCall McDaniel** and cardiologist **Dr. Paul Stahls III**. ... Congratulations to St. Tammany Quality Network Business Development Manager **Erin Strain**, who was named to Edge of the Lake magazine's "40 Under 40" list for 2021. ... STHS said goodbye this past spring to a number of longtime colleagues. Among them: AVP-Support Services **Mike Portie** (37 years) ... CRNA **Steve Zorilla** (23 years) ... Director of Patient Financial Services **Elizabeth O'Daniell** (21 years) ... Mammography Tech **Agabita Rowe** (20 years) ... and **Drs. Libeau Berthelot** and **Mark James** (17 years each). Heartfelt thanks and congratulations to all!



LEFT: Dr. Kristine Chimento, the medical director of St. Tammany Health System's 14-bed Level III Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, leads a second-line from the old NICU to the expanded NICU space in the health system's new patient tower. BELOW: A vacant neonatal isolette awaits its new occupant as staff members second-line through the health system's new NICU. (Photos by Mike Scott / STHS)



# Oh, baby!

## STHS opens new neonatal ICU with a second-line

By Mike Scott, [mScott@stph.org](mailto:mScott@stph.org)

In October, St. Tammany Health System's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit made the long-awaited move to the hospital's four-story new patient tower, and the health system's doctors and nurses relocated to their roomier new digs in true South Louisiana style: with a second-line.

Led by Dr. Kristine Chimento, the medical director of the 14-bed, Level III NICU, the celebration featured incubators in lieu of live musicians, stethoscopes in place of feather boas and scrubs instead of to-the-nines parade wear.

Those substitutions aside, it was still an unmistakable celebration, with a jazz soundtrack providing a backbeat and second-liners waving pink and blue hankies as they made their way to the new NICU.

According to Suzanne Fraiche, director of pediatrics for the health system's Women and Children's Services, the celebration was entirely warranted, especially given

how quickly western St. Tammany's population continues to grow.

"We are seeing the growth, and those babies are coming to us," Fraiche said.

The new NICU is the latest portion of the health system's recently completed four-story new patient tower to come online. While it boasts the same number of beds as the previous NICU, it encompasses significantly more space, which will mean, among other things, more comfort for the families of babies there.

It also includes additional space for expansion of the unit should that become necessary.

"My comment just now was, 'We are jazzed to be in this new NICU,' which works so well with that second-line concept," Dr. Chimento said. "I really enjoyed it, because I've been waiting so patiently for the day that we were able to move in here and provide more space, more comfort but also more care for these babies."

**"That means so much for a family, to be close to their babies while they're getting this care."**

- Dr. Kristine Chimento, STHS NICU medical director

Dr. Chimento said that with recent investments in technology and the addition of more pediatric specialists over the past few years at St. Tammany Health System, fewer babies will require transport to other facilities in the region to receive the care they need.

"That means so much for a family, to be close to their babies while they're getting this care," Dr. Chimento said.

She added: "This neonatal ICU, with its larger space, definitely gives us the ability to take great care of these patients and continue providing the world-class healthcare close to home that we've been providing." ■

# \$6M workforce investment unveiled

By Melissa Hodgson, [mhodgson@stph.org](mailto:mhodgson@stph.org)

The St. Tammany Health System Board of Commissioners in November approved a \$6 million workforce strategy, called Invested in You, aimed at retaining the exceptional workforce for which it is known and as COVID-19 workforce impacts are affecting employers locally, regionally and nationally.

“As a board, we hear from our community all the time that St. Tammany is different from other health systems,” Board Chairman John Evans said. “When people say they feel special, like family, that comes from how they are treated in our hospital. We have to do what it takes to make sure this workforce feels supported and valued. That’s what Invested in You means.”

The Invested in You campaign will include targeted incentives and salary adjustments to keep market-sensitive job classifications competitive, particularly in relation to travel and agency offers designed to entice highly skilled and valued employees away from established employers such as STHS.

The health system leaders also committed to educational programs

that will help STHS colleagues further their careers long-term and enable STHS to grow the next generation of care providers. Programs in this part of the Invested in You campaign will foster career pathways for CNAs, sterile processing, RN residents, RN to BSN programs and other educational support and assistance designed to ensure dedicated, trained STHS professionals for years to come.

“If we are true to our culture of excellence, we are Invested in You, as the campaign says,” STHS President and CEO Joan M. Coffman said. “This commitment to our most valuable assets, our colleagues, is our way of ensuring the people who make St. Tammany special, the colleagues who embody our values, remain with us long-term.”

With 2,500 colleagues, St. Tammany Health System is the city of Covington’s largest employer and St. Tammany Parish’s second-largest employer. Healthcare is the second-largest private employment sector in St. Tammany Parish, according to data from St. Tammany Corp., impacting the local economy daily.



“This commitment to our most valuable assets, our colleagues, is our way of ensuring the people who make St. Tammany special, the colleagues who embody our values, remain with us long-term,” St. Tammany Health System President and CEO Joan Coffman said of the recently announced Invested in You campaign. (Photo by Mike Scott / STHS)

The board decision comes as a result of analysis of local workforce data, compensation rates and recognition that colleagues at every level have direct impact on hospital quality, safety and patient experience. STHS was honored for world-class performance in all three measures in 2021 by national organizations including US News & World Report, CareChex, Leapfrog and Healthgrades. ■

## New STHS surgery center planned for Bootlegger Road

By Melissa Hodgson, [mhodgson@stph.org](mailto:mhodgson@stph.org)

This fall, St. Tammany Health System Board of Commissioners approved plans to develop a \$75 million surgical center adjacent to the Paul D. Cordes Outpatient Pavilion at 16300 Highway 1085 (Bootlegger Road), south of Covington.

Site work will begin in first quarter 2022, with completion expected in summer 2023.

“A comprehensive surgical center adjacent to the Cordes Pavilion has been a strategic goal for us for a long time, as technology brings more surgery to the one-day arena,” STHS President/CEO Joan Coffman said. “As the COVID-19 pandemic changes how we deliver care,

we are taking bold steps to develop environments that support our patients’ needs and deliver the world-class care they know and trust.”

Advancements in technology and recruitment of highly skilled specialists at St. Tammany Health System and its partner Ochsner Health have increased the number of surgeries that can be done in a 23-hour stay.

“While day procedures can be performed at main campus, it’s more convenient to patients and more efficient for operations to move those types of procedures to a surgery center and maintain the main campus

operating rooms for highly advanced surgeries,” Coffman added.

The new center will host 12 surgery suites, supporting departments and services including pre-operative and post-operative care, overnight stay beds, surgical sterilization, imaging, lab, pharmacy, rehabilitation, food service and environmental services.

Clinical capabilities planned for the center and scope of the project are being developed according to national best practices for high reliability, efficiency and safety for patients, STHS team members, visitors and vendors. ■

# UNSUNG HEROES

Shining a light on St. Tammany Health System colleagues who are quietly making a difference every day.

By Mike Scott, [mscott@stph.org](mailto:mscott@stph.org)

## Meet Linh Schmelling, STHS's room service superstar

Linh Schmelling doesn't like the spotlight. She's not a fan of cameras. None of that is why she does what she does.

Rather, the longtime room service specialist in St. Tammany Health System's Food and Nutrition Services Department does it for a much more selfless reason.

"The patients," the self-described "people person" said when asked what motivates her every day. "They make any day special."

Anyone who has ever stayed at the health system's Covington hospital has probably spoken with Linh at some point. Hers is one of the cheerful voices that answers the phone – hundreds of times every day – when someone calls for room service dining.

Of course, given that it's a hospital, she does more than simply enter meal orders. She makes menu suggestions based on a patient's diet order. She also does what she can to lift spirits.

And when she's not staffing the phones, she's doing last-minute checks on patients' meal orders right before they're sent up to their room, just to make sure any special needs have been properly addressed.

"Linh is what I consider a core colleague," STHS's Director of Food and Nutrition Services Joanna Wilbanks said. "She has that special skill set and dedication that's essential to operations and growth of the department. We can always count on her to be there for us and with us, whatever we need.

"She treats everyone like they're her only patient. You should hear her on the phone," Wilbanks added. "She gets really excited for patients when they tell her they are going home. She always follows up with 'Thank you for choosing St. Tammany Health System.'"

Linh smiles when she hears that kind of talk. "It's a wonderful team to work with, to be a part of," she said.

She doesn't linger on it, though. There are phones to be answered. Orders to be filled.

"Room Service Dining, this is Linh. How may I help you?" ■



When she's not staffing the phones, St. Tammany Health System Room Service Specialist Linh Schmelling is doing last-minute checks on patients' orders right before they're sent up to their room, just to make sure any special needs have been properly addressed. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

**"She treats everyone like they're her only patient. You should hear her on the phone. She gets really excited for patients when they tell her they are going home. She always follows up with 'Thank you for choosing St. Tammany Health System.'"**

– Joanna Wilbanks, STHS director of Food and Nutrition Services

**DID YOU KNOW** that, with more than 2,500 employees, St. Tammany Health System is the largest employer in Covington and the second-largest in St. Tammany Parish? Visit [StTammany.health/careers](http://StTammany.health/careers) to learn how you can join the team.





Although technically a member of St. Tammany Health System's Environmental Services team, Miranda Ard takes pride in lending a hand however she can at the health system's Covington hospital. "I don't think, 'Oh, that's a nurses job,'" she said. "We work as a team. If I can assist them in any way, I will." (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

## Meet Miranda Ard, STHS's 'clean machine'

There's a word for people like Miranda Ard. Two of them actually. "Miranda is a clean machine," said David Synakiewicz, director of Environmental Services at St. Tammany Health System's Covington hospital. "That's the best way to describe her. If I could clone her, I would."

Miranda, who has been putting her obsession with cleanliness to work at the health system for more than two years, smiled upon hearing that.

"I've been told that before, actually," she said with a soft laugh. "The most fulfilling thing about my job is cleanliness. I love to clean, even at home. I'm pretty much OCD."

That unflinching cleanliness sometimes prompts rolled eyes from the Franklinton resident's five children. ("My kids tell me, 'There's nothing wrong with this house, Mama! I'm like, 'Yeah, but I'm going to reclean it anyway.'") At work, though, it makes her a superstar.

As she mops the floor of the hospital's newly expanded Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, or NICU, the nurses there greet her by name, part of what makes it one of her favorite places in the hospital. (That and the babies, of course.)

She also takes pride in cleaning the operating room where C-sections are done — and the idea that she gets to welcome new babies into the world by ensuring the room in which they're born is clean, disinfected and safe.

When she's not doing that, she's cleaning the public areas of the hospital, including the hallways and lobby area of the hospital's New Family Center. "That's the first thing people see when they come in," Miranda said.

With so much ground to cover, she, like others in the EVS Department, doesn't have much time to rest. But she's not complaining.

"I had been trying to get on at St. Tammany for years," she said, adding, "I wanted a change and a little bit more stability."

She rubs her fingers together while making that last point, a wordless acknowledgment of the hospital's newly announced restructuring of pay for workers in certain departments, including EVS.

But pay isn't everything.

"You get told how appreciated you are," she said.

"St. Tammany really is a nice place to work." ■



PBX Operator Ashia Rogers isn't just an employee at St. Tammany Health System. She's also one of its biggest fans. 'I actually have always wanted to work here,' she said. 'My family has always chosen St. Tammany. They'll pass up anywhere to get here. We love it.' (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

## Meet Ashia Rogers, STHS's queen of cool

Ashia Rogers is cool. Like, cucumber cool. Other-side-of-the-pillow cool. Fonzie cool.

And while that's a good characteristic in almost any situation, it makes the Bedico resident, particularly well-suited for her job as one of St. Tammany Health System's PBX operators, the people behind the soothing first voices heard by often-anxious callers.

"Especially if they're calling for somebody in the emergency room, you have to realize some people are in a stressful situation," Ashia said. "You just try to keep them calm, try to be courteous and just understand they're going through a rough time. They might snap at you; it's not your fault. You do have to keep that in mind."

But even if the chief duty of the PBX team is answering the main phone line — and making a good first impression in the process — it's by no means all they do.

The nine-person PBX team, which staffs the phones 24/7, are more like air-traffic controllers.

In addition to answering the "code" phone and issuing the requisite alerts over the whole-hospital intercom (yes, Ashia admits to practicing her voice-of-God delivery at home), they also monitor fire and other alarms, answer basic IT calls from colleagues and generally act as information central.

"We're just all-knowing, all-transferring," Ashia said with a laugh.

Truth be told, she's well-practiced in keeping cool while dealing with people. Before joining the PBX team in mid-2021, she worked for three years in the health system's Patient Relations Department, which also required a certain level-headedness.

On top of that, Lead PBX Operator Celita Hart said, Ashia is as dependable as they come.

"Ashia adjusted her schedule for her co-workers to have Thanksgiving off to spend with their families," Hart said. "She also agreed to work Christmas Eve night and the full shift Christmas Day. She's the epitome of a team player."

Ashia shrugs off such praise. She's happy to do it, and for the same reason she gives when asked why she enjoys working at St. Tammany.

"The people," she said. "It's a family here. You feel it. The people here really make it a nice place to work." ■

# The doctors are out

Longtime Folsom physicians Dr. Mark James and Dr. Libeau Berthelot announce retirements

By Mike Scott, [msscott@stph.org](mailto:msscott@stph.org)

It was 1984, and two young physicians – Drs. Libeau Berthelot and Mark James – began working together, serving the needs of rural Northshore residents as partners in Dr. Gerald Foret’s family medical practice in Franklinton.

In December, the two old friends and business partners are going out the same way they practiced for those 37 years: together.

“To work with the excellent physicians at St. Tammany Health System – I’ve really been honored to do that,” Dr. Berthelot said at a recent sendoff at the Folsom clinic at which he and Dr. James have been working since it was relocated from Franklinton six years ago. “It’s been a really good ride, and I’m going to miss it.”



Dr. Mark James, left, and Dr. Libeau Berthelot of St. Tammany Physicians Network’s Folsom clinic share a smile over red velvet cake and conversation at their joint retirement celebration in December 2021. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

The feeling, by all accounts, is mutual. “These two guys are also role models and mentors to a generation of physicians, including myself,” St. Tammany Health System Chief Medical Officer Dr. Patrick Torcson said. “We are deeply honored to have had you as members of our team and for all you’ve done for this community in St. Tammany and Washington parishes.”

Among those joining Torcson were Dr. Gerald Foret, the retired founder of

the practice who welcomed Drs. Berthelot and James into the fold so many years ago; and his son, Dr. Chris Foret, who has practiced alongside them – and who will continue to practice out of the office they’ve all shared.

“You guys have been so much more than people in an office,” the younger Dr. Foret said. “You have been mentors and friends, and I love you both. And, I’m telling you, it’s not ‘goodbye.’ It’s ‘see you later.’”

As for how they will spend their retirement, Dr. Berthelot said he intends to spend more quality time with his eight grandchildren, including a planned family trip to Walt Disney World.

Dr. James also plans on traveling, first for a couple of weeks of hunting, and then hitting the road to visit family members in Georgia, Alaska, Australia and Italy.

“The only thing we have to figure out is which one to visit first,” Dr. James said.

Wherever they wander, both also said a part of their hearts will remain with their old team in Folsom, and they promised not to be strangers.

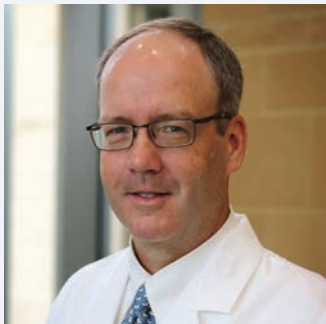
“You’re the best,” Dr. James said. “It’s truly been an honor and privilege to work with you all.” ■

# The doctors (and nurse practitioners) are in

By STHS Communication Department

Retiring physicians Dr. Mark James and Dr. Libeau Berthelot have undoubtedly left behind some big shoes to fill at the St. Tammany Physicians Network family medical clinic in Folsom. But, rest assured, a solid succession plan is in place.

Here’s a peek at the Folsom clinic’s medical staff as of Jan. 1, 2022.



**DR. CHRIS FORET**

Dr. Foret is the son of the practice’s founder, retired physician Dr. Gerald Foret, and has been practicing family medicine in Folsom alongside Drs. James and Berthelot for years. Like them, Dr. Foret joined St. Tammany Health System in 2004.



**PATRICK WAINWRIGHT, APRN**

Patrick, a nurse practitioner who joined St. Tammany Health System in 2016, is a U.S. Navy veteran who has also been working alongside Dr. James and Dr. Berthelot in Folsom.



**DR. ROBERT BRINKMAN II**

An employee of St. Tammany Health System since 1998, Dr. Brinkman is now splitting his time between the St. Tammany Physicians Network offices in Covington and Folsom.



**LAURA READ, APRN**

A nurse practitioner with St. Tammany Health System since 2015, Laura will be making the move from the STPN clinic in Mandeville to join the Folsom team.

# Now boarding

By Mike Scott, [mscott@stph.org](mailto:mscott@stph.org)

## Meet the five newest members of the St. Tammany Hospital Foundation Board

With the arrival of the new year, St. Tammany Hospital Foundation is getting a new-look Board of Trustees.

For starters, Rock Kendrick's nine-year stint on the board is coming to a close. In addition, though, five new members will be joining, boosting the body's size to 17 members.

"Two years ago, our board made the decision not to grow in numbers, as our tight-knit, hard-working group worked to meet the challenges of fundraising in a pandemic and began work

with a consultant to create a strategic plan for our foundation," said Nicole Suhre, the foundation's executive director.

"As we looked forward to 2022, we knew this was the right time to increase our numbers and bring on a dynamic group of community leaders to add value to our board. We are thrilled to have these talented and driven individuals work with us in our mission to support St. Tammany Health System."

Meet the board's new members below.

### Laura Brown

A 30-year resident of the Northshore and the mother of two children, Brown spent much of her "mommy" years volunteering in the parents clubs at her daughters' schools.



When the younger of those daughters recently packed her bags for LSU, the local real estate agent found herself looking for a new cause.

That's when Liz Healy, the foundation's vice chair, recruited Brown to consider joining the STHF mission. She did — and now she's eager to dive in and get to work.

"I'm happy to be here and work with everybody," Brown said. "The staff is so amazing. I'm looking forward to it."

### Penny Dastugue

As a resident of St. Tammany since 1975, Dastugue raised her children on the Northshore and still lives with her husband, Quentin, along Jahnke Avenue in Covington, "So we consider this hospital to be our neighbor," she said.



But, really, it's more than that. The former member of the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has been a patient at St. Tammany Health System, as has her brother.

"Most profound, my mother was a cancer patient here," Dastugue said. "The care was so extraordinary, the people were so great, I think that cemented my devotion to St. Tammany."

As a co-founder of the nonprofit Kickin' Parkinson's organization, she brings to

the table prior experience in the philanthropic and healthcare realms.

"I see St. Tammany as a powerful force in this community for healing and care," she said, "and I've always had a tremendous respect for it."

### Chip Lavigne

Chip Lavigne wears a lot of hats. The northshore native is president and owner of Lavigne Oil in Baton Rouge. He owns Blue Harbor Pointe service station in Mandeville.



He's an experienced property developer.

And now, he's a member of the St. Tammany Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees.

"I've been a donor to St. Tammany Hospital for many, many years," he said. "You've got to have great healthcare. You've got to take care of the people — and St. Tammany is a fixture, so I just wanted to get involved and give back to the community."

That being said, if he's got a particular area of interest, it's cancer care.

"I lost both my parents to cancer," Lavigne said. "So I've been contributing to cancer care for a long, long time. Cancer is a big key to me — and this is a great group of people."

### Tim Lentz

If the name Tim Lentz sounds familiar, that's for good reason. The former chief of the Covington Police Department and second-in-command at the St. Tammany



Sheriff's Office has been a prominent member of the local community for decades. But with his retirement from law enforcement, the Mandeville native felt like he had some gas left in the tank.

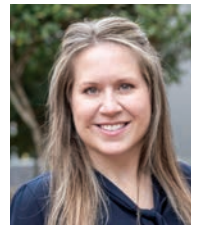
That's when he and his wife founded TASS Brain Injury Rehabilitation Center, which has locations in Ponchatoula, Crystal Springs and Covington.

That, of course, keeps him fairly busy, but not so busy that he doesn't have time to give back to the community.

"I grew up in this community," Lentz said. "This is home to me. And now I'm at a point in my life where I have time, I have the talent and it's time to give back. It's time to serve."

### Sunny McDaniel

Sunny McDaniel is no stranger to healthcare. She's a nurse practitioner who practices in Ponchatoula. She teaches at the Loyola University School of



Nursing. She's a certified autism specialist.

Even with all that, she somehow finds time to be mom to twin 8-year-olds and a 14-month-old — all boys. "They're great kids," she said. "I'm blessed."

She also sees a glaring local need, and that's a big part of why she's joined the foundation board.

"Particularly in our area, St. Tammany is among very few resources for individuals with autism, whether that's therapy, whether that's resources on how to enter the medical world," she said. "The standard of care doesn't change when you treat patients, but the approach might be different. ... And so my goal is to try to connect those worlds." ■



Four Unplugged provided live entertainment for THE Gala 2021, which was presented once more by HUB International. (Photos by Chuck Billiot for St. Tammany Hospital Foundation)

# DANCE FEVER

THE Gala 2021, themed “Step Into Your Dancing Shoes,” was held Nov. 4 at Tchefuncta Country Club – and it was, in a word, groovy.

Again presented by HUB International, the event – St. Tammany Hospital Foundation’s signature annual fundraiser – saw attendees donning their finest

disco duds and shaking their booties for a good cause.

By the end of the night, more than \$203,000 was raised for local cancer care, an event record.

And that’s something worth dancing about. ■



Jack Khashou, Cancer Center administrator, and Kevin Gardner, title sponsor, get into the spirit of the evening.



Foundation Board Members Mary Lee, Dr. Jim Woodard and Norma Richard with their spouses.



The night’s theme was ‘Step Into Your Dancing Shoes’ – and the dress code was, appropriately ‘disco chic.’

## FEELING LUCKY

St. Tammany Hospital Foundation celebrated its 10th annual Get Lucky! Golf Tournament recently, and despite a few late-in-the-day rain showers, they're feeling very lucky indeed about it. Presented by Refreshment Solutions, the tournament was held Thursday, Nov. 18, at Beau Chene Country Club in Mandeville. In addition to providing participants with a day of fun and fellowship, it raised \$62,000 – the most in the event's history to-date – to benefit the healing work of St. Tammany Health System. (Photo by Chuck Billiot)



## MONSTROUSLY FUN

Monsters big and small turned out in October for the 33rd annual Monster Mash presented by Metairie Bank Northshore, the local not-so-scary Halloween shindig thrown in Bogue Falaya Park. More than 2,500 people turned out to show off their costumes, explore the Monster Maze, play on inflatables and, of course, to load up in the Trick-or-Treat Village. In all, nearly \$90,000 was raised to support the work done at the St. Tammany Parenting Center. (Photo by Eric Suhre)

## ANGELS OF LIGHT

After going virtual last year in deference to the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Tammany Hospital Foundation's annual Angels of Light ceremony – held to benefit St. Tammany Hospice – reverted to an in-person event in December, featuring the lighting of the Tree of Life and a performance by the health system's employee choir. In addition to being adorned with hundreds of tribute angels purchased by the community, this year's tree was dedicated in loving memory of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Maloney Sr. by their family. (Photo by Chuck Billiot)



Visit [STHfoundation.org/News](https://www.sthfoundation.org/News) for more photos from these events and to read about other foundation happenings!

## Off and running

Just 6 months in, new cancer center transforming Northshore cancer care

By Mike Scott, [mscott@stph.org](mailto:mscott@stph.org)

It only just opened in June, but the new St. Tammany Cancer Center, a campus of Ochsner Medical Center, is already changing the way the Northshore receives its cancer care.

A joint venture of St. Tammany Health System and its partner Ochsner Health – and with St. Tammany Hospital Foundation serving as its chief philanthropic arm – the new cancer center was envisioned from its outset as a one-stop-shop for cancer care.

Even just six months in, it's delivering on that promise.

“The words they use around here a lot is ‘integrative cancer care,’ which is really just a fancy way of saying cancer patients here are able to get treatment – for the mind, body and spirit – in this one central location,” the foundation’s Jennifer Garrard said. “We’ve been just thrilled with the way the community has supported it.”

It all represents a dramatic change in the way cancer care previously was delivered locally.

Until now, patients often found themselves cobbling treatment together on their own, running from appointment to appointment at various locations to address different aspects of their care.

The new center’s integrative approach removes that burden, allowing patients to focus more on their treatment and recovery rather than logistical hurdles and schedule-juggling.

“That means a lot to them,” Garrard said. “And it really includes much more than traditional clinical therapies. Here, we talk about treating the whole person rather than just treating the tumor.”

What’s more, community donations have proven key to funding some of those services.



With support from community donations to St. Tammany Hospital Foundation, St. Tammany Cancer Center in November distributed 80 food boxes – all curated by the center’s dietitians to meet the special nutritional needs of cancer patients – to help cancer patients and their families celebrate a happy, and, more importantly, a healthy Thanksgiving. A similar food distribution event was held at the center around Christmastime. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo)

One prime example: the center’s onsite Therapeutic Food Pantry, staffed by nutritionists to address the special dietary needs of cancer patients.

Another program uses donations and grant funding to provide transportation assistance for financially disadvantaged patients to ensure they can get to their appointments – and thus get their treatments – in a timely manner.

“A lot of what we do at St. Tammany Hospital Foundation is focused on removing those sorts of barriers to care,” Garrard said.

Additionally, there’s an onsite wig boutique. There’s an acupuncturist. In the first quarter of 2022, the center plans to launch a series of therapeutic classes, including music therapy, art therapy, tai chi and yoga. Some will even be available virtually, for those patients who might not feel up to participating in-person.

Even the building itself reflects the whole-patient approach, with artwork from a variety of local artists adorning its walls as part of the foundation’s Healing Arts Initiative.



St. Tammany Parish Sheriff Randy Smith, left, presents a check for more than \$20,000 to St. Tammany Health System President and CEO Joan Coffman. The money, to be used for local cancer care, was raised as part of the United in Pink breast cancer awareness campaign conducted through the month of October. Pictured with Smith and Coffman are Rich Mauti of the Mauti Cancer Fund and Jack Khashou, administrator of St. Tammany Cancer Center, a campus of Ochsner Medical Center. (Photo by Mike Scott / STHS)

“Really, it’s about more than just treating the whole patient. We support the whole family,” Garrard said. “Through the generosity of our community, we can come in, rally around them and support the whole family through this cancer journey, from diagnosis through survivorship.” ■

For information on how you can **support cancer care** through St. Tammany Hospital Foundation, contact Jennifer Garrard at (985) 338-5328 or [kgarrard@stph.org](mailto:kgarrard@stph.org).

# New year, renewed strength

Together, we've proven we can handle whatever 2022 has in store



STHF Executive Director Nicole Suhre

**“I have to say, I see our St. Tammany Health System team and our community rising to those challenges with more resilience and grace than ever before.”**

Happy New Year!

In preparing for this personal message to each of you, I looked back to the thoughts I shared at the beginning of 2021. Back then, I opened by saying, “I don’t know about you, but I have never been more excited to see the arrival of a new year.” It is with some humor, that I once again echo this statement for 2022.

How much our world has changed in the past almost 24 months. While “challenging” has become a bit of a catch-all phrase for everything from our near post-pandemic world to the effects of Hurricane Ida, I have to say, I see our St. Tammany Health System team and our community rising to those challenges with more resilience and grace than ever before.

The past two years have made us strong and laser-focused on what is most important in our lives. I look forward to moving into 2022 with this attitude, ready to meet the challenges that may arise together.

This year, St. Tammany Hospital Foundation will share with much excitement ways that we can partner with our local businesses and individual supporters on new programs and initiatives of our health system. A state-of-the-art ambulatory surgery center, a journey to becoming a graduate medical education center, workforce development, patient support programs at our cancer center, the Be Well Bus and further main campus facility expansion – these are just some of the ways the health system is growing to meet the needs of the community, and we can’t wait to be part of it.

As you read in this issue, our foundation has welcomed five new members to our Board of Trustees. Together, with the existing board and new chairman, we look forward to also growing and evolving to meet the needs of our generous donor community.

We thank you for the generosity you showed us in 2021 and will continue to show as our partner in 2022.

Sincerely,

Nicole Suhre, CFRE  
STHF executive director

## Foundation Calendar Save the dates!



### Doctors Day March 30, 2022

National Doctors Day is a day to celebrate the contribution of physicians who serve our community by caring for its residents. St. Tammany Hospital Foundation’s Doctors Day program provides you the opportunity to make a donation to the foundation in honor of a physician of your choosing. Your gift is a meaningful way to say “thank you” for the exceptional, compassionate care provided by your physician.

**Details:** [sthfoundation.org/DoctorsDay](http://sthfoundation.org/DoctorsDay) or call Doug Walker at (985) 898-4174.

### Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month April 2022

The foundation invites the community to join us for the second annual Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month throughout the month of April as we shine a light on autism awareness and our support of pediatric patients in our community with autism. Proceeds raised through our awareness efforts will support St. Tammany Health System’s efforts to better care for those with autism in our community.

**Details:** [sthfoundation.org/goblue](http://sthfoundation.org/goblue) or call Melanie Rudolph at (985) 898-4141.

### Get Lucky! Golf Tournament Spring 2022 / date TBD

After being rescheduled to the fall the past two years out of COVID-19 concerns, our 11th annual golf tournament returns to the spring calendar for 2022. The date and location depend on COVID’s continued presence, but we know it’ll boast all the fun, fellowship and fundraising for which it has become known.

**Details:** [sthfoundation.org/golf](http://sthfoundation.org/golf) or call Melanie Rudolph at (985) 898-4141.



1202 S. Tyler St., Covington, LA 70433



**YOUR FUTURE STARTS NOW.**

World-Class Healthcare. Close to Home.



## Ready to reach new heights?

At St. Tammany Health System, we work hard to provide nothing less than world-class healthcare close to home for our neighbors on the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain. To deliver it, we are committed to attracting and retaining the very best professionals for every position in our health system.

Search STHS job openings and apply today.

[StTammany.health/Recruitment](https://StTammany.health/Recruitment)