

Vol 17: No 2 / Spring 2021



# Heart to Heart

A publication of St. Tammany Health System



## THE HOUSE THAT NURSES BUILT

How STHS caregivers  
helped design its new wing

Looking back on the year of COVID, p.4

Dr. Angela Buonagura comes home, p.6

New publication recounts STHS's storied history, p.10

Multiple STHS departments designated Certified Autism Centers, p.14

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# Gratefully Yours

## Moving from the winter of COVID to a season of optimism

Now that spring has sprung and vaccines are readily available to our residents, optimism is the key word at St. Tammany Health System.

Your community health system achieved significant goals last year despite the COVID-19 pandemic. We focused on ensuring the system expands to serve more patients as our population in west St. Tammany and surrounding areas continues to grow. Our new patient care addition is complete and opening this month to care for more patients on main campus.



Joan M. Coffman, FACHE

We continued to build on our commitment to our multidisciplinary comprehensive cancer program, adding a high-risk breast disease clinic. You'll see in this issue a welcome back to Dr. Angela Buonagura, breast surgeon, who has returned home after a decade away. Accredited by American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer and its National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers, St. Tammany Health System also is perennially recognized for its cancer care with the national Women's Choice Award and excited to be opening our new cancer center with Ochsner Health later this summer.

Earlier this spring, we took a moment March 12 to contemplate the diagnosis of our first COVID-19 patient one year before. We honored those who lost their lives in the pandemic, as we also celebrated and upheld our heroes who have worked tirelessly to save and improve the lives of all our patients, balancing the needs of COVID care with all the other reasons our patients come to see us for their best health.

Please enjoy this issue of Heart to Heart magazine, our opportunity to share with you the world-class healthcare we deliver here close to home.

Gratefully,



Joan Coffman, FACHE  
STHS President / CEO

## COVID-19 BY THE NUMBERS

Key COVID-19  
figures from  
March 10, 2020  
to April 1, 2021

**445,469**

The total number of  
COVID-positive or  
probable positive cases  
reported in Louisiana

**25,046**

The total number of  
COVID-positive or probable  
positive cases in all of  
St. Tammany Parish

**4,283**

The total number  
of COVID-positive or  
probable positive cases in  
Washington Parish

**19,798**

The total number of  
COVID-19 vaccines  
administered at  
STHS facilities

**2,877**

The number of COVID-19-  
positive cases, inpatient  
and outpatient, treated  
at STHS

**1,096**

The number of COVID-19  
inpatient cases discharged  
from the hospital

**6**

The total number of  
inpatients receiving COVID  
care at STHS on April 1, 2021

Sources: Louisiana Department  
of Health, St. Tammany  
Health System

St. Tammany Health System team members pause for a solemn ceremony to commemorate one year of COVID-19 in the community and to memorialize those lives lost during the pandemic. STHS's first COVID-positive case was confirmed on March 13, 2020. (Photo by Mike Scott / STHS)



# One Year of COVID-19

Looking back on 12 months of extraordinary loss,  
and looking forward with hope at what comes next

BY MIKE SCOTT, MSCOTT@STPH.ORG

One needn't look far to find heartbreaking statistics illustrating just how difficult the past year of COVID has been.

By March 13, the one-year mark since the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed at St. Tammany Health System, the number of Louisianans infected with the coronavirus was at 440,000. Of those, nearly 10,000 have died.

More difficult to measure, but still tragic, is the emotional impact those deaths have had on the families left behind. The same goes for the army of healthcare workers who have worked regularly to the point of exhaustion, often pushing through unfathomable grief, to honor their commitment to protecting the public.

Still, the year of COVID-19 can't accurately be described without also touching on the litany of small victories – and some not-so-small ones – that have played out in the past 12 months.

Of course, the biggest and most consequential was the historically rapid development of multiple COVID vaccines.

But according to St. Tammany Health System infectious disease expert Dr. Mike Hill, there are many, many others.

“We’ve had a lot of victories,” Dr. Hill said. “And we had no playbook, no rule book, no nothing. We had to create that out of ether. There was nothing out there. But we got ahead of it. We developed some rules and guidance – with some help from the CDC and others – but we really got together and learned how to keep the healthcare system safe, not only for our patients but for employees.”

That last point is no small thing. Reflecting on the health system's journey over the past year, Dr. Hill expressed particular pride in the way St. Tammany's frontline healthcare workers responded to the crisis with fearlessness, dedication and determination.

“If I had to sum up the past year in one word, I would say ‘courage,’” he said. “It took a lot of courage for people to come to work, to take care of patients, not knowing if they were going to catch COVID. There was also the exhaustion of wearing all that

PPE and having to stay in rooms with COVID-positive patients, as well as the emotional toll of losing a patient you might have gotten very close with.”

A similar courage was displayed by COVID patients, particularly those earlier ones, who didn’t know what the next day might bring – or if they’d even be able to survive the disease, he added.

Then there were members of the community, from which so much was asked in the interest of stopping the spread of infection. Many lost their livelihoods. Others lost much more.

“I think it’s been a tough year, but it’s been one of overwhelming courageousness,” Dr. Hill said.

If “courage” is the word that springs to mind in reflecting on the past year, when he looks forward to what the future might hold, Dr. Hill has two additional words.

The first is “hope,” thanks to the promise of the nation’s ongoing and accelerating vaccination effort.

The other is “patience.”

“We think that by the end of May, people who want vaccines should be able to get them and will have gotten



St. Tammany Health System Chaplain Zac Ritchie, bottom, says a prayer as members of the STHS Security Department lower the hospital flag and the Louisiana state flag to half-staff on March 12 in memory of those lost in the first year of the pandemic and in recognition of the continued dedication of the hospital staff. (Photo by Mike Scott / STHS)

them,” he said. “At that time we can sit down and say, ‘Do we need masks or not?’ and look at how to go forward and get back to normal.”

That being said, he warned that we’re not at the finish line yet – which means mask-wearing, social distancing and hand washing are still the rules of the day.

People should also get used to the idea of getting COVID booster shots every so often as virus variants crop up, perhaps every year or two.

“We’re so close now,” he said. “Just be patient. Let’s get everybody vaccinated. Between the people who have had COVID and who now have some natural immunity, and the people who are vaccinated, we should get to some herd immunity at some point.

“The great thing, and it feels so good to finally be able to say this, is that if we all keep doing our part, if we keep being patient and we keep playing by the rules, that return to normalcy will probably come sooner rather than later.” ■

*Learn more about COVID-19 in St. Tammany Parish at [StTammany.health/COVID-19](https://StTammany.health/COVID-19).*

## Northshore COVID numbers manageable – for now

BY MIKE SCOTT, MSCOTT@STPH.ORG

With federal officials warning of a potential fourth surge of COVID-19 infections amid the loosening of restrictions by numerous states including Louisiana, coronavirus numbers in western St. Tammany Parish are manageable at the moment, according to St. Tammany Health System Chief Medical Officer Dr. Patrick Torcson.

Speaking to WDSU-TV recently for its 4, 5, 6 and 10 p.m. newscasts, Dr. Torcson said the number of COVID-positive inpatients at STHS’s Covington hospital have plateaued in the single digits. On Easter Sunday, they even dropped to zero, albeit briefly, for the first time since the pandemic started in March 2020.

That’s a far cry from the pandemic’s local height in January, when the hospital had 66 COVID-positive inpatients, a third of the patients in the hospital at the time.

One key to those improved numbers: vaccines.

“I think back on the earlier days in the pandemic when we were struggling for test kits and all the other PPE and the

supplies that we needed – to now to have such an abundance of vaccines is really refreshing and it serves our community very well,” Dr. Torcson said.

He added: “The prediction models and the data we’re seeing around COVID numbers, so far western St. Tammany is in a good position.”

That being said, only 15% of people in the state Department of Health’s Region 9 – which encompasses St. Tammany, Washington, Tangipahoa, Livingston and St. Helena parishes – are fully vaccinated against COVID, so it’s important that people not let down their guard yet.

That’s a message reiterated by Gov. John Bel Edwards, who, while loosening occupancy restrictions on a number of businesses, also renewed the state’s mask mandate for at least through April 28.

“At this point in the pandemic, the three best tools we have are for people to be vaccinated, for people to wear masks and for people to distance,” said Governor Edwards. ■



After ten years in Arkansas, Covington High graduate Dr. Angela Buonagura is back on the northshore, rejoining the St. Tammany Health System family as a breast surgeon working with Northlake Surgical Associates out of its new clinic at the STHS Women's Pavilion in Covington. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

# Dreams do come true

## Just ask Dr. Angela Buonagura

BY MIKE SCOTT, MSCOTT@STPH.ORG

Long before Dr. Angela Buonagura earned her medical degree, she was a doctor – at least in spirit, anyway.

She can't really put her finger on how she came to that calling. Nobody in her family practiced medicine. But for as long as she can remember, she had the heart of a healer.

"I knew I wanted to be a doctor since I was 3 or 4," said Dr. Buonagura, a surgeon specializing in breast health. "It was my dream my entire life. It was in my inner core. I wanted to help."

In January, that dream came full circle as Dr. Buonagura – whose first job out of med school was a decade-long stint at St. Tammany Health System starting in 2001 – rejoined the STHS family following a 10-year sojourn in northwest Arkansas.

And nobody's happier about her return home than she is.

"I cried the whole way leaving, heading up there," Dr. Buonagura said. "I never wanted to leave in the first place, so coming back is huge. It's massive."

Ask her what she missed the most, and she has trouble nailing down just one thing. There's the food, the people, the architecture – just the *everything* of it.

She would know. She was born in New Orleans, where she lived before moving to the northshore at age 12 – which happens to be about when, while still enrolled at William Pitcher Junior High, she began taking classes at Tulane University.

After graduating from Covington High at 15, she earned her undergraduate degree at Tulane. She followed that with postbaccalaureate studies at UNO before earning her medical degree at LSU School of Medicine.

If that's not enough to establish her south Louisiana bona fides, there's that last name – and to answer your next question: Yes, she is related to the late, legendary Tony Buonagura, the longtime eye-in-the-sky traffic reporter on WWL-870 AM and other local outlets. He was her father.

So, yeah. Dr. Buonagura knows what it means to miss New Orleans.

Not that she's got anything bad to say about Arkansas. It was while there that the former general surgeon honed her skills and took an interest in breast health. That will remain her

focus with STHS, working as part of its Northlake Surgical team out of a satellite office within its Women's Pavilion in Covington.

"It's like a dream to be a part of the Women's Pavilion," she said. "Just look at the achievements it's racked up: It's a breast imaging center of excellence, it just won another Women's Choice award as a 2021 mammogram center, it's a nationally accredited breast center. I'm not sure people know what a jewel we have right here in our backyard. I'm really looking forward to working alongside these people every day."

That includes specifically trained breast radiologists as well as an on-site patient navigator who, especially with the addition of Dr. Buonagura, offer patients a continuity of care from diagnosis to treatment.

That being said, Dr. Buonagura knows it won't be easy. Breast cancer and breast health is a challenging specialty, she admits. But, going back to those early dreams of helping people, that's precisely why she does it.

"I find it rewarding in its own way," she said. "It takes a huge emotional toll on the patient, and I want to be there for them I want to explain to them what's happening I want to help them understand everything they're going through."

"It takes a lot of your core and soul to give that much," she added, "but that's what it takes with these patients."

The fact that she'll get to decompress when she's away from the office with a little Jazzfesting, Who Dattin' and Mardi Gras-ing (in non-pandemic times, anyway) makes her happier than ever to be back home – and back at STHS.

"Everybody talks about how much St. Tammany Health System has grown, but to me it's the same St. Tammany," Dr. Buonagura said. "Great care, great people, and the nursing staff – everybody is family to them. It's a great place to come back to." ■



St. Tammany Health System's new Breast Disease and High Risk Clinic is adjacent to the health system's Women's Pavilion, at 301 N. Hwy. 190 in Covington. That proximity is no accident. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

# Raising the bar on breast care

## New clinic further bolsters STHS's multidisciplinary approach

BY MIKE SCOTT, MSCOTT@STPH.ORG

It's among the first questions out of the mouth of anyone diagnosed with breast cancer: So, what now?

For residents of the Northshore, the answer is easier than ever: St. Tammany Health System's new Breast Disease and High-Risk Clinic, which opened in late 2020.

Patients can think of it as information central for patients diagnosed with breast cancer, as well as those considered at high risk of developing it in the future.

It's also, however, a key cog in St. Tammany Health System's multidisciplinary approach to comprehensive breast care.

That starts with its location next to the health system's Women's Pavilion – which was by no means an accident.

"This proximity fosters collaboration between our radiologists and nurse navigator, our surgeons and our breast nurse practitioner, who is onsite daily," said Melonie Lagalante, STHS assistant vice president of outpatient and diagnostic services. "The intent is to provide a bridge between diagnosis and treatment, and also offer ongoing support to breast cancer patients."

STHS Nurse Practitioner Kelly Crim MSN, who is part of the high risk clinic team, said that type of collaboration is crucial to providing the best care possible.

"There are a lot of moving parts involved with breast care," Crim said, "and the quality of care is significantly improved when those moving parts communicate well."

**"There are a lot of moving parts involved with breast care, and the quality of care is significantly improved when those moving parts communicate well."**

**- Nurse Practitioner Kelly Crim, MSN**

For Crim, that involves serving as a patient resource and point of contact, with a focus on education, counseling, genetics and support service referrals.

But it also includes working with the world-class radiologists at the Women's Pavilion, which is certified as an American College of Radiology Breast Imaging Center of Excellence; as well as with Dr. Angela Buonagura, a breast

surgeon working out of a satellite office of STHS's Northlake Surgical Associates located at the high risk clinic; and Certified Patient Navigator Cindy Turner, who helps guide patients through their breast care journey.

"We take care of patients across the spectrum of breast disease diagnosis, treatment and surveillance," Crim

said. "From imaging to surgery, genetics to research, patient navigation, risk reduction and survivorship, we provide access to care across the full continuum of breast cancer."

To further fuel that collaboration, members of the STHS multidisciplinary breast care team – including radiologists, oncologists, breast surgeons, plastic surgeons, genetics specialists, pathologists, patient navigators, support services and others – meet bimonthly at multidisciplinary breast conferences to discuss the specifics of patient care.

The upshot: More coordination between specialties – and, for patients, a more seamless healthcare experience.

"Because of this," Crim said, "our quality of care is great, and our patients' quality of life is greater." ■

# The house that nurses built

St. Tammany Health System's new patient tower, designed with caregivers in mind



Throughout construction of St. Tammany Health System's \$56 million new patient wing, the health system's nurses were consulted to make sure the facility would fit their needs. It is scheduled to open in April 2021. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

BY MIKE SCOTT, MSCOTT@STPH.ORG

Call it the house that nurses built.

It's not as if they were out there with hammers, drywall knives and tile cutters, but St. Tammany Health System's nursing team played a nonetheless crucial role in the design of the health system's new 160,000-square-foot, four-story patient tower, which is set to come online this April.

"That building represents an extraordinary collaboration among the architects, the builders and our own nurses at St. Tammany Health System," STHS Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton said. "It's not just your garden-variety hospital wing. The result, in addition to being a beautiful representation of St. Tammany Health System's brand of world-class healthcare, is an innovative, evidence-based facility designed with the needs of our nurses in mind."

That also makes it something of a nurse's dream, Milton said – and that's no accident.

From the project's beginning and throughout construction, STHS nurses – from supervisors to bedside caregivers – were repeatedly consulted to help make sure the building would be effective and efficient when it comes to delivering quality care.

Early on, that consisted of the creation of a full-sized mockup of one of the new wing's patient rooms, complete with a hospital bed and other furniture. Nurses were then invited to spend time in the room, offering feedback on the best location for everything from gas jets to power outlets to the bathroom.

That feedback, which was similarly solicited at multiple stages throughout construction, was incorporated into the building's design.

It's a big part of the reason why the new building, which was designed by fl+WB Architects and built by Womack Construction, features such nurse-friendly touches as:

- Patient lifts, which are positioned in every patient room throughout the 30-bed Critical Care Unit, to help transfer patients from the bed to another bed or wheelchair.
- Rubberized floors throughout every unit, to ease the impact on nurses' knees and hips from being on their feet all day.
- Support services, like radiology capabilities, conveniently located in or adjacent to nursing units.



In addition to new administrative space, the first floor of the new wing includes a conference center that boasts seven meeting rooms named after locales such as Madisonville, Mandeville, Covington, Lacombe and Ponchatoula.

- Larger and more centralized nursing stations, to facilitate camaraderie and sharing of information.
  - A large central break room, featuring mailboxes for nurses, which drew “oohs” from those participating on a recent walk-through and which is complimented by several smaller break rooms.
  - Advanced infection prevention technology, including antimicrobial surfaces, germ-busting UV lighting in every room with a water source, as well as easy-to-clean, solid-surface walls from floor to ceiling.
- “Every piece of it, throughout, we’ve been involved in the process, from the patient rooms to the supply closets,” said Mathilde Lyon RN, nurse manager for adult care at STHS. “As far as I know, there’s no other hospital anywhere around here that’s like this.”

It’s not all about the nurses, though. Patient needs, as identified by nurses, were also carefully considered.

And so, in addition to electronic door tags outside each room, which give care providers quick and convenient access to patient information, in-room monitors provide patients with a schedule of impending procedures. Also in each room: iPads, to bring healthcare technology directly to the bedside.



Patient rooms in the new tower are all single occupancy, with such high-tech features as digital message boards, as well as UV disinfecting lights in the bathroom, purchased with donations to St. Tammany Hospital Foundation.

Springboarding off the philosophy behind St. Tammany Hospital Foundation’s Healing Arts Initiative, which has brought art to every area of the hospital, high-end fixtures such as custom lighting – all LED and all dimmable – are ubiquitous in the new building, lending both the front of the house and the back of the house a warm feel.

Families of patients will also appreciate a “healing garden” located off the spacious second-floor Intensive Care waiting area, which features high-end finishes from floor to ceiling.

“It really is a pretty and calming environment,” Lyon said. “And that can reduce the stress of patients and of families. That helps us when the family is in the right mindset.”

Another unique but artful touch: A stainless-steel time capsule from 2020, glassed in and on display in the first-floor elevator lobby. Not to be opened until 2070, it fittingly pays homage to STHS’s nurses of 2020.

“That might be my favorite part of the whole building,” Milton said. “Our nurses are the backbone of our healthcare team, and this building is testament to St. Tammany Health System’s recognition of that fact – and that time capsule will ensure everybody knows it for generations to come.” ■



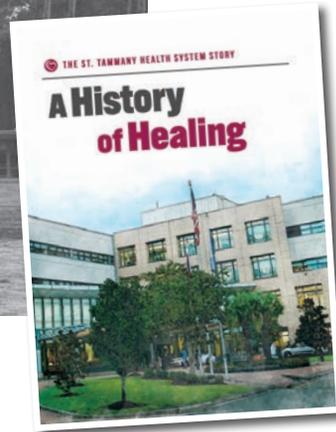
Lighting throughout the new wing, including over this nursing station, incorporates dimmable LED lighting, to set a calming tone for quiet times.



A second-floor waiting area for families of patients in intensive care features such serene touches as a view of an outdoor balcony garden.



One of the first photos of the completed St. Tammany Parish Hospital, taken in November 1954. Landscaping was added by the time the hospital opened on Dec. 1 that year. (Photo via STHS archive)



# A History of Healing: The St. Tammany Health System Story

New publication charts the evolution of a Northshore institution

BY MIKE SCOTT, MSCOTT@STPH.ORG

It happened, as it turns out, in a driving rainstorm.

Others might trace it to another moment in time, but for Norma Core, it happened on a dreary night in the 1940s as rain washed through the ditches and over the roads of rural St. Tammany Parish.

“A friend of mine broke his leg and had to go to New Orleans for care,” Core remembered in a newspaper interview some 40 years later. “It was raining, and on the horrible little road through the marsh, the ambulance wrecked. My friend lay in the rain with his leg in disarray. They got him to New Orleans, but he died soon after from shock. They didn’t treat him for the effects of lying in the rain in pain.”

It was then that Core made up her mind.

“I decided,” she said, “we must have a hospital.”

It would be years before spade would hit dirt, but for all intents and purposes, it was then and there – in the rain and on the road whose name has long since been forgotten

– that St. Tammany Health System was willed into being.

There are, of course, others who proved instrumental in the founding of the hospital. Core, however, would become an early and particularly conspicuous champion of the cause. Eventually, she would also become the sole female member of the very first St. Tammany Parish Hospital Commission.

All these decades later, the institution that Core helped found hardly resembles the humble one-story country hospital set amid the pines at Tyler Street and 11th Avenue back in 1954 – at least, not in a physical sense. Then, it was a 25,000-square-foot, 30-room facility. With the opening of its newest wing this April, the hospital will include 715,000 square feet of space and nearly 250 patient beds, to say nothing of the health system’s 20-plus satellite locations.

At its heart, though, it’s still very much the community-based hospital Core and others envisioned. And there’s a very good reason for that, according to St. Tammany Health System President and CEO Joan Coffman, whose healthcare career began as an radiologic technologist at the hospital in the early 1980s.

Actually, there are a few thousand good reasons.

“When I think back to what has been fundamental to the success of the organization throughout the tremendous change that has occurred over the last 66 years, it’s the people,” Coffman said. “We really are a community hospital. This hospital has become intertwined into the very fabric of this community. We’re neighbors with many of our patients and their families – or they’re our colleagues.”

In fact, if you’re going to recount the history of St. Tammany Health System with any accuracy, you’ve got to start with that long-treasured community connection.

Oh, and President Harry S. Truman. ■

*Read the rest of the story, and others like it, in “A History of Healing,” available for purchase in the St. Tammany Health System gift shop, with sales benefiting the St. Tammany Hospital Foundation.*



Members of the Krewe of Muses, photographed on Feb. 11, 2021, at St. Tammany Health System's Covington hospital. (Photos by Mike Scott / STHS)

## Muses and their shooses

There weren't any Mardi Gras parades this year, thanks to COVID-19, but members of the Krewe of Muses made sure the healthcare heroes at St. Tammany Health System got at least a taste of Carnival anyway. ¶ Eight Northshore members of the Krewe of Muses, all bedecked in full Carnival regalia – including masks, but not the fun kind – paid a visit Feb. 11 to the health system's Covington hospital. There, in coordination with St. Tammany Hospital Foundation, they showered

nurses and other caregivers with affection and 100 of the krewe's coveted signature throws: hand-decorated shoes. ¶ Part of an outreach program dubbed Heels for Healers, it was dreamed up as a festive display of gratitude for the hard work put in by frontline COVID-19 caregivers over the past year, said Muses Lieutenant Eugenie Suggs. "We're not going to not have fun," Suggs said. "And so this is our way of saying we see you all – and we thank you all." ■



A special Muses shoe designed to resemble a bottle of hand sanitizer and presented to STHS President and CEO Joan Coffman.



STHS colleagues admire some of the 100 shoes given away at the health system's Covington hospital by the Krewe of Muses.

# STH Foundation's newest face to focus on cancer fundraising

BY MIKE SCOTT, MSCOTT@STPH.ORG

Just as St. Tammany Health System and Ochsner Health prepare to unveil their all-new cancer center this summer just south of Covington, St. Tammany Hospital Foundation has hired a major gift fundraiser who will be dedicated to helping further bolstering STHS's cancer programs.

Jennifer Garrard, who joined the foundation team in January, will work out of the comprehensive, state-of-the-art St. Tammany Cancer Center, a campus of Ochsner Medical Center, when it opens at Interstate 12 and Highway 21.

She is the first fundraiser in the foundation's history to be hired specifically to focus on a single service line.

Garrard brings a wealth of philanthropic experience to the position, having previously worked with such human service organizations as Habitat for Humanity, educational organizations including the LSU College of Business, and healthcare organizations including an assisted living facility in her former home state of Florida.

Her passion for helping others started early and was inspired by the example set by her parents, who she



'My parents inspired my heart for service,' said Jennifer Garrard, the newest member of the fundraising team at St. Tammany Hospital Foundation. 'They served and cared for all five of their children and were always looking for ways to serve others in their work and church. It was their example that taught me and my four siblings to have the same heart as well.' (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

said always looked for a way to serve their community.

"My parents inspired my heart for service," Garrard said. "They served and cared for all five of their children and were always looking for ways to serve others in their work and church. It was their example that taught me and my four siblings to have the same heart as well."

In her role, Garrard will assist donors in making a meaningful impact on cancer care through a major gift program that includes naming opportunities, corporate giving, grants, direct program support and more.

Given that she'll be based out of the cancer center, she'll also have an opportunity to develop relationships with the patients there and their loved ones.

The opportunity to advocate on

their behalf by boosting the center's transportation, nutritional and educational offerings is particularly meaningful to her, Garrard said.

It's also personal.

"I've had two family members who have been diagnosed with cancer," Garrard said. "Knowing what they go through and how they feel, how sick they get, we want to provide that care here so that they don't have to travel.

"This hospital, it started with a need in the community and people of the community are the heart of what we do," she added. "And this cancer center is a gift to this community. It's an honor to be a part of it." ■

*If you would like to discuss making a gift in support of cancer care at St. Tammany Cancer Center, you can reach Jennifer Garrard at [jgarrard@stph.org](mailto:jgarrard@stph.org) or (985) 898-4142.*

## Red sofa campaign promotes heart health



Members of the STHS executive leadership team help kick off the 2021 Red Sofa Campaign. Pictured are, from left, Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton, SVP - Human Resources Carolyn Adema, CEO Joan Coffman, Chief Financial Officer Sandra DiPietro, AVP - Strategic Planning and Implementation Kelly Rabalais and Chief Operation Officer Sharon Toups.

BY STHS COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

If you've been in the lobby of St. Tammany Health System's Covington hospital recently, you've probably noticed a red sofa positioned prominently just inside the main entrance – and you've probably also wondered to yourself, "What the heck is that all about?"

It's all part of the Red Sofa Campaign, a yearlong social-media-driven campaign originated by the American Heart Association to spread awareness of heart disease and stroke, which causes one in three deaths among women each year, more than all cancers combined. Locally, the campaign is being headed up by St. Tammany Hospital Foundation, with the sofa itself being donated by Southern Interior Solutions.

"With heart disease being the

leading cause of death in Louisiana, it was an easy decision to support this campaign," Southern Interior Solutions' Patrick McMath said. "Celebrating these survivors and bringing awareness could lead someone to recognize a symptom, see a doctor and potentially save a life."

Throughout the year, the sofa will go on tour, visiting various sites throughout the community. At each stop it will be accompanied by wellness information from the STHS cardiac teams.

Additionally, members of the public will be invited to post a photo of themselves on the sofa to social media and help spread the word about heart disease. ■

*Learn more about the campaign on the foundation website at [STHFoundation.org/RedSofa](http://STHFoundation.org/RedSofa) – and watch for the red sofa to turn up in the community throughout 2021.*

## STH Foundation lands transportation grant for cancer patients

BY STHS COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

A major healthcare roadblock just got closer to being cleared for many northshore cancer patients.

St. Tammany Hospital Foundation this month landed a \$20,000 transportation grant from the American Cancer Society to address needs of patients at St. Tammany Cancer Center, a campus of Ochsner Medical Center.

The cancer center, a joint project of Ochsner and St. Tammany Health System, is scheduled to relocate to a new, state-of-the-art facility this

summer near the intersection of Interstate 12 and Highway 21 just south of the current St. Tammany Cancer Center.

According to Chryl Corizzo RN BSN, the clinical quality coordinator at the cancer center, transportation is a major issue for many cancer patients. In some cases, it prompts patients to forgo treatment all together, one study has shown.

The American Cancer Society grant will be used to alleviate those concerns for local patients.

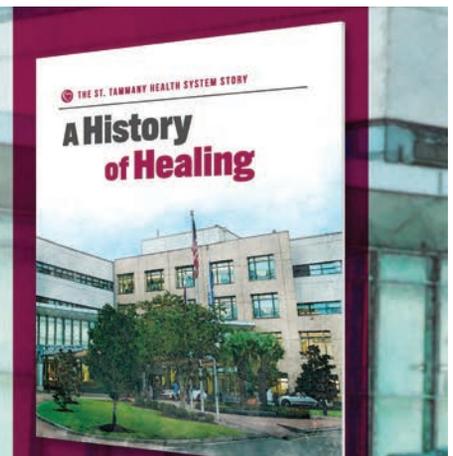
"St. Tammany Health System is committed to addressing the barriers to care that may exist for some of its patients, including transportation, which 20% of recently surveyed patients listed as one of the top barriers to treatment," Corizzo said. "Our cancer team's goal is to quickly identify individuals with transportation barriers and provide the necessary resources, and this grant will help us do that." ■

*Learn more about St. Tammany Hospital Foundation at [STHFoundation.org](http://STHFoundation.org).*

♥ THE ST. TAMMANY HEALTH SYSTEM STORY

# A History of Healing

Available at the St. Tammany Health System gift shop





Pediatric orthopedist Dr. McCall McDaniel, center, and her staff at STHS's Bone & Joint Clinic show off their autism awareness T-shirts and banner on April 2, which was World Autism Day. (Photo by Jan Budenz/STHS)



STHS Pediatrics Department Chairman Rob Fauchoux, center, marks World Autism Day with members of the staff at the St. Tammany Pediatrics clinic on Highway 21 in Covington. (Photo by Jan Budenz/STHS)

# Signs of compassion

## Multiple STHS departments earn Certified Autism Center status

BY MIKE SCOTT, MSCOTT@STPH.ORG

For children with autism or sensory disorders, the world can seem like an unwelcome and sometimes scary place. For their parents and caregivers, that can make getting reliable healthcare for their children equally frustrating.

And so the recent designation of multiple pediatric departments at St. Tammany Health System as Certified Autism Centers will come as welcome news to families of children with autism on the Northshore.

“Our goal at STHS is to meet the needs of patients, and by obtaining this autism designation we are able to care for this group of patients in a way they feel comfortable,” said Cindy Ingram, director of Women and Children’s Services at STHS.

“The training the staff received on the journey to becoming a Certified Autism Center has been invaluable in providing care to our patients,” Ingram added. “Parents as well as patients will be treated in a manner that meets their special needs. We are excited to be the only facility in the area to have obtained this designation as we continue to provide world-class care to our pediatric patients.”

The health system’s Pediatric Intensive Care Unit and its only-in-the-region Pediatric Emergency Department both received the Certified Autism Center designation in August 2020 from the International Board of Credentialing and Education Standards. That was followed in February by certification for St. Tammany Pediatrics, the health system’s primary care pediatric practice on Highway 21 just south of its Covington hospital.

Most recently, the health system’s pediatric orthopedics practice at its Bone & Joint Clinic, also on Highway 21, was expected to receive the designation this spring.

Fittingly, that coincides with the recognition of April as

Autism Awareness Month.

“With our current knowledge and understanding of autism, it is our top priority to become a Certified Autism Center,” said pediatric orthopedist Dr. McCall McDaniel, who is helping spearhead the effort to earn the designation for the Bone & Joint Clinic. “This new designation is not only important to the community but to my family as well. It shows our commitment to implementing strategies that will accommodate, support and serve families better while providing quality care.”

To become a Certified Autism Center, a facility or organization must show a commitment to treating and understanding the needs of children with autism by having at least 80% of their staff undergo intensive, autism-focused training.

In addition to the hard work of the personnel at each of the STHS locations earning the Autism Center status, the initiative got a

major boost from donors in the community, including the all-volunteer St. Tammany Hospital Guild, which donated \$13,000 to St. Tammany Hospital Foundation for the autism initiative.

Foundation Executive Director Nicole Suhre said she and her staff welcomed the opportunity to help facilitate the gift, especially considering the profound impact it will have on the lives of so many local families.

“Funding initiatives like this one are a true joy for our foundation,” Suhre said. “Our donors take such pride in being able to impart real change with their generosity. Every individual in our community deserves the most personalized care possible. It is our privilege to be part of the hospital’s efforts to better care for patients with autism.” ■



# Springing forward into a busy 2021

Season of renewal brings a wealth of opportunities



STHF Executive Director Nicole Suhre

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Now is the time to secure your spot at this year's premier signature event – THE Gala, this year themed “Step Into Your Dancing Shoes” and promising an evening of dancing and disco on Aug. 12 in support of our cancer care programs. To learn more visit [TheGalaNorthshore.org](http://TheGalaNorthshore.org).

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Happy spring!

As the COVID-19 numbers in our region steadily decline and the number of vaccines administered rises, there's something about the advent of spring that seems all the more meaningful. Springtime symbolizes rebirth, and it certainly feels like our community is on the precipice of just that.

St. Tammany Health System encourages everyone to continue to wear masks, socially distance and get vaccinated as we hopefully put the worst of the pandemic behind us.

Springtime also ushers in Autism Awareness month. Under the leadership of Dr. McCall McDaniel, a board-certified, fellowship trained pediatric orthopedist at the STHS Bone & Joint Clinic, our foundation is raising awareness with the sale of blue T-shirts for our colleagues and community at large, as well as “lighting up” locations of our health system blue in support of all individuals with autism.

“Autism is a complex, multifaceted spectrum that affects everyone differently,” Dr. McDaniel said. “A child with autism may have social communication challenges, difficulty with social interactions or atypical interests or behaviors. Frequently, these behaviors are misinterpreted by others and may lead to exclusion. Autism Awareness Month creates a platform for understanding, acceptance and education to create an all-inclusive community for children and adults with autism.”

This campaign is all the more significant given the recent designation of our St. Tammany Pediatrics practice and the pediatric inpatient and emergency departments becoming Certified Autism Centers. You can read more about this and how donor dollars helped make the certification trainings possible on page 14 of this issue. We hope all of you will join us this month in celebrating this milestone for

care in our community.

Spring is also a time of planning for the foundation. While our active efforts around annual support, major gift solicitation, grants and more are in full force, our team is also gearing up for some big things this summer.

June will see the kickoff of our annual One Heartbeat employee campaign. (Did you know last year's campaign raised \$110,800 from more than 800 colleague donors and physicians?) We will also unveil a newly rebranded caregiver tribute gift program, which allows patients and family members to make a donation in honor of an STHS physician, nurse or other healthcare professional who provided exceptional care or service.

Our new cancer center location opens in June. Leading up to the opening, donors who wish to make an impact on cancer care in the community can choose from a variety of naming opportunities within this incredible, state-of-the-art facility. Now is also the time to secure your spot at this year's premier signature event – THE Gala, this year themed “Step Into Your Dancing Shoes” and promising an evening of dancing and disco on Aug. 12 in support of our cancer care programs.

2021 is going to be a special year. I am truly grateful to work collaboratively with such a generous community. On behalf of our board and team, we look forward to springing into action with each of you as we support the healing work of St. Tammany Health System, together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole Suhre". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Nicole Suhre CFRE  
STHF executive director



1127 S. Tyler St., Covington, LA 70433



**YOUR FUTURE STARTS NOW.**

World-Class Healthcare. Close to Home.



## Take your career to the next level

With our state-of-the-art, \$56 million patient tower going online this spring, there's never been a better time to join the St. Tammany Health System family. We are now offering generous signing bonuses for select positions. (Restrictions apply.)

Search STHS job openings and apply today.

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