



THE ST. TAMMANY HEALTH SYSTEM STORY

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# A History of Healing







An image of St. Tammany Parish Hospital taken shortly after its 1954 completion. Built as a one-story structure with 30 beds, it has continuously expanded over the years and now encompasses nearly three-quarters of a million square feet of interior space and almost 250 beds. (Image via STHS archive)



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A newspaper editorial cartoon published in 1956.  
(Image via STHS archive)

To mark its 65th anniversary in December 2019, St. Tammany Parish Hospital unveiled a new name — St. Tammany Health System, acknowledging its growing community reach — and a new, modernized version of its double-hearts logo. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)



## THE ST. TAMMANY HEALTH SYSTEM STORY

# A History of Healing

“In turning over to you the keys to this institution, Mr. Hebert, I say: May you never lock from your door one who needs your help.”

– Police Jury President Fred Mizell, to St. Tammany Parish Hospital Commission Chairman Oliver Hebert, upon the hospital’s dedication on Nov. 28, 1954

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-bed facility. With the opening of its newest wing in early 2021, 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 a 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.





President Harry S. Truman's championing of the expansion of healthcare opportunities to Americans laid the groundwork for the formation of St. Tammany Parish Hospital. "Inequalities in the distribution of medical personnel are matched by inequalities in hospitals and other health facilities," Truman said in a 1945 address to Congress. "Moreover, there are just too few hospitals, clinics and health centers to take proper care of the people of the United States." (Image via Truman Presidential Library)

"Millions of our citizens do not now have a full measure of opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health. Millions do not now have protection or security against the economic effects of sickness. The time has arrived for action to help them attain that opportunity and that protection."  
 - President Harry S. Truman, April 1945

## CHAPTER 1: GIVE 'EM HEALTH, HARRY!

Even before it became a passion project for Core, the desire to build a hospital in St. Tammany Parish had been bubbling away for decades.

"At long last," Police Jury President Fred Mizell said at the hospital's dedication ceremony two days before it opened its doors in late 1954, "we are about to complete a job that is the culmination of a quarter-century of effort on the part of the citizens of this parish."

For much of that time, however, things proceeded in fits and starts — but mostly fits, and the financial kind.

Namely: Who would pay for said hospital?

Those efforts gained significant traction on Nov. 19, 1945. That's the

day President Harry S. Truman, in an address to Congress, introduced his five-part plan for improving healthcare in the United States. Part one dealt with the lack of adequate medical facilities nationally, and particularly in rural areas such as St. Tammany Parish.

"Inequalities in the distribution of medical personnel are matched by inequalities in hospitals and other health facilities," Truman said. "Moreover, there are just too few hospitals, clinics and health centers to take proper care of the people of the United States."

To solve that problem, he called upon Congress to provide federal funding to assist states and municipalities in construction of new hospitals. A year later, Congress responded with the Hospital Survey and Construction Act — popularly known as the Hill-Burton Act, named after U.S. Sens. Harold Burton of Ohio and Lister Hill of Alabama, the bill's sponsors — which took direct aim at bolstering the nation's healthcare infrastructure through the awarding of grants.

Earmarked for St. Tammany: \$234,000. That would make up more than 60% of the hospital's eventual \$365,000 price tag.

The catch, though, was that the state and the parish had to figure out a way to come up with the rest.

That's when the women of St. Tammany Parish took over.

## CHAPTER 2: OF GRASSROOTS AND KNITTING CIRCLES

On Nov. 8, 1946, a short, unassuming item was published in the St. Tammany Farmer newspaper in Covington. If

1949

1950

1951

1952

**MARCH 15, 1950**

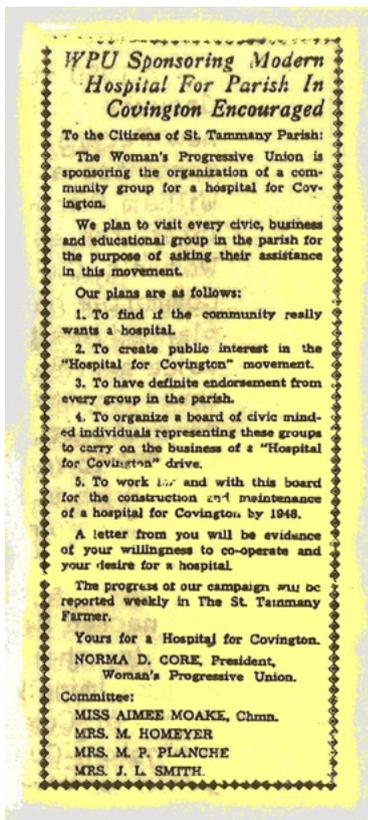
After years of proceeding in fits and starts, 20 local organizations attend a public meeting to reaffirm their shared desire to build a local hospital, signaling near-universal community support for the project.

**MARCH 27, 1951**

Voters of St. Tammany Parish agree to a property tax to finish financing the hospital. The final price tag: \$365,000. Of that, \$234,000 is provided by the federal government, with local funds covering the rest.

**AUG. 29, 1951**

A site-selection committee chooses a wooded stretch of the old Covington-Madisonville Highway, today better known as South Tyler Street or Louisiana Highway 21, as the location for the new hospital.



If hospitals had birth certificates, St. Tammany Parish Hospital's would be this item published in the St. Tammany Farmer announcing the Women's Progressive Union of Covington's intentions to work toward establishing a hospital in western St. Tammany Parish. (Image via STHS archive)

hospitals were issued birth certificates, that brief announcement would be St. Tammany Health System's.

Addressed to "the citizens of St. Tammany Parish," it announced that the Women's Progressive Union — a civic organization for which Core served as president and Aimee Moake as chairwoman — would be dedicating its attention to getting that long-awaited hospital built once and for all.

"We plan to visit every civic, business and educational group in the parish for the purpose of asking their assistance in this movement," it read.

And that's exactly what they did. Under Moake and Core's leadership, the group mounted a grassroots advocacy campaign targeting

everything from the biggest local churches and civic groups to the smallest knitting circles.

The thinking: If they could get the parish's residents on board with the plan to get a hospital built, local elected officials would have little choice but to line up behind the idea.

They also started a fundraising campaign to help pay for the project. According to a brief history of the hospital tucked away in a faded scrapbook kept by Cecile Hebert — the wife of Oliver Hebert, who would become chairman of the hospital's first Board of Commissioners — a local resident named Marguerite Weiss had the distinction of not only proposing the fundraising campaign but also of making the first contribution to it. Others would follow Weiss' lead.

The efforts of the Women's Progressive Union continued over the next few years. A key make-or-break moment for the project came in March 1951, however, when parish residents were asked to vote up or down on a 1.5 mil property

tax that would raise \$175,000 and which, when added to already allocated federal funds, would finance construction of the hospital.

Today, St. Tammany Health System no longer relies on taxpayer money, operating instead as a self-sustaining nonprofit aided by charitable donations to its sister organization, St. Tammany Hospital Foundation. But that initial infusion of seed money from the people of St. Tammany would prove crucial.

That 1951 bond issue was approved, overwhelmingly.

The community had spoken.

### CHAPTER 3: 'MAY IT ALWAYS REMAIN OPEN TO SUFFERING HUMANITY'

In the beginning, when a site-selection committee was searching for a plot of land on which to build the hospital, committee members figured they'd need 135,000 square feet of space for the hospital and its grounds — or about one-and-a-half city squares.



From left, Dr. M.J. Duplantis, Norma Core, Oliver J. Hebert, L.L. Landon and Gus Fritchie break ground on construction of St. Tammany Parish Hospital in May 1953 in Covington. The five were the inaugural members of the hospital's Board of Commissioners. (Image via STHS archive)

**MAY 4, 1953**  
A groundbreaking ceremony is finally held for the new hospital.

**DEC. 1, 1954**  
A new era in healthcare in St. Tammany Parish begins as the new one-story St. Tammany Parish Hospital, covering 25,000 square feet and including 30 beds, opens its doors.

**MARCH 25, 1955**  
In a meeting held at the Southern Hotel in Covington, the all-volunteer St. Tammany Hospital Guild is formed to provide non-professional, non-administrative services to the hospital.

**DEC. 1, 1955**  
The hospital marks its first anniversary. In its first year, 1,151 patients were reportedly treated, 354 people were operated on, 272 received treatment in the emergency room and 179 babies were born.

The new hospital, which would include only 30 beds, wouldn't need nearly that much land, but they had a nagging feeling.

After all, just after voters approved the bond issue to pay for the hospital, they also approved funds to build the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway toll bridge linking the north and south shores of the lake. New subdivisions were also starting to go up in the area. Clearly, western St. Tammany Parish was growing.

"This size was mentioned," read a newspaper report describing the committee's detailed invitation for land offers, "because of the possibility of expansion in the future, with the thought that other buildings may be needed at some time."

If they were aware of just how prescient that thought would end up being, they didn't have much time to dwell on it. They had a hospital to build.

The site-selection committee settled on a location along a then-wooded stretch of the old Covington-Madisonville Highway, which is today better known as



This newspaper image shows St. Tammany Parish Police Jury President Fred Mizell, right, handing over the keys of the then-newly constructed St. Tammany Parish Hospital to O.J. Hebert, the chairman of the hospital's Board of Commissioners, during a dedication ceremony on Nov. 28, 1954. (Image via STHS archive)

South Tyler Street or Louisiana Highway 21.

Downright quaint when compared to today's gleaming campus, the original hospital would be a one-story, 25,000-square-foot building designed, appropriately enough, in the shape of a cross — albeit it with one "lazy" arm — by the New Orleans firm of August Perez and Associates.

That's the same influential firm that would go on to design parts of the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition in New Orleans, the Canal Place office tower, the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, the Piazza d'Italia on Poydras Street and the Shrine on Airline, among numerous other prominent structures in the New Orleans skyline.

Southern Construction of Columbia, Mississippi, was selected as the builder.

As designed, the new hospital would boast such modern amenities as air-conditioned operating and delivery rooms, off-street parking and a common patio so mobile patients could grab a few breaths of piney air as they convalesced.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on the site on May 4, 1953. Oliver Hebert turned the first spade of dirt. Among the collection of dignitaries assembled was Norma Core, by then appointed to serve with Hebert on the hospital's Board of Commissioners.

A month later, the concrete foundation was poured. Slowly but surely, the hospital — for so long a dream — was becoming reality.

Construction continued apace for the next several months, but just before the hospital's scheduled opening, officials realized they had forgotten one crucial thing: They had a hospital, but they didn't have any money to equip or run it until it could become self-sufficient.

To fix that no-so-minor oversight, the community stepped up again, with local civic groups raising initial operating funds and donating money to furnish and equip several patient rooms, the nursery, operating rooms and more. *(cont. on p.10)*



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. (Image via STHS archive)

1958  
**DEC. 7, 1958**  
 Just days after its fourth anniversary, the hospital opens a new, \$75,000 wing adding 14 beds, among other improvements. It would be the first in a nonstop string of expansions over the next several decades.

1960  
**JULY 18, 1960**  
 Wilbert F. Breaux succeeds Harold F. Pittman to become the second administrator of St. Tammany Parish Hospital.

Mr. Burus, Dr. Grant, Members of the Hospital Board, Members of the Clergy, Distinguished Visitors, Ladies and Gentlemen:

At long last we are about to complete a job that is the culmination of a quarter-century of effort on the part of the citizens of this Parish. A great deal of hard work went into the building of this beautiful, modern hospital and now we see here the result of all this work. St. Tammany can be proud of its hospital.

Situated as it is among these tall, stately pine trees, our hospital will bring healing to the body and comfort to the spirit of the afflicted.

The medical staff of our hospital comprises all of the doctors practicing in the Parish and I believe a finer body of physicians cannot be found anywhere. Famous specialists from neighboring New Orleans will be available for consultation with the medical staff so as to provide a medical service unexcelled anywhere.

The equipment of the hospital is the latest and finest obtainable and the personnel has been carefully chosen so as to provide the patients with the utmost in hospital care and comfort.

But all this - the fine building, the excellent medical staff, the expert service that will be provided by the hospital personnel - impose an obligation on the people of our Parish. As all of you know, it costs money - much money to operate a hospital such as this one. Nothing will be spared to give the patients the latest care in medical and hospital service. But - such a high level of service costs money and the hospital must pay its way. This is where the obligation of the good people of St. Tammany Parish lies. And the only way they can discharge this obligation is by using the hospital. Instead of taking hospital treatment in other cities, our people and our Doctors should use our own beautiful modern hospital. Only in that way can it flourish and render the great humanitarian service to our Parish that it is intended to render.

And now, Mr. Hebert, as President of the St. Tammany Parish Police Jury, I now hand over to you as Chairman of the Hospital Board, the key to this fine institution. May this key never be used to close it; may it always remain open to suffering humanity.

The original one-page speech of St. Tammany Parish Police Jury President Fred Mizell — typewritten on onionskin paper — delivered at the Nov. 28, 1954, dedication of St. Tammany Parish Hospital. (Image via STHS archive)

1963

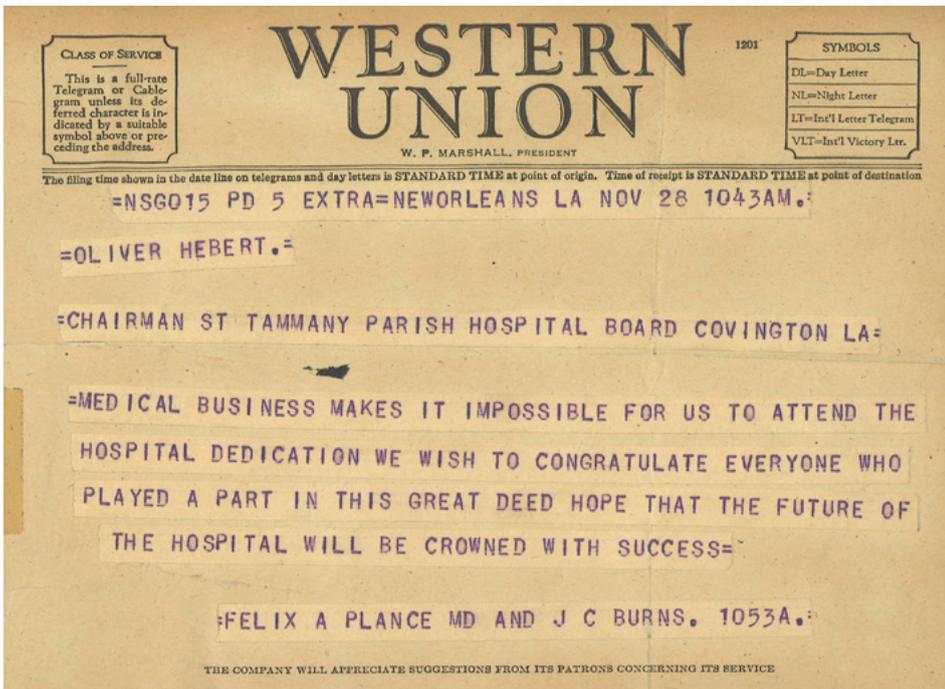
1964

1964  
Covington native Haller Alexis joins St. Tammany Parish Hospital as its comptroller. Two years later, he would be named hospital administrator, a post he held for the next 19 years.

1965

1965  
The hospital is first accredited by the Joint Committee on Hospital Accreditation.

1966



A 1954 telegram to St. Tammany Parish Hospital Commission Chairman Oliver Hebert offers congratulations on the dedication of the hospital. (Image via STHS archive)

“One of the most modern (hospitals) built in Louisiana, contain(ing) besides 30 beautifully decorated and well furnished rooms, private and semi-private, three operating rooms consisting of an emergency, main and delivery operating rooms, an X-ray room, complete in every detail, a nursery equipped with two incubators and seven bassinets, a hot and cold sterilizing department, a modern technical laboratory and superbly equipped kitchen.”

- St. Tammany Farmer newspaper, 1954

Then, on Nov. 28, 1954, almost exactly 19 months after ground was broken, a dedication ceremony was held in front of the nearly completed building. An estimated crowd of 1,000 turned out on what The Times-Picayune described as a blustery Sunday afternoon.

An array of local muckety-mucks was also on hand to help with the delivery of the obligatory oratory, as was the Covington High School band, which provided the music. The Rev. Timothy Pugh of St. Peter’s Catholic Church delivered the invocation.

Then, Parish Police Jury President Fred Mizell stepped to the microphone and pulled from his pocket a 385-word speech, typewritten on a single sheet of onionskin.

“At long last we are about to complete a job that is the culmination of a quarter-century of effort on the part of the citizens of this parish,” he started, acknowledging early talks

about building a local hospital dating as far back as 1933. “A great deal of hard work went into the building of this beautiful, modern hospital, and now we see here the result of all this work. St. Tammany can be proud of its hospital.

“Situated as it is among these tall, stately pine trees, our hospital will bring healing to the body and comfort to the spirit of the afflicted.”

After praising the building, the staff and the assemblage of then-modern medical equipment inside, he went on to urge the community to finish the work they started by actually using the hospital instead of traveling out of parish for their healthcare.

“And now, Mr. Hebert, as president of the St. Tammany Parish Police Jury, I now hand over to you as chairman of the Hospital Board, the key to this fine institution,” Mizell said in closing. “May this key never be used to close it; may it always remain open to suffering humanity.”

The hospital officially opened to patients three days later, on Dec. 1. At 7:30 that morning, it got its first patient: Carl Bougere of Rutland Street in Covington, who had suffered a heart attack. He would survive.

The St. Tammany Farmer newspaper hailed the new facility as “one of the most modern built in Louisiana, contain(ing) besides 30 beautifully decorated and well furnished rooms, private and semi-private, three operating rooms consisting of an emergency, main and delivery operating rooms, an X-ray room, complete in every detail, a nursery equipped with two incubators and seven bassinets, a hot and cold sterilizing department, a modern

1967

1968

1969

1970

APRIL 20, 1968

U.S. Sen. Russell B. Long delivers the keynote address for a dedication ceremony unveiling the hospital’s new, two-story expansion, which cost \$1.25 million and added 61 beds.

technical laboratory and superbly equipped kitchen.”

Fulfilling Mizell’s wish, locals did, indeed, use the hospital.

Did they ever.

#### CHAPTER 4: AND THEY’RE OFF...

It’s unclear if those original hospital leaders were the celebrating type, but if they were, they didn’t have much time to bask in the accomplishment of finally getting the hospital open. There were patients to be seen, after all.

In its first year of operation, the hospital hosted an average of 16.3 inpatients per day. In all, 1,151 patients received treatment in that time period — 272 through the Emergency Room — and 179 babies were born.

And just like that, the question went from whether Covington was big enough for a hospital to how quickly the hospital could expand to accommodate ever-growing patient counts.

It wasn’t even three years old, in fact, when St. Tammany Parish voters

in July 1957 approved another bond issue to pay for a 15-room expansion and assorted renovations. The work was completed in December 1958.

Just like the rest of St. Tammany Parish, the hospital has been growing steadily ever since.

By April 1968, it expanded again, this time by 61 beds. The ’68 project also gave the facility a second floor.

A \$4 million expansion program completed in 1978 saw the addition of 64 more beds, along with an expansion of the Emergency Room; the lab; and administrative, X-ray, physical therapy and respiratory areas.

“I doubt if anyone realized back in 1953, when construction was begun, that our population would increase so rapidly,” Haller Alexius, the hospital’s administrator at the time of the 1978 expansion, said in an interview with *The Times-Picayune*. “But grow it did, and we at the hospital have tried to meet the demands of that growth.”

That growth would only continue.

“There were major expansions every 10 years or so for a while there,” said Mike Portie, the health system’s assistant vice president of Support Services — and who, as a 36-year employee of the organization, knows the facility as well as, if not better than, anybody walking its halls.

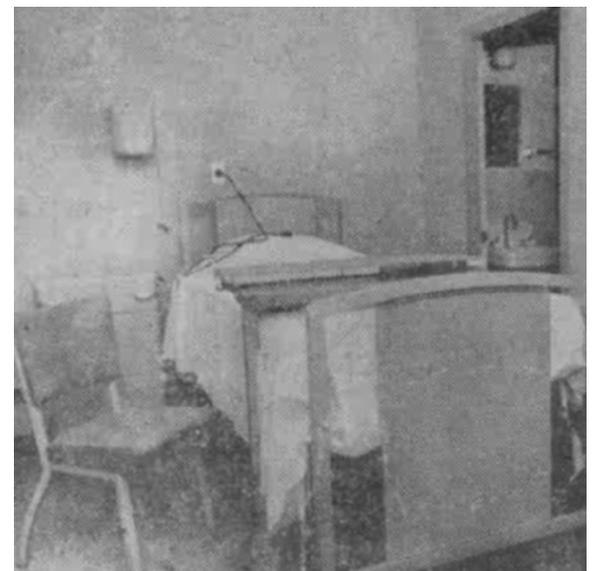
“Even when it wasn’t expanding, there have been constant renovations, remodels and other projects,” Portie said. “It went to a new level, though, around 1996. That was the beginning of the nonstop rapid growth.”

In 1995, the biggest expansion of the hospital to that point was started. Its centerpiece was a three-story structure to house the hospital’s intensive care unit, adding some 45,000 square feet of space and costing an estimated \$8.5 million. It was completed in May 1996.

In 1999, a new standard was set again as ground was broken on what the hospital dubbed its New Millennium Project. Completed in



A newspaper image shows the waiting room of the original St. Tammany Parish Hospital building, taken upon its opening in 1954. (Image via STHS archive)



A newspaper image shows one of the private patient rooms in the original St. Tammany Parish Hospital building, taken upon its opening in 1954. Initially, the hospital boasted 30 beds. It now has nearly 250. (Image via STHS archive)

1972

1973

1974

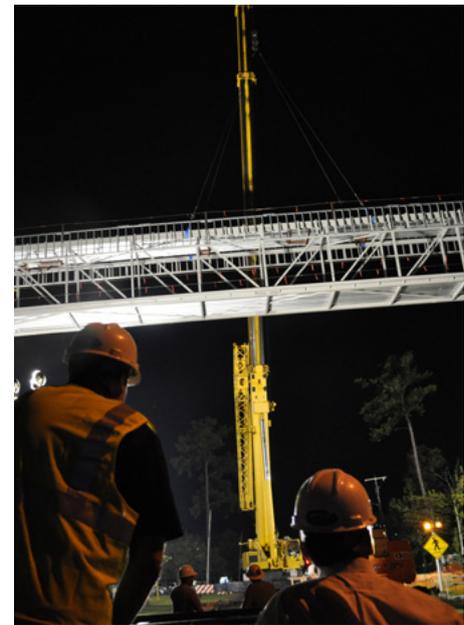
1975

1974

Another wing is added, to house an obstetrics unit. The wing was demolished around 25 years later as part of the hospital’s five-year New Millennium Project, a construction initiative that started in 1999.



Hospital leaders and local dignitaries break ground on the final phase of the hospital's New Millennium Project, which tripled the size of the hospital and added the atrium lobby locals know today. The \$45 million project was completed in 2004. (Image via STHS archive)



A construction crane lifts a section of truss into place for a pedestrian skybridge over South Tyler Street in summer 2011, linking St. Tammany Parish Hospital with the Charles A. Frederick Jr. Medical Office Complex across the street. (Image via STHS archive)

2004, the \$45 million project would triple the size of the hospital and add the sun-drenched atrium lobby that visitors know today.

In November 2011, in a dramatic aerial maneuver scheduled in the dead of night to reduce the impact on local traffic, an elevated pedestrian skybridge was hoisted by cranes and installed over South Tyler Street to link the hospital to the Charles A. Frederick Jr. Medical Office Complex across the street.

In 2014, the health system entered into a strategic partnership with Ochsner Health, further expanding its reach and creating the most comprehensive, integrated health system in St. Tammany history.

In 2016, the hospital renovated and greatly expanded its Emergency Department, which to this day

includes the region's only Pediatric Emergency Department.

Most recently, in 2019 and 2020, a new four-story expansion rose over the sprawling hospital campus, making room for it to turn every one of its patient rooms into a private room for the first time in the hospital's history. Containing more than five times the square footage of the original 25,000-square-foot hospital building, it pushed the hospital to nearly three-quarters of a million square feet of enclosed space.

For now.

## CHAPTER 5: TOMORROW AT ST. TAMMANY HEALTH SYSTEM

Those hoping to clap eyes on traces of the original building from 1954 are out of luck. None of that structure exists any longer.

"None. Zero. It's all gone," Portie said.

For the record, its lobby faced Tyler Street and was located roughly in the area of the outdoor fountain and Employee Brick Pathway outside today's hospital chapel, just northwest of the current hospital's main entrance. If you sit on one of the park benches near the water's edge, you'll be sitting right about where patients in 1954 would have waited to be seen by a doctor or nurse.

The two-story building that went up as part of the 1968 expansion is still in use; it's the oldest existing part of today's hospital facility, although few people likely realize how old it is without being told. It's been renovated and modernized multiple times, Portie said, always with an eye toward blending it seamlessly with the rest of the hospital.

1976

1977

1978

1979

1978

Yet another expansion is completed, this one costing \$4 million and adding 64 more beds, along with an expansion of the Emergency Room; the lab; and administrative, X-ray, physical therapy and respiratory areas.

DEC. 1, 1979

St. Tammany Parish Hospital celebrates its 25th anniversary. To mark the occasion, Parish President Robert Innerarity signs a proclamation declaring Dec. 1 to 7 to be St. Tammany Parish Hospital Week.

Today, it houses the hospital's Radiology Department, among other departments.

But even if everything else has changed since the hospital first rose along Tyler Street, one thing definitely hasn't: its commitment to the people of St. Tammany Parish.

"Even from that very first origin story of Mrs. Core wanting to have family and friends taken care of locally so they didn't have to drive across the lake, that's really become the driving force behind the hospital," said Dr. Patrick Torcson, St. Tammany Health System's chief medical officer. "The growth of the structure has been done to accommodate the breadth of the services that we need to take care of an expanding population."

That willingness to invest in the hospital is a credit to the foresight of the hospital's governing body and leadership over the years, Torcson said.



A newspaper editorial cartoon published in 1956 highlights the symbiotic relationship that has existed between St. Tammany Health System and the people of St. Tammany Parish from the hospital's very beginning. 'I think that's the special sauce,' said Dr. Patrick Torcson, chief medical officer, when asked about the hospital's success. 'There's no detachment. This is not an interloping corporate initiative. This is very much an organic part of this community in terms of its growth and role in the community.' (Image via STHS archive)

But, he added, credit is also owed to the countless anonymous staffers who have worked diligently to make sure that, as big as the hospital gets, it doesn't lose that community connection.

"Everybody here is somebody's neighbor, friend, sister-in-law, brother-in-law," Torcson said. "It really is a very well-connected community. I think that's very different from a big-city medical center. We really are caring for our friends, families and neighbors. We see that every day, and I think that contributes to the overall success we have achieved."

He continued: "It's truly a symbiotic relationship between the hospital and the community. I think that's the special sauce: There's no detachment. This is not an interloping corporate initiative. This is very much an organic part of this community in terms of its growth and role in the community."

From what he sees of the hospital's current decision makers, Torcson said the health system is poised to continue its growth over the next 10 or 20 years. Just like the growth it has experienced since 1954, that will likely include expansion of its physical footprint, he said, but it will also mean the continued addition of innovative new services and equipment to benefit the ever-growing community it serves.

As evidence of that commitment, he pointed to the recent investments the health system has made in robotic-assisted surgery, in digital disease management, in cancer care and other clinical areas.

For her part, STHS President and CEO Joan Coffman said she also sees an opportunity to expand the use of video visits and other in-home healthcare options that began growing

"It really is a very well-connected community. I think that's very different from a big-city medical center. We really are caring for our friends, families and neighbors. We see that every day, and I think that contributes to the overall success we have achieved."

- Dr. Patrick Torcson, St. Tammany Health System's chief medical officer

exponentially in popularity among local residents with the onset of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

Once more, that vision — which started by listening to what the community wanted and then delivering it — dovetails neatly with the mission that has guided the hospital since that tragic rainy night all those decades ago.

"I think what St. Tammany has done extraordinarily well, going back to its roots nearly seven decades ago, is connecting with and hearing the voice of the community," Coffman said. "Institutionally, there's a history of listening to our community constituents and reacting and responding to what they're telling us what the needs truly are.

"When you look back at what was here even in the early '80s when I started here, it was an unassuming two-story hospital with a very small footprint. You really didn't know unless you saw the signage that it was a hospital. Now, today, not only do we have the extraordinary new wing coming online, but we have a much bigger footprint out in the community, because we wanted to make sure over time that we were able to truly meet the needs where they are.

"And I think we've done a great job of that over the years." ■

1981

1982

1983

1984

MAY 30, 1984

The state House of Representatives votes to split the St. Tammany Parish Hospital Service District Board of Commissioners into two entities, one to govern St. Tammany Parish Hospital in the west side of the parish and another to govern Slidell Memorial in the east side of the parish.

## GROWTH TREND

Since its opening as St. Tammany Parish Hospital on Dec. 1, 1954, St. Tammany Health System has yet to stop growing. Here's an at-a-glance look at some of the larger expansions to the main hospital campus over the years:

### 1958

Coinciding with its fourth anniversary, the hospital in 1958 cut the ribbon on a \$75,000 new wing adding 14 beds to what was originally a 30-bed hospital. The first of what would be a series of expansions over the decades, it also included a new nursery, a new nursing station, a pediatrics ward and an "Executone" PBX system that — in something of a novelty at the time — put a telephone in every patient room.

### 1968

Even with the addition of a new wing in the previous decade, by the mid-1960s it was evident that considerably more space was needed. That led to a 1968 expansion adding 61 beds, nearly double the previous amount. Neither the original hospital building nor the 1958 wing exist any longer, which makes the 1968 wing — which has been modernized and renovated multiple times — the oldest existing part of the hospital.

### 1974

Another expansion takes place, adding a new wing, 31 beds and an obstetrics unit.

### 1978

By the 1970s, the hospital was growing so fast that it petitioned the city to close two blocks of Harrison Avenue to accommodate future growth. The city agreed, and by the end of 1978 the hospital unveiled a \$4 million expansion adding 64 beds and expanding several other parts of the facility, including the ER, X-ray, physical therapy, respiratory care and lab areas.

### 1996

After something of a construction lull in the 1980s, the hospital launched another major expansion in the early 1990s. Opened in May 1996, the new three-story addition cost \$8.5 million and added 45,000 square feet of space and 50 beds to the hospital. The work also tripled the size of the ER and ICU, and saw the renovation of 6,000 square feet of existing space.

### 2004

Hospital leaders greeted the new millennium by announcing plans for the New Millennium Project, a three-phase, \$45 million expansion completed in 2004 that tripled the size of the hospital and touched nearly every major department. Included were the addition of six endoscopy rooms, 17 post-anesthesia units, 11 operating rooms, two cardiac catheter labs, a 26-room outpatient surgery center, and a new kitchen and cafeteria. Also, the Radiology Department and New Family Center were both overhauled. Perhaps most conspicuous, however, was the addition of a glass-enclosed atrium and lobby to serve as an architectural welcome mat for the community.

**THEN:** In late 2013, crews got to work on a two-and-a-half-year, \$21 million project to add 8,600 square feet to St. Tammany Parish Hospital's Covington Emergency Department, in addition to an expansion to add a third floor — and 21 private rooms — to an adjacent building, seen at right. The project was completed in 2016. (STHS file image by Rick Olivier)



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Neither the original hospital building nor the 1958 wing exist any longer, which makes the 1968 wing – which has been modernized and renovated multiple times – the oldest existing part of the hospital.

## 2011

It wasn't the biggest of the hospital's numerous expansions, but it's the only one that literally stopped traffic. In July 2010, crews briefly closed busy South Tyler Street so construction cranes could place the framework for a \$3 million pedestrian bridge – enclosed, air-conditioned and known simply as “the skybridge” – to connect the main hospital building with its Covington Surgery Center and St. Tammany Cancer Center across the street. Scheduled to take place at night to reduce the impact to traffic, the maneuver drew photo-snapping spectators, anyway. Upon the completion of the skybridge in November 2011, hospital executives led staff on a second-line across the 208-foot-long span, which rises 27 feet over the roadway.

## 2016

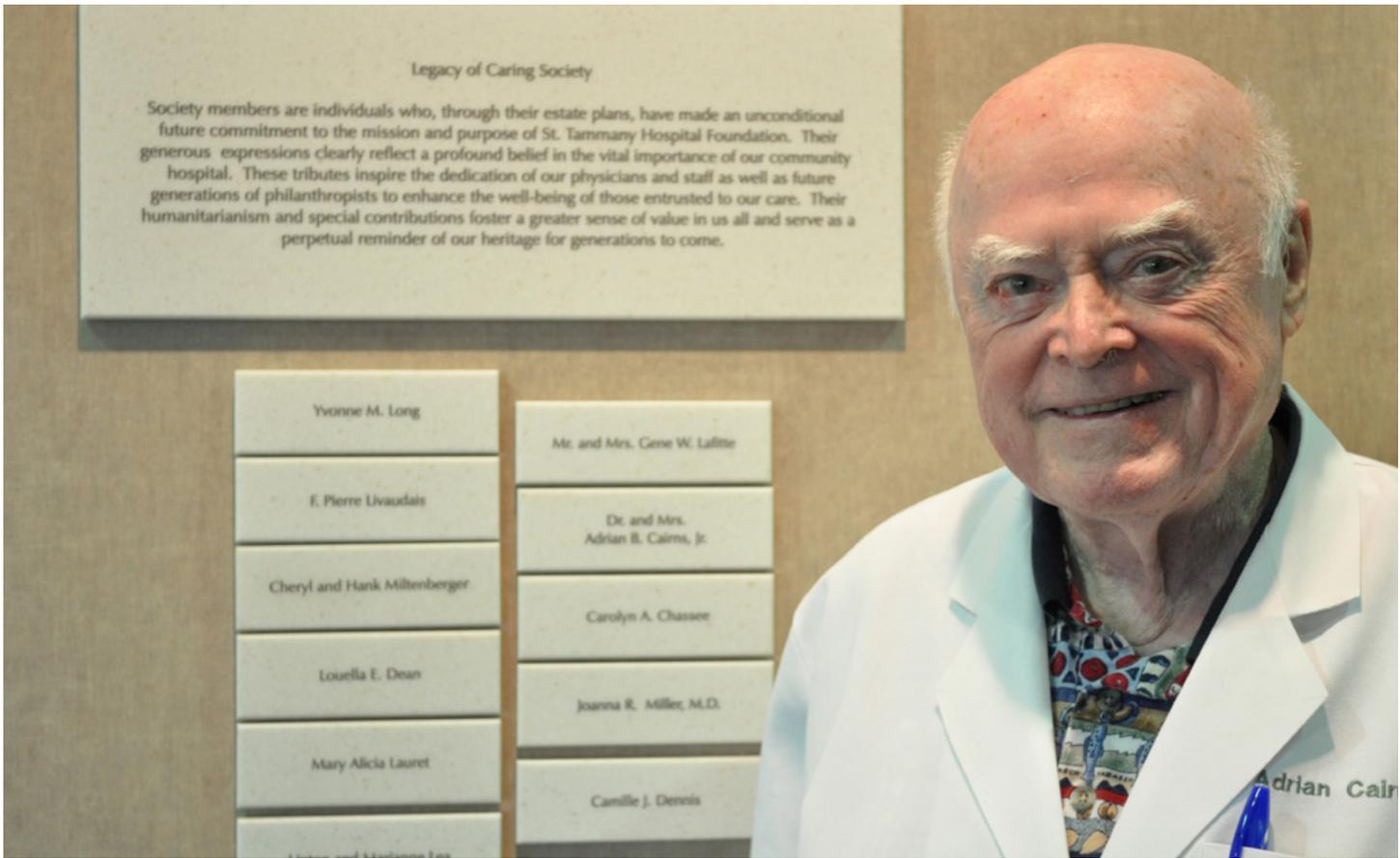
Shortly after its 60th anniversary, the hospital got to work on a multiyear, \$21 million project that saw the renovation and expansion of the Emergency Department. But that's not all it did. It rethought the ED, adding the area's only Pediatric Emergency Department as well as boosting the main ED's bed count by a third, to 30. The project also added 10 beds to the hospital's surgical unit and 21 medical/surgical rooms via a third-floor addition.

## 2021

Coinciding with the change of the organization's name from St. Tammany Parish Hospital to St. Tammany Health System – a move intended to reflect the regional reach provided by the hospital and its more than 20 satellite locations throughout western St. Tammany Parish – came the biggest expansion yet. A three-year, \$100 million project, it was highlighted by the addition of a 160,000-square-foot, four-story patient tower. In addition to housing new administrative space on the first floor, the expansion was designed to give the hospital enough space to make every patient room a private one. Under construction since 2018, it is scheduled to open in 2021 and will be followed by extensive renovations to multiple parts of the existing hospital facility, including the neonatal intensive care unit.



**NOW:** In addition to being designated a Level 3 Trauma Center, St. Tammany Health System's Emergency Department – photographed in January 2021 – also includes the only pediatric emergency room in the region. (Photo by Mike Scott / STHS)



In 2003, St. Tammany Health System leadership asked local physician Dr. Adrian B. Cairns to steer the formation of St. Tammany Hospital Foundation. It would become a passion. Cairns would end up serving as the organization's first board chairman, a post he held until 2008, and then as chairman emeritus until his death in 2017. (Image via STHS archive)

## A GIVING TRADITION

# How St. Tammany Hospital Foundation was born

BY MIKE SCOTT, MSCOTT@STPH.ORG

The generosity was there. It always had been, dating to the beginning when St. Tammany Health System was founded in December 1954 as St. Tammany Parish Hospital.

Back then, just as the initial building was nearing completion, leaders of the effort to establish the hospital realized they had overlooked something important: They had raised enough money to construct the hospital, but

they had forgotten to earmark money to equip and run it.

A call for help went out to Northshore residents, and they stepped up.

The Lions Club raised money to help furnish the pediatric ward. The Covington Rotary Club donated enough to outfit a double patient room. The Women's Progressive Union of Covington, the Garden Club of Covington, and the Business and

Professional Women of Covington each furnished a single room. The MCB Library Club in Covington raised enough to outfit the nursery in the new hospital's maternity ward.

Fast-forward a half-century, to spring 2003. While that spirit of generosity throughout the community hadn't waned, hospital leadership realized it would be a major benefit to establish a nonprofit foundation

1985

**DEC. 3, 1984**

St. Tammany Parish Hospital marks its 30th anniversary with an open house.

1986

**JULY 1985**

George C. "Chip" Faircloth succeeds St. Tammany Parish Hospital Administrator Haller Alexius to become the fifth person to hold that title.

1987

1988

**JULY 27, 1988**

Following a four-month interim stint, James A. Bingham becomes the sixth administrator of St. Tammany Parish Hospital.

“Our fledgling foundation was blessed to have behind it the most influential and community-minded volunteers to serve as ambassadors for its efforts, creative and innovative leadership and skilled staff, all working together to drive its mission.”

- Nicole Suhre, current foundation executive director

not only to corral that community generosity but also to raise the bar in an effort to make St. Tammany a healthier place.

St. Tammany Hospital Foundation was born.

Local physician Dr. Adrian Cairns was asked by hospital leadership to steer the effort in those early days. It would become a passion for Cairns, who would end up serving as the chairman of the foundation’s first Board of Trustees and remain a key part of foundation leadership until his death in 2017.

But from the start, Cairns and other early foundation organizers knew it would take much more than one or two people to accomplish the foundation’s goals. This would have to be a community effort.

“They came up with the idea that they wanted a foundation, and then they went out and found people to be a part of it,” said local businessman Harry Warner, who was recruited by longtime hospital and foundation board fixture John “Pizzie” Romano to serve on that initial board. “I told them, ‘I’d be happy to work with you, but I’m just a peon.’ But Pizzie — he and I grew up together — he told me he’d beat me up if I didn’t get on it. So, I joined up.”

Among the things that impressed Warner the most in those early years, he said, was the diversity of the backgrounds represented on the board.

“That was a big key that I saw,” Warner said. “We were able to get ideas from all aspects of life in this area. We accomplished a lot. It was really an interesting time.”

It was also an important time in the growth of the parish, according to Greg Pellegrini, who served on the foundation board from 2012 to 2020.

“The founding members had tremendous vision and were able to found an organization with the goal of enhancing healthcare in St. Tammany,” Pellegrini said. “It’s one of the most important aspects of the quality of life in our area, and those founders saw the growth that was happening in St. Tammany and the need to grow the hospital.”

And it has, indeed, grown. As it has, the foundation has grown with it.

Current foundation Executive Director Nicole Suhre points, for example, to the foundation’s first capital campaign in 2012, which set an ambitious goal of raising \$3 million to help fund the hospital’s Pediatric Emergency Department. With Pellegrini steering it, that campaign was successful, and St. Tammany Health System’s Covington hospital is now the only one in the region with a pediatric-specific ER.

“That was a huge win for us as a foundation,” Suhre said. “It really felt like we had taken things to the next level.”

It’s not just the big things, though. One of Pellegrini’s favorite initiatives is the foundation’s “Little Grant, Big Impact” program, through which

hospital departments can apply for funds to purchase a piece of equipment or some type of patient-related item to help them better do their healing work.

“It could be a new chair in the infusion suite, a laptop in the ED — things you would never think of but which make their life easier,” he said.

Suhre is also enormously proud of the foundation’s Healing Arts Initiative, which, inspired by the positive impact of the arts on the healing process, has over the years resulted in the installation of art of all varieties throughout the health system’s facilities, from paintings to sculptures to aquariums to the player piano in the hospital lobby.

Without the work and vision of that first foundation board, she said, none of it would have been possible.

“Our fledgling foundation was blessed to have behind it the most influential and community-minded volunteers to serve as ambassadors for its efforts, creative and innovative leadership and skilled staff, all working together to drive its mission,” Suhre said. “Donors were not hard to find, and as the hospital expanded and evolved, more and more community members stepped up to support its growth.”

While the scope of the foundation’s work has grown over the years as new members have come on board, its focus really hasn’t.

For his part, Pellegrini doesn’t see that changing.

“The foundation has as its sole goal and sole mission to support the hospital by enhancing the care and quality of life in St. Tammany Parish,” he said. “And that will never go away.” ■

1990

**FEBRUARY 1989**

The Parenting Center at St. Tammany Parish Hospital opens, offering education and support for families living in the hospital’s service area.

1991

**MARCH 1989**

The New Family Center opens, making St. Tammany Parish Hospital the first in the New Orleans area to allow an expectant mother to labor, deliver, recover and stay in the same room for the duration of her stay.

1992

1993

## THE GIFT OF TIME

# Since 1955, the all-volunteer St. Tammany Hospital Guild has embraced a mission of service

BY MIKE SCOTT, MSCOTT@STPH.ORG

Fall had only just descended on Covington in 1955 as Doris G. Alexander returned home from having a procedure done at the then-new St. Tammany Parish Hospital, and she felt an urge to say something.

“Do the people of the parish know how lucky we are to have the St. Tammany Parish Hospital?” she began a letter to the editor published in October of that year in the St. Tammany Farmer newspaper.

The hospital facilities, she wrote, were clean and beautiful. The doctors, she added, were “fine and congenial.” The nurses and their aides were, in her words, “pleasant at all times.”

But she saved arguably her most effusive praise for the members of the St. Tammany Hospital Guild, the all-volunteer organization founded just six months earlier as the St. Tammany Hospital Women’s Auxiliary to provide non-professional, non-administrative services to the hospital.

“These ladies are doing a fine job,” Alexander wrote. “Almost all day there is a lady on duty from this organization. At mid-morning they serve juices and coffee to the patients, which makes a pleasant break in the day. They also bring around toilet articles and incidentals that patients might have forgotten to bring from home. Books and magazines from the library are also offered to the



The St. Tammany Hospital Guild has been providing comfort and companionship to the patients at the Covington hospital, and assistance to the medical staff, since March 25, 1955, which is when the group was formed in a meeting at the Southern Hotel. (Image via STHS archive)

patients, as another fine service.”

Fast forward more than six decades, and the approximately 135 men and women making up the guild’s ranks are still providing comfort, care and companionship to the hospital’s patients, as well as highly valued support for its staff.

“Oh, they do everything,” STHS Volunteer Coordinator Shirley Primes said. “They’re up in endoscopy, where they greet patients. They prepare files for nurses upstairs. I have one in ambulatory care, where they give patients gowns and tell them, ‘They’ll be with you shortly.’ They’re in the surgery waiting area, they’re at the front desk. They’re at the Parenting Center and St. Tammany Hospice. They’re everywhere — and we’re lucky to have them.”

The guild was formed in a meeting held at the Southern Hotel in Covington on March 25, 1955, less than four months after the hospital opened its doors.

At that time, the hospital was a small, one-story country concern, but it represented a long, hard-fought victory for the community, the members of which previously had to make the drive around Lake Pontchartrain to receive hospital care in New Orleans.

After years of fits and starts, the hospital finally opened its doors to patients on Dec. 1, 1954. It didn’t take long, however, for hospital leadership to realize that it takes more than doctors and nurses to run a hospital.

Enter the guild, which, under the leadership of its first president, Mrs. M.T. Benedict, stepped in to

1994

NOV. 18, 1993

The hospital cuts the ribbon on its St. Tammany Regional Heart Center, located across Tyler Street from the hospital and representing one of the first major expansions beyond the main hospital campus.

1995

1996

MAY 1996

A three-story addition costing \$8.5 million opens, adding 45,000 square feet of space and 50 beds to the hospital.

1997

fill all manner of voids. They made surgical dressings. They raised money for hospital equipment. They maintained the hospital grounds. They sewed anything and everything that needed sewing in a room at the hospital dedicated solely to that purpose. And they poured that refreshing juice and coffee that made Doris Alexander so grateful.

While the daily tasks have changed, that generous spirit still fuels today's guild members, said longtime STHS volunteer Dottie Frederick, who joined the guild in 2000 following the death of her husband.

"I can tell you, most of us were older people, and most of them wanted something to do, something to keep them active," said Frederick, who is still a guild member. "It serves two purposes: We help the hospital, but it also gives us something enjoyable to do."

As the hospital has grown over the years, the guild has kept pace, raising money to purchase needed equipment for the hospital and — since 1972 — awarding scholarships to hospital employees who are continuing their medical education.

In October 1995, the group took things to the next level with the opening of the St. Tammany Hospital Gift Shoppe, the result of some 20 years' worth of fundraising and planning. As with the profits from its annual jewelry sale and linen sale, among other fundraisers, the guild plows the money it makes from the gift shop right back into the hospital through the nonprofit St. Tammany Hospital Foundation.

In 2019, the guild's annual donation to the foundation was more than \$65,000 and funded everything



On March 25, 1955, Mrs. M.T. Benedict was elected the first president of the St. Tammany Hospital Guild, which was formed as the St. Tammany Hospital Women's Auxiliary. (Image via STHS archive)

from an opioid intervention program to iPads for the hospital's pediatric unit to rocking chairs for its New Family Center.

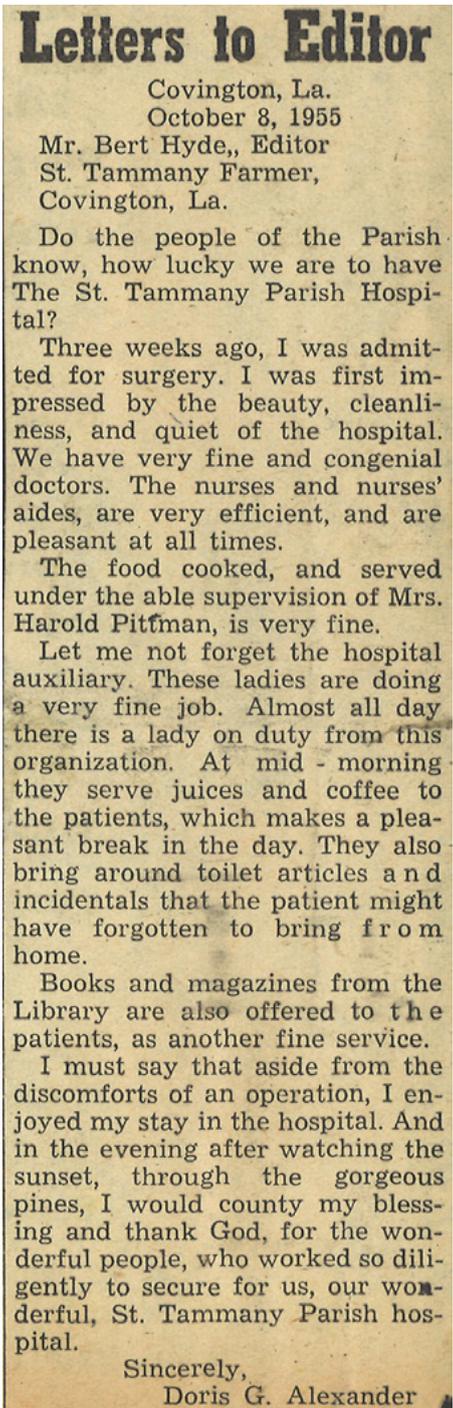
That same year, it also awarded \$19,500 in nursing scholarships.

The real contribution, however, has been the time donated by the guild's members, which just from 2010 to 2018 has been estimated to be 200,556 people hours and valued at \$3,218,924, according to guild calculations.

"Our guild members are true champions. The services they provide to the hospital aren't done for compensation. They volunteer out of the goodness of their hearts," said Nicole Suhre, executive director of St. Tammany Hospital Foundation. "Their gift of time is a most precious one, and we are forever grateful for their time and the funds they raise for the hospital through the foundation."

Doris Alexander, for one, agreed.

"I must say that aside from the discomforts of an operation, I enjoyed my stay in the hospital," she wrote in closing her 1955 letter. "And



A 1955 letter to the editor of the St. Tammany Farmer from local resident Doris G. Alexander extolled the work of the hospital's then-newly-formed guild. (Image via STHS archive)

in the evening after watching the sunset, through the gorgeous pines, I would ... thank God for the wonderful people who worked so diligently to secure for us our wonderful St. Tammany Parish Hospital." ■

1999

**JULY 1999**

Hospital officials break ground on a three-phase, "New Millennium Project," a \$45 million expansion and renovation initiative that will take three years to complete.

2000

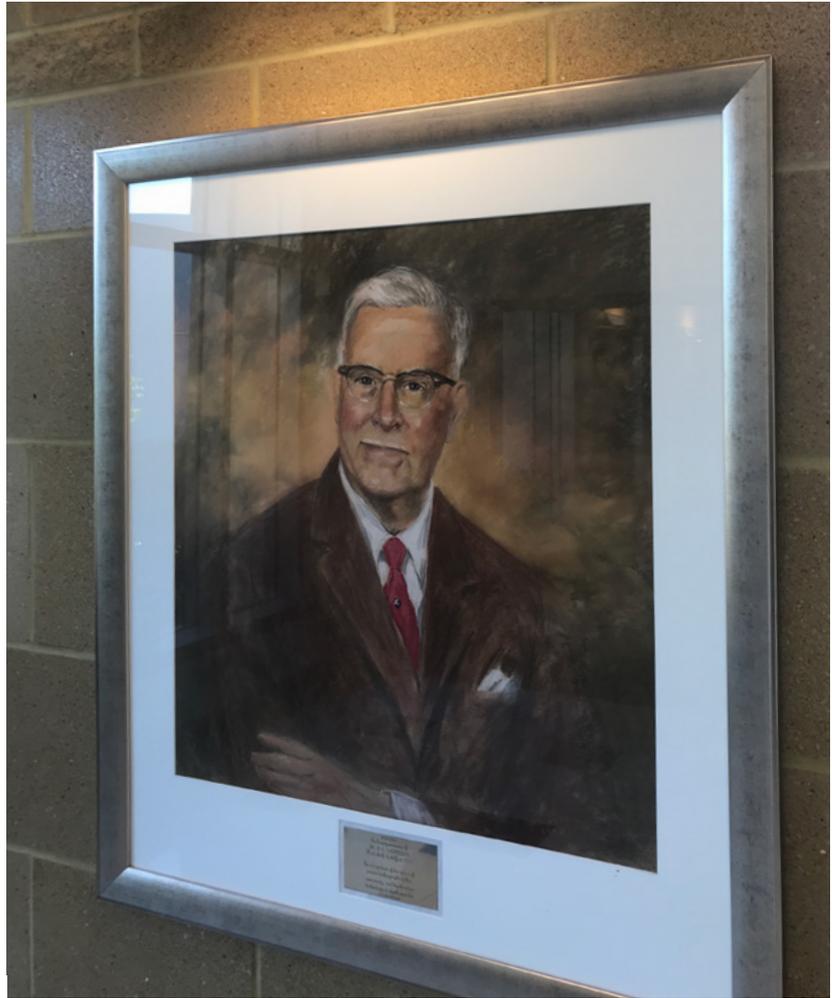
**OCTOBER 2000**

Patti M. Elish is named president and CEO of St. Tammany Parish Hospital, succeeding Thomas J. Stone in the top job. Elish would stay in the role for 18 years.

2001

2002

A portrait of Dr. H.E. Gautreaux, the first chief of staff at St. Tammany Parish Hospital, is one of five portraits of men from the hospital's history that hang in the Radiology hallway at St. Tammany Health System's main Covington campus. (Photos by Mike Scott/STHS)



## PORTRAITS OF COMPASSION

# Meet St. Tammany Health System's 'Five Old Men'

BY MIKE SCOTT, MSCOTT@STPH.ORG

If you've ever walked down the Radiology hallway at St. Tammany Health System's Covington hospital, you've undoubtedly seen them. You might have even wondered out loud about them.

They are five distinguished-looking gentlemen, all in various stages of balding or graying, who stare back at visitors from a series of reverential portraits. It's obvious from the portraits' prominent positioning, as well as the brass inscriptions attached to each, that each man was important or beloved or both — but who are these guys, anyway?

They are the Five Old Men of St. Tammany Health System, and each had a part to play in its long history.

These are their stories.

2003

**FEB. 21, 2003**

The nonprofit St. Tammany Hospital Foundation is created to harness the generosity of local donors in an effort to sustain the healing work of St. Tammany Health System.

2004

**MARCH 19, 2004**

The hospital celebrates its 50th year with the unveiling of a new glass-lined atrium lobby, part of a three-phase, \$45 million expansion tripling the size of the hospital and touching nearly every department.

2005

2006

**AUG. 29, 2005**

Hurricane Katrina roars ashore, decimating South Louisiana. Afterward, St. Tammany Health System — which continued operating throughout — is called a "beacon of light" on the Northshore.

## A PILLAR OF THE COMMUNITY

The man: Dr. H.E. Gautreaux (1882-1969)

The artist: Gigi Burgan

The inscription: “In recognition of his years of service to the people of this community and his devotion to the highest ideals and the art of medicine.”

Many family medicine practitioners joke about providing care for patients “from the womb to the tomb.” But Dr. Henry Gautreaux actually did it.

The longtime Covington doctor said he stopped counting how many babies he delivered when he reached 3,000. Then, in 1946, he was appointed coroner of St. Tammany Parish when the elected coroner fell ill. He would be re-elected unopposed for six terms.

In that time, he would continue practicing medicine and eventually accept a post as the first chief of staff at St. Tammany Health System upon its founding in 1954 as St. Tammany Parish Hospital.

Born in New Orleans, Dr. Gautreaux was one of five children of Henry E. and Mary Scallen Gautreaux. He attended Jesuit High School followed by Tulane University, from which he earned a medical degree in 1904.

After a two-year internship at Touro Infirmary, in 1906 he made the move to the Northshore, where — as one of the area’s few doctors — he made his rounds in a horse and buggy, according to a front-page obituary that ran in The Times-Picayune upon his death in 1969.

Named “Outstanding Man in the Parish” in 1931 and “Outstanding Citizen of Covington” in 1951, he was held in high regard throughout his career, according to the St. Tammany Farmer in a special section published to mark the second anniversary of the hospital.

“He came to this community in 1906,” it read, “a character of ability, understanding and tenderness, whose qualities have endured and gained momentum with the passing years.”

Although remembered as soft-spoken and easy to smile, Dr. Thomas Healy could be tough when that was required. According to his obituary, he led a M.A.S.H. unit on the beaches at Normandy during World War II and earned a bronze star and five combat stars before coming home to become a charter staffer at St. Tammany Parish Hospital.

## ‘SPOKE ONLY A LITTLE AND SMILED A LOT’

The man: Dr. Thomas James Healy (1914-1993)

The artist: Marilyn Carter Rougelot

The inscription: “In recognition of 57 years in the medical profession.”

It’s been nearly 30 years since Dr. Thomas Healy passed away following an illustrious career as a local physician, but his legacy at St. Tammany Health System is very much alive, in the form of two descendants — a granddaughter and great-granddaughter — who work at the hospital today.

Medicine was an early calling for the New Orleans native and graduate of Jesuit High School, who entered Loyola University at the tender age of 15 before transferring mid-term to Tulane to study medicine.

After receiving his medical degree in 1935, he interned at Hôtel-Dieu and worked for a time in Thibodaux before moving to Covington to start a practice — and raise a family — in 1954.

Described as soft-spoken and easy to smile, he started each day by attending Mass at St. Peter Catholic Church.



JULY 2007

The hospital purchases its first da Vinci surgical robot system for minimally invasive pelvic surgeries, kick-starting a new era in technology at the Covington facility.

JANUARY 2009

The Heart Center building across Tyler Street from the hospital is razed to make room for the three-story Medical Office Building now occupying the site.

Don't think that means he wasn't tough when he needed to be, though.

During World War II, he joined the U.S. Army and served as company commander of a medical battalion for 22 months in the European theater. According to his Times-Picayune obituary, he led a M.A.S.H. unit on the beaches of Normandy and was awarded a bronze star and five combat stars by the time of his discharge in December 1945.

A charter staffer at St. Tammany Health System, he would serve as its chief of staff from 1960 to 1961. In 1970, he succeeded Dr. H.E. Gautreaux as coroner and was re-elected to the post four times, retiring from it in 1987.

He continued his Covington medical practice, however, until 1992. A month after closing it, he died.

## A BIG PERSONALITY WITH A BIG HEART

The man: Dr. Jacob H. Kety (1917-1977)

The artist: Gigi Burgan

The inscription: "In recognition of his devotion and dedication to St. Tammany Parish Hospital / Donated by the employees of STPH."

One look at artist Gigi Burgan's portrait of Dr. Kety hanging at St. Tammany Health System's hospital campus is all it takes to get a general sense of the man. He was a big man with a big personality, and Burgan's portrait captures that.

But there was more to him than gregariousness.

"He was well known for his colorful personality, but perhaps most remembered for his generous heart," read a 1991 story in a hospital-produced publication. "As a general practitioner, he is remembered for his great ability to correctly diagnose a patient with minimal testing. But it was his kindness and compassion that really stood out."

When making rounds in rural areas, he was known to accept payment in whatever form was convenient for his patients. That's precisely how, over the years, he ended up with a barnyard's worth of goats, chickens and other livestock.

Born and raised in Wilmington, Delaware, he would earn his bachelor of science from LSU in 1940, after which he served in the U.S. Army during World War II as a medical officer in an infantry unit from 1942 to 1945. Seeing action in North Africa, Sicily and elsewhere in the European theater of operations, he earned five decorations and five

A man known for his gregarious nature and his dedication to LSU football, Dr. Jacob Kety could also be a big softie. When making rounds in rural areas, he was known to accept payment in whatever form was convenient to his patients — leaving him with a menagerie of farm animals.



2012

OCT. 4, 2011

Hospital officials cut the ribbon on the new Women's Pavilion in Covington, which has a particular focus on breast health.

2013

NOV. 15, 2011

Hospital administrators open their new enclosed pedestrian skybridge — linking the hospital with the new Medical Office Building — by second-lining across it.

2014

OCTOBER 2014

St. Tammany Health System enters into a clinically integrated partnership with Ochsner Health, giving locals the most comprehensive, integrated health system in western St. Tammany Parish's history.

2015

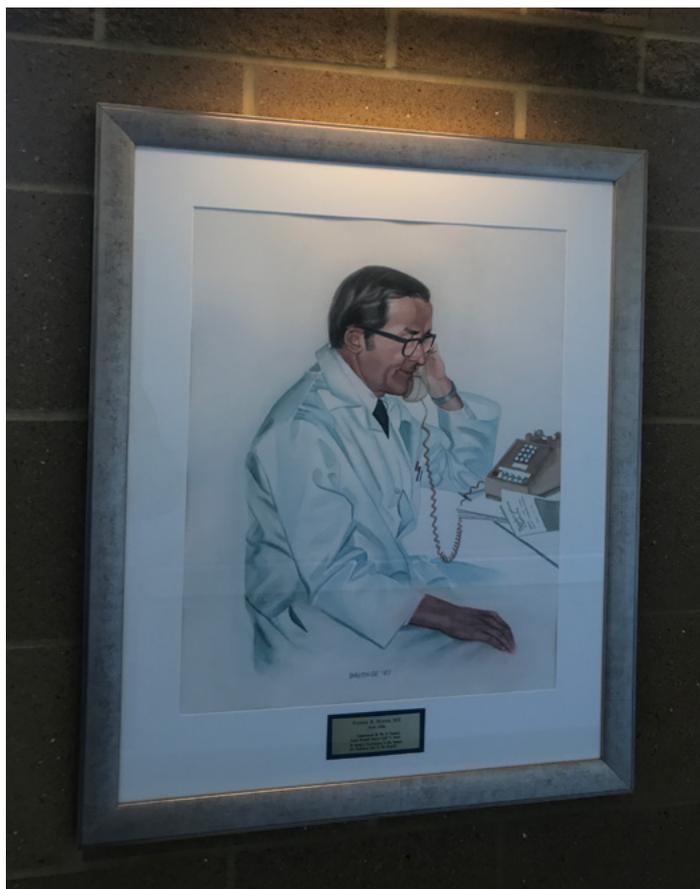
battle stars, according to a 1956 story published in the St. Tammany Farmer.

After the war, he returned to LSU to earn his medical degree. He would remain a lifelong Tigers fan, going so far as to write a scathing letter to the sports editor of The Times-Picayune in 1970 denigrating the skills of rival Tulane's football squad.

(“When Tulane can put together a half-dozen straight winning seasons, including victories over something stronger than Cincinnati, etc., then you can brag, not before,” he wrote.)

In addition to an internship at Touro Infirmary, he studied for a year at the University of Vienna. There, he met his future wife, Gaby Khalil Achkar, also a physician. In October 1957, Kety and Achkar were the first couple to be married in New Orleans' then-new City Hall, a distinction marked with a photo and accompanying story published in The Times-Picayune.

Kety joined the inaugural staff of St. Tammany Health System upon its founding in 1954 as St. Tammany Parish Hospital, and he served as its chief of staff from 1966 to 1967.



In addition to operating a private practice — including, for a time, in the old Madisonville library building — he was for years the team physician for the Covington High School football team.

Kety died in 1977 and was buried in Picayune, Mississippi.

## THE MAN BEHIND THE STADIUM (AND THE SCHOLARSHIPS)

The man: Dr. Patrick Hunter (1928-1986)

The artist: Gauthier

The inscription: “Commissioned by the St. Tammany Parish Hospital medical staff to honor Dr. Hunter’s contribution to his patients, his profession and to the hospital.”

Like the other men on St. Tammany Parish’s wall of honor, surgeon Dr. Patrick Hunter was a giving man, although he often did his giving quietly.

“Dr. Hunter used to give us five scholarships a year,” former principal Brother Jeffrey Calligan told New Orleans’ WGNO-TV in 2015. “He would choose kids from the public system who were poor, and the kids never knew, nor did the family. We would take them. It was wonderful.”

It was part of a long, close relationship with St. Paul’s School, where Hunter served for 21 years as the team physician for the football team. Six of his eight children played on the team.

He’s also the reason the Wolves play at Hunter Stadium, which was named after him.

A graduate of the LSU School of Medicine, he completed his surgical residency at Charity Hospital in New Orleans before briefly going into private practice in Greenville, Mississippi. He moved to St. Tammany Parish around 1966.

In late 1984, Hunter was named a member of St. Tammany Parish Hospital’s Board of Commissioners, where he served until his death in July 1986 of an apparent heart attack.

In addition to being a community physician, Dr. Patrick Hunter was a donor to St. Paul’s School in Covington, which named its football stadium — Hunter Stadium — after him.

2017

2018

### JUNE 2018

Joan M. Coffman, who started her medical career as a radiologic technologist at St. Tammany Parish Hospital, is named the health system’s new president and CEO.

2019

### DEC. 4, 2019

The 65th anniversary of the hospital is marked with the adoption of a new logo and a new name — St. Tammany Health System — acknowledging the growing community reach of the organization.

2020

### MARCH 13, 2020

St. Tammany Health System’s first confirmed COVID-19 patient is diagnosed, beginning one of the most emotionally challenging years in hospital history.



Haller Alexius started his career as a hardware salesman. He would end it by serving 19 years as the administrator of St. Tammany Parish Hospital, a longer tenure than anyone else who has served in that post.

## AN ERA OF GROWTH

The man: Haller Alexius (1920-1989)

The artist: Marilyn Carter Rougelot

The inscription: "In recognition of serving 21 years as administrator."

Haller Alexius wasn't supposed to be a hospital guy. He was supposed to be a hardware guy.

And initially, at least, that's what he was.

A member of the extended local Alexius family and a product of the local public school system, the Covington native served in the Coast Guard during World War II. After the war, he started his civilian career first as an employee, and eventually as president, of Alexius Brothers Hardware.

Then, in 1964, he decided to make a switch, joining St. Tammany Parish Hospital as comptroller. In 1966, he was chosen to succeed the hospital's outgoing administrator, H. Shober Roberts.

It was a position Alexius would hold for 19 years, one of the longest tenures of anyone who has served in the post. (The inscription on a brass plaque affixed to his portrait erroneously says he was administrator for 21 years, although he was comptroller for the first two years of that span.)

In that time, Alexius would oversee some of the biggest expansions to that point in the hospital's history. They included a 61-bed expansion completed in 1968, a 31-bed expansion completed in 1974 and a 64-bed expansion completed in 1978.

When he started in the job, the hospital had 45 beds. By the time he retired in 1985, it had 200.

"I doubt if anyone realized back in 1953, when construction was begun, that our population would increase so rapidly," Alexius said at the time of the 1978 expansion. "But grow it did, and we at the hospital have tried to meet the demands of that growth."

Alexius died on Dec. 2, 1989, at the age of 69 — at St. Tammany Parish Hospital. ■

2021

### EARLY 2021

Expected opening date of a new four-story, 160,000-square-foot new patient wing, part of a three-year, \$100 million project.

### MID 2021

After operating for years out of the Medical Office Building across the street from the hospital, St. Tammany Health System is scheduled to move its cancer care services to a new \$50 million, 75,000-square-foot cancer center built in cooperation with its partner Ochsner Health near the intersection of Interstate 12 and Louisiana 21.



