



# Heart to Heart

A publication of St. Tammany Health System



GULF COAST  
& Trust C  
nk That Care



## COOKING WITH HEART

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At St. Tammany Health System, we treat kids like kids. Not little adults. We're home to the only pediatric ER on the Northshore, a leading-edge PICU, a ground-breaking Parenting Center, and many fellowship-trained pediatric specialists. Together with our partner Ochsner Health, we're making it easier to stay by your child's side on this side of the lake.

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Amy Bouton, executive editor  
Mike Scott, editor and senior writer  
Tory Mansfield, creative director  
Tim San Fillippo, senior marketing specialist  
Jan Budenz, editorial assistant

# Gratefully Yours

## The recipe for a Healthier Northshore



Joan Coffman, FACHE

**“Growing fresh vegetables is one thing. But once you have them, what do you do with them?”**

Feeling hungry?

After seeing the cover of this issue, featuring Chef Gavin Jobe of Meribo in Covington, and reading the accompanying story and recipe on Pages 8 and 9, I sure am.

At the same time, I am also quite satisfied.

That’s because Chef Gavin was participating in the latest installment of the quarterly Eat Well, Live Well cooking demonstration series co-hosted by Healthier Northshore.

That group, near and dear to my heart, is a coalition of like-minded community stakeholders founded in part by St. Tammany Health System with the goal of improving local population health metrics.

It hit a homerun last spring when it planted a community garden on the Safe Haven campus in Mandeville. The Eat Well, Live Well series is a beautifully conceived outgrowth of that project.

After all, growing fresh vegetables is one thing. But once you have them, what do you do with them? Eat Well, Live Well has some healthy yet tasty suggestions.

Caring for our community is always rewarding – but rarely is it as delicious!

I hope you enjoy this issue of Heart to Heart as much as I am sure you will enjoy Chef Gavin’s recipe. And thank you, as always, for being part of our St. Tammany Health System family.



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



## Let the good times roll

St. Tammany Health System President and CEO Joan Coffman, left, and other members of the health system leadership team – from left, Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton, Chief Financial Officer Sandra DiPietro, Assistant Vice President Care Coordination Paula Day, Senior Vice President Human Resources Christopher Ford and Chief Operating Officer Sharon Toups – showed off their Carnival colors in February as part of a colleague celebration marking the health system’s 2022 successes. (Photo by Mike Scott/ STHS)

# Sparking innovation

STHS's Dr. Paul Stahls discusses how electrophysiology is changing heart care

By *STHS Communication Department*

The recent expansion of St. Tammany Health System's Cardiology Clinic – including the addition of three more cardiologists and a satellite office in Mandeville – is undeniably good news for Northshore patients.

It's also, however, good news for STHS cardiologist Dr. Paul Stahls, who – thanks to the additions – can focus full-time on his professional passion: electrophysiology.

But what does that mean, exactly? To find out, we sat down for a chat with Dr. Stahls. Below is a transcript of our conversation, edited for space.



**“(The Watchman device) is really going to change the complexion of our ability to prevent clot formation within the heart.”**  
– Dr. Paul Stahls, STHS cardiologist

**Let's start at the beginning. What is electrophysiology?**

The heart is a very complex organ, and when you think about it, it's a muscular pump. But that muscular pump has to coordinate its actions, and with that coordinated muscular motion you get the optimized blood flow, or hemodynamics. The electrical side of the heart drives the hemodynamics. It's really where the coordination of the muscular movement comes into play.

You're looking at a field that didn't exist when you and I were born. The 1980s and '90s is really when electrophysiology started to catch stride. The mechanisms were being teased out. The understanding of the electrical side of the heart

was really being honed and not just understanding what it is to be normal but abnormal – and then what the heck you do about it.

**And what do you do about it?**

Ablation is one of the top electrophysiology procedures to do to adjust the wiring within the heart. It involves going inside the heart through the veins, coming into the right side of the heart and passing very thin catheters, about the thickness of a piece of spaghetti, with little electrodes on them. Then I can study how the electricity flows through the

heart, determine where the bad wires are, if there are any, or what area is diseased.

I then go in and modify with heat energy or freezing energy. The idea is to purposefully scar, because scarred or dead cardiac myocytes can't conduct electricity. So it's sorting how to block the flow of either the normal or abnormal electrical signals within the heart.

**Recently you started doing the minimally invasive Watchman implant procedure. Can you talk about that?**

It's a new addition to our structural heart program. The Watchman device is about the size of a stack of four or five quarters, and it can compress and go into a small area of the left atrium called the appendage. It's a small little pouch in which we estimate 90 to 95% of the clots that form inside the heart develop.

So instead of using blood thinners – which are rife with their own issues – the Watchman device can occlude the area so blood doesn't pool there any

## KEEPING WATCH

A closer look at how the Watchman device helps reduce the risk of stroke in some patients:

- 1 In the left atrium of the heart is an "outpouch" known as the left atrial appendage, or LAA, where an estimated 90% to 95% of stroke-causing clots that come from the heart form.
- 2 In a minimally invasive procedure, the Watchman is compressed and threaded through a vein and positioned to block blood flow to the LAA.
- 3 Eventually, tissue grows over the Watchman device, closing off the LAA, decreasing stroke risk and reducing the need for strong blood thinners.

Images courtesy Boston Scientific

longer. The procedure takes about 30, 45 minutes and you're home the same day. It's really going to change the complexion of our ability to prevent clot formation within the heart.

**Can it get people off blood thinners?**

That's the goal, and that's actually one of the biggest things with electrophysiology in general I was attracted to: the ability to do a mechanical fix and remove the need for medicinal therapy. Now that's not always the case, but in this case it is.

With the Watchman, instead of being on Coumadin or one of the very strong blood thinners we call NOACs or DOACs, you can come off of those medicines.

The point is really, within a day, we can take your stroke risk and your need of prophylaxis – using a strong blood thinner – and stop that, potentially for life. ■



Visit [StTammany.health/CardioCare](https://StTammany.health/CardioCare) or call (985) 871-4140 to make an appointment.

# Ask the STHS Experts

Our team of seasoned professionals answer questions from our Northshore neighbors

**How do I know if my child is ready to graduate to a booster seat when traveling, and how can I tell if it fits him properly? – A.B., Mandeville**

Good questions; you're not the only one wondering. As important as they are for the safety of children, car seats can prompt frustration, confusion and even intimidation in many parents.

Your child is ready for a booster seat when they are older than 4 and/or have outgrown their forward-facing



Marla Rabalais

car seat with internal harness by height or weight.

When your child is seated in the booster seat, make sure the lap belt fits low across the hips and the shoulder belt across the shoulder.

Generally, children need a booster seat until they are between 8 and 12 years old. Use a booster seat with the vehicle lap and shoulder seat belt until your child passes all of the following milestones:

- 1 Their knees bend at the edge of the vehicle seat when their back and bottom are against the vehicle seat back.
- 2 The vehicle lap belt fits across the upper thighs without a booster.
- 3 The vehicle shoulder belt fits across the child's shoulder and chest without a booster.

St. Tammany Health System's Parenting Center has certified passenger safety technicians on staff who can ensure your car seat is installed properly or to teach you how to install them – all at no charge. Call (985) 898-4435 to set an appointment.



Children using a properly installed booster seat in the back seat of a vehicle are 45% less likely to be injured in a crash than children using a seat belt alone, studies show. (Stock image)

## YOUR TURN

Do you have a question for our STHS team? Go ahead. Just ask. Email your questions to us at [CommDept@stph.org](mailto:CommDept@stph.org). We'll do our best to get an answer, with select responses appearing in future editions of Heart to Heart. *(Please include your hometown and the initials you'd like us to use in identifying you.)*

We encourage expectant parents to call for a free installation and/or instruction appointment at least two weeks before their due date.

– Marla C. Rabalais, RD, LDN, CPST, St. Tammany Health System Parenting Center health educator

**I'll be having my baby soon at St. Tammany Health System's New Family Center. What are the rules for visitors? – B.V., Slidell**

First things first: Congratulations – and thank you for being part of the St. Tammany Health System family!

The New Family Center is a locked

unit for the security of our mothers and babies, so all visitors must sign in for access every time they visit their loved one on the unit.

For vaginal deliveries, two visitors are allowed during childbirth. For a non-emergency C-section, one support person is allowed.

Once you've had your baby, two visitors at a time are allowed. Siblings

under the age of 18 must be accompanied by an adult and are not counted in the two-visitor limit.

Additionally, one support person over the age of 18 may remain overnight with you. Children under 18 are not allowed to stay overnight with the patient.

Please see our visitor policy online at [www.StTammany.health/Visitors](http://www.StTammany.health/Visitors) for the most current and up-to-date information.

– Jamie Orr Romage, MSN, RN, director of Lactation Education, Mother Baby and New Family Center at St. Tammany Health System ■



Jamie Romage

# For Dr. Farah Ali, palliative medicine is ‘a privilege and an honor’

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

For most people, it’s an uncomfortable topic, one they’d rather not talk about or, in many cases, even think about.

But St. Tammany Health System’s new director of Palliative Care sees death differently.

“Death is inevitable. We’re all headed to that point,” said Dr. Farah Ali, DO. “And it’s so much harder for a patient and their family when it’s right at the end, they’re unprepared for it and everything is hitting them like a bag of bricks.”

It doesn’t have to be that way, though — which is where palliative care comes in, to help patients who have serious, even terminal medical conditions plan for the inevitable.

In the process, they get an opportunity to optimize their quality of life for the time they have left, including alleviating symptoms like pain and shortness of breath in serious illness. But additionally, palliative care can help patients’ families plan for their eventual passing and, hopefully, relieve everyone of that whole bag-of-bricks feeling.

“I’m really excited to be at a health system that really strives to deliver compassionate care,” Dr. Ali said. “Literally, our mission statement at St. Tammany is about compassionate care, and that’s what palliative care is about. It’s such a good fit.”

That emphasis on compassion at St. Tammany Health System is part of what prompted Dr. Ali to pack her bags and make the move to the Bayou State.

Born and raised in the Atlanta



Dr. Farah Ali says her new posting as director of St. Tammany Health System’s Palliative Care program is more than just a job. It is a calling. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

## Take 5: the five facets of home care

**Primary Wellness Home Care** offers patients an annual in-home checkup by one of our professional, highly trained care providers to support and complement the patient’s regular doctor’s care.

**Home healthcare** is in-home care provided to a patient by a trained professional while allowing them to continue to enjoy familiar surroundings.

**Transitional care** sees our skilled nursing team follow a patient’s care for at least 30 days after their discharge from the hospital.

**Palliative care** is devoted to the improvement of quality of life for people with serious, life-limiting conditions by addressing the many stressors that can accompany such illness, such as pain, fatigue, fear of the unknown and loss of independence.

**Hospice care** provides palliative and supportive care to terminally ill patients and their families in the home through an interdisciplinary team that addresses physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs.

area, she attended medical school at Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in Suwannee, Georgia. Upon graduation, she completed an internal medicine residency at Grady Hospital through Morehouse School of Medicine, followed by a hospice and palliative medicine fellowship at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

She is board certified in internal medicine and is a member of an array of professional societies, including the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine, and the Center to Advance Palliative Care.

“I always knew I wanted to practice palliative medicine,” Dr. Ali said. “It was an interest of mine back when I was in medical school, so I used that time to find out if palliative was right for me. I only continued to feel stronger and

stronger about that calling.”

And that’s how she sees her posting at STHS. It’s not just a job. It’s not just a career. It’s a calling.

“It’s a privilege and an honor to be a part of such an intimate moment for patients and their families, when they’re making such serious decisions about what’s most important to them and what gives them meaning in their life and what they want the end to look like,” Dr. Ali said.

Away from work, she enjoys traveling and spending time with her family.

In fact, her family can be credited with sending her down the path to palliative medicine.

“I have an amazing family,” she said. “They inspire me to be kind and be humble and work hard for other people.” ■

# Coming up Daisies

Five more St. Tammany Health System nurses were honored in recent months by the international Daisy Award program for their compassion, commitment and expertise. We thought you'd like to meet them.



STHS nurses react with delight as Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton, left, surprises nurse Regina Knight with a Daisy Award. Regina, an ICU nurse and 22-year veteran of STHS, was nominated by colleague Suzanne Fraiche, who noted Regina's tireless work at the bedside and on various health system committees. 'Regina is a role model for nursing and working in the trenches to provide the best care for the ICU patients,' Suzanne wrote. 'She advocates for patients and families every shift she works.' (Photo by Jan Budenz/STHS)



STHS Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton, right, surprises cardiopulmonary nurse Janie Kuebel with a Daisy Award. Kuebel was nominated for the award by Julie Dixon, whose mother underwent a quintuple bypass. 'Janie prayed with us, comforted us. She continually checked on us,' Dixon wrote. 'The discharge instructions did not stick with me after a 10-day hospital stay, but thanks to Janie, I knew how to care for her when I got home. She was a vital part of her recovery.' (Photo by Jan Budenz/STHS)



Nurse Madison Malaschak, who works on the Orthopedic Surgery unit at St. Tammany Parish Hospital, celebrates her Daisy win with members of her team. Madison was nominated for the honor by patient Ross Crawford, who praised her for her professionalism, compassion and knowledge. 'She is always professional, polite and caring,' Crawford wrote. 'She deserves to be recognized for going above and beyond, and I have been fortunate to receive her care.' (Photo by Jan Budenz/STHS)



St. Tammany Health System nurse Ashley Kinchen, center, is surrounded by team members following the presentation of Ashley's Daisy Award. Ashley's care for patient Duke Mauterer, who spent nine days in the ICU while dealing with cancer and COVID pneumonia, struck Mr. Mauterer's sibling, Pat Marr, who nominated her for the honor. 'She was very caring at the end of our Duke's life unlike I have ever seen,' Marr wrote, adding, 'Ashley is in the right career and is an asset to this large hospital.' (Photo by Tory Mansfield/STHS)



St. Tammany Health System nurse Ashley Dykes, left, is all smiles after learning from Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton that she was singled out for a Daisy Award. 'Ashley is consistently recognized by colleagues and patients for the exceptional care she provides. What is most special about Ashley is that she spends time getting to know her patients and makes them feel as if they are the only person she is caring for,' wrote STHS Director of Critical Care Mariah Wallace in nominating her. (Photo by Jan Budenz/STHS)



(Photo by Tim San Filippo / STHS)

## Sterile Processing team movin' on up

She had worked the weekend. She spent her Monday morning moving equipment. But St. Tammany Health System Sterile Processing Director Michelle Milner couldn't help but smile.

After years of operating in cramped quarters and weeks of planning, the Sterile Processing Department — which is tasked with cleaning and preparing surgical instruments ahead of scheduled procedures at the health system's flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital — moved into shiny new digs Jan. 23.

"We are live," Milner said while showing off her department's new digs. "We just say, 'Thank you.'"

In addition to more than tripling the size of the central workspace for the 18-person team, the \$2.4 million project enhances its capabilities, thanks to the addition of new equipment, as well as providing room for a more efficient workflow.

That will help maintain the high-quality patient care upon which STHS prides itself. It also improves quality-of-life for Sterile Processing staff.

"I traveled for 10, 11 years," Milner said, including to places like Emory University Hospital, Piedmont Atlanta and UNC Chapel Hill. "I can tell you, this is state-of-the-art. It's terrific. It's very nice."

Nancy Ledet, the health system's assistant vice president of Surgical Services, added: "The improvements, the size and the new technology, with an excellent team: It was worth the wait." ■



Is there a St. Tammany Health System nurse you'd like to nominate for a Daisy? Find out how at [StTammany.health/ThankYou](https://StTammany.health/ThankYou).

# From garden to table – to stomach

Locally grown veggies star in Eat Well, Live Well cooking demo



Chef Gavin Jobe of Meribo in downtown Covington walks a classroom of home cooks through his recipe for oven-roasted chicken thighs with vegetables. The event was the latest in Healthier Northshore's quarterly Eat Well, Live Well cooking demonstration series. (Photos by Tory Mansfield/STHS)

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

Meribo, a modern Italian restaurant in downtown Covington, is where Chef Gavin Jobe practices his craft.

The televised cooking competition "Chopped" is where he earned a measure of fame.

But if you're looking for where it all started, where he learned his waste-nothing ethos and his appreciation for fresh-from-the-garden vegetables, look no further than his grandmother.

"I grew up cooking with my Granny," Jobe told the crowd of more than 40 home cooks gathered Jan. 30 for the nonprofit Healthier Northshore's latest Eat Well, Live Well cooking demonstration. "She always had a garden growing, so we always ate fresh things, whatever was in season."

No surprise, then, that the dish Jobe prepared for the Eat Well, Live Well crowd was highlighted by roasted seasonal vegetables – including Brussels sprouts, sweet potatoes and red onions – nestled



around seasoned chicken thighs.

It's also no surprise that he gave everyone in the room permission to make the recipe their own by experimenting with whatever fresh ingredients they might find in their garden or grocery.

"This is more a method than a recipe," Jobe said. "It can be turned into a spring dish, a fall dish, a winter dish, depending on what's in season."

Got summer squash in your garden? Sub it out for the potatoes. Got broccoli? Use it instead of Brussels sprouts. You could even sub out the chicken with pork loin.

"If you have a lot of color on your plate, with a lot of natural ingredients, you're really on the path to something healthy," Jobe said.

For January's cooking demonstration, held in the classroom kitchen at the Samaritan Center in Mandeville, Jobe stuck mostly with the recipe he provided to those in attendance. Through the generosity of the American Heart Association and Gulf Coast Bank & Trust, all attendees were also provided with a box containing the fresh ingredients necessary to re-create Jobe's dish in their own kitchen.

Jobe also had a few tips for his audience, but among his simplest and most impactful pieces of advice: Always use fresh herbs over dried herbs for maximum flavor. Don't have any? Grow your own.

"Herbs are great, and it's a really great way to get started gardening," he

Scan the QR code for a printer-friendly recipe card.





said. “They grow easily, don’t need a lot and it will give you confidence to maybe grow your garden.”

Find Chef Gavin’s recipe below, along with additional healthy recipes from our St. Tammany Health System dietitians.

### CHEF GAVIN JOBE’S ROASTED CHICKEN THIGHS WITH VEGETABLES

*Yield: 4 servings*

*Time: Approximately 20 minutes prep time, 45 minutes cooking time*

- 4 medium sweet potatoes
- 2 pounds Brussels sprouts
- 1 medium red onion
- 3 cloves garlic
- 4 to 8 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs\*  
(Adjust number of thighs depending on size.)
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 1 pinch cayenne (optional)
- 1 to 2 lemons
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons Creole mustard
- 5 sprigs fresh thyme, stems removed and discarded, leaves chopped

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. While waiting for oven to heat, prep your vegetables by peeling sweet potatoes and cutting into 1-inch cubes; cutting the ends off Brussels sprouts and splitting each in half through the root; cutting the red onion into 1-inch pieces; and smashing and roughly chopping the garlic. Set all aside.

Place chicken on cutting board, drizzle with some of the olive oil, then season thoroughly with salt, pepper, paprika and cayenne (if using). Transfer seasoned thighs to center of roasting pan, skin side up.

Put sweet potatoes and Brussels sprouts into a mixing bowl and drizzle with enough oil to lightly coat them. Add to roasting pan, arranging them around the thighs.

Put pan on the center rack of oven, uncovered, and roast for 20 minutes.

Lightly oil the chopped onions in a small bowl and set aside.

In the mixing bowl, create Honey Mustard Vinaigrette by whisking the juice of 1 to 2 lemons with honey, mustard, garlic, thyme and the rest of the olive oil.

After 20 minutes, remove roasting pan from oven, add onions and stir veggies. Return to oven for another 15 minutes.

Remove pan from oven, drizzle vinaigrette over the veggies and stir once more. Return to oven for 4 to 5 minutes.

Remove from the oven and let rest for 5 minutes before serving.

\*Alternate preparation: Can substitute boneless, skinless chicken breasts as a more healthful alternative to thighs, although cooking time will vary.

*The following additional recipes were provided by St. Tammany Health System staff dietitians as part of March’s recognition of National Nutrition Month.*

### BUTTERNUT SQUASH MAC-’N’-CHEESE

*Yield: 6-8 servings*

*Time: 35-45 minutes*

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 large cloves garlic, minced
- 1 pound (about 4 cups) diced butternut squash
- 1 ½ cups vegetable stock
- 2 cups reduced fat milk
- 1 pound uncooked macaroni (or other pasta)
- 8 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- Fine sea salt and freshly cracked black pepper, to taste

Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil.

While waiting for it to boil, heat the olive oil in a large sauté pan. Add the garlic and sauté for 1 minute, stirring occasionally. Add the butternut squash and vegetable stock, and stir to combine. Continue cooking until the stock reaches a simmer.

Once stock reaches a simmer, reduce heat to medium-low, cover and cook for 10 minutes or until the squash is tender and mashes easily with a fork, stirring occasionally.

Transfer the squash mixture to a blender. Add milk and give the mixture a quick stir, then pulse until smooth.

Add the pasta to the boiling water and cook according to package instructions until al dente. Remove from heat, then drain the pasta and return to pot.

While the pasta is cooking, return the butternut squash mixture to the sauté

pan over medium-high heat. Add the cheese and stir until it has melted into the sauce.

Season the sauce with salt and pepper to taste. (The stock may provide enough salt without requiring the addition of more.) Pour the butternut cheese sauce on top of the pasta, and stir to combine.

### COOKIE DOUGH HUMMUS

*Yield: 4-5 servings*

*Time: 15 minutes*

- 1 can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- ¼ cup unsweetened applesauce
- 1 tsp canola oil
- 2 Tbsp honey or maple syrup
- 2 Tbsp creamy peanut butter
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ cup rolled oats
- 2 Tbsp raisins (optional)
- 3 Tbsp chocolate chips

Drain and rinse chickpeas.

Place all ingredients except chocolate chips, raisins and oats in a blender. Blend until smooth.

Add oats and mix until smooth.

Remove mixture to a bowl. Fold in raisins and chocolate chips.

Serve with whole grain graham crackers or apple slices. ■

*The Eat Well, Live Well cooking demonstration series is a quarterly series hosted by the Healthier Northshore coalition with key support from St. Tammany Health System and the American Heart Association. Access to and education about nutrition continues to be a priority for Healthier Northshore and a major focus of the programming surrounding the community garden at Safe Haven, which is managed and maintained by NAMI St. Tammany. Learn more at [HealthierNorthshore.health](http://HealthierNorthshore.health).*



# FINISHING STRONG

Longtime local pediatrician hangs up her stethoscope

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

After 43 years and, by one estimate, some 200,000 patient interactions, Dr. Margie Strong — a fixture in Northshore pediatrics for the past four decades — is hanging up her stethoscope.

Dr. Strong, whose career saw her work for a number of health systems and for a time in private practice, celebrated her retirement Feb. 22 from St. Tammany Pediatrics, the primary care pediatrics practice of St. Tammany Health System, of which she's been a member since 2018.

"I can't think of a better place to end my career than at an institution like St. Tammany," she said at the practice's Madisonville clinic, where staff members and health system executives gathered to salute her.

That career started with her graduation from LSU School of Medicine in 1980, followed by a three-year pediatric residency at Earl K. Long Memorial Medical Center in Baton Rouge.

She followed that by practicing in the Covington area. She's been there ever since, living for 39 years within a block of the health system's flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital.

Among those in attendance for her Feb. 22 sendoff was Dr. Patrick Torcson, chief medical officer at St. Tammany, whose back-of-the-prescription-pad math indicated Dr. Strong had engaged in roughly 200,000 patient interactions over the course of her career — although that might be on the low end.

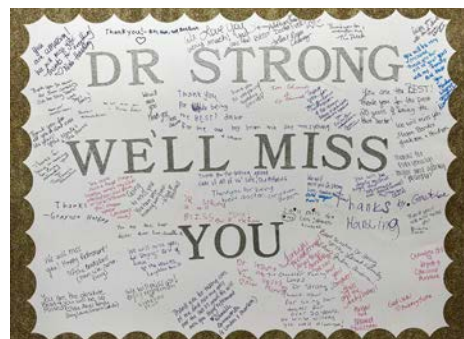
"It's probably double that," Dr. Torcson said, "because not only are you dealing with the



St. Tammany Health System Chief Medical Officer Dr. Patrick Torcson, left, speaks at a retirement ceremony for local pediatrician Dr. Margie Strong, far right, who has been part of the health system's St. Tammany Pediatrics practice since 2018. (Photo by Tory Mansfield / STHS)



Dr. Margie Strong reacts upon unwrapping a gift of a hand-crafted birdhouse resembling the St. Tammany Pediatrics Clinic during her retirement celebration. (Photo by Tory Mansfield / STHS)



Well-wishes from patients and colleagues adorn a sign for retiring pediatrician Dr. Margie Strong. (Photo by Mike Scott / STHS)

child but also their parents."

He would know. His daughter was one of her patients.

"Early on, Dr. Strong had a reputation for being good at taking care of doctors' children," he said. "I want to thank you for taking care of my daughter — and my wife — for 18 years."

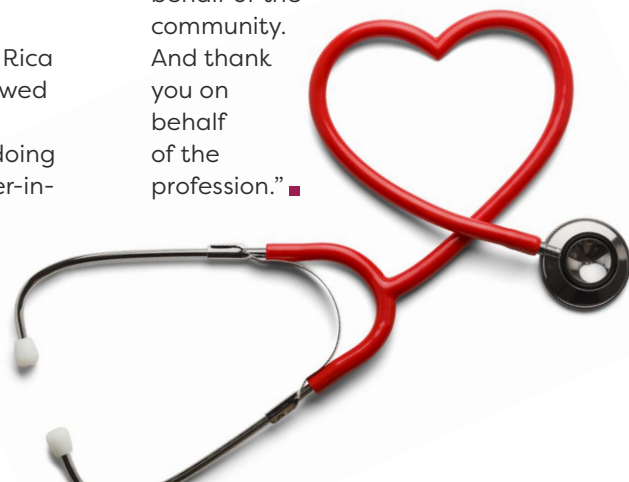
As for what will come next, travel is at the top of the list. Dr. Strong has a trip to Costa Rica in her immediate future, followed this fall by a trip to Italy.

"But the bravest thing I'm doing is taking my son and daughter-in-law with their six children to Disney World," she said.

Following the obligatory

speechifying and cake-cutting, Dr. Strong was presented with gifts including a handmade birdhouse reminiscent of the St. Tammany Pediatrics Clinic — as well as innumerable expressions of thanks.

"Thank you on behalf of St. Tammany Health System," Dr. Torcson told her. "Thank you on behalf of the community. And thank you on behalf of the profession." ■



## All-volunteer guild donates \$44,500 in support of hospital's healing mission

By *STHS Communication Department*

Members of the all-volunteer St. Tammany Hospital Guild recently presented their annual gift to St. Tammany Hospital Foundation, this year in the amount of \$44,500.

The gift will be used to support the healing mission of care providers at St. Tammany Health System, including going toward:

- Angel Eyes cameras for the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at STHS's flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital.
- Blanket warmers for the Cardiology and Surgery departments.
- A vein finder for the health system's Ambulatory Care program.
- Ongoing support for the Be Well Bus, a 40-foot mobile health unit dedicated to improving population health on the Northshore.
- Ongoing support for the Pediatric Department's "Reefie" project, an extension of the foundation's Healing Arts Initiative in which

whimsical undersea sculptures created by Covington artist Robert Post are being commissioned to brighten the health system's pediatrics spaces.

"We felt like these projects are extremely beneficial to the patients, and we just embrace the opportunity to give back," guild President Ken Lane said.

Since the foundation was started in 2003, the guild has donated a total of more than \$461,500 in support of its work, most of it generated by sales at the hospital's lobby gift shop.

"The guild continues to amaze us with their generosity," foundation Executive Director Nicole Suhre said. "This gift represents 20 years of giving, and their gifts have only grown! Whether through volunteerism, time or funds, the support of these dedicated individuals truly knows no bounds. We are deeply grateful for their loyal support." ■

## \$20K transportation grant to help local cancer patients get treatment they need

By *STHS Communication Department*

For the third year running, the American Cancer Society has awarded St. Tammany Hospital Foundation a grant for the Transportation Assistance Program at St. Tammany Cancer Center, a campus of Ochsner Medical Center.

The grant, in the amount of \$20,000 – double the amount from 2022 – will go directly toward helping cancer patients in need make it to their appointments for treatment.

Transportation obstacles continue to be the cancer center's most emergent need, impacting 193 patients in 2022, a 55.6% growth over 2021.

"The foundation never wants to see patients forgoing treatments due to lack of access to transportation

or the rising cost of fuel," foundation Executive Director Nicole Suhre said. "The need to eliminate disparities in healthcare has long been recognized in this community, and we are proud to have a partner like the American Cancer Society joining with us to improve access to reliable transportation."

The cancer center's transportation program is fully funded by philanthropy, including donations from the community and grantors such as the American Cancer Society.

The increase in the ACS grant this year speaks volumes about the trust it has in the foundation and the cancer center to steward the funding and to make an impact in the lives of the patients, Suhre said. ■



Dr. Mike Hill of St. Tammany Quality Network presents the STQN Medical Director's Award for the first quarter of 2023 to Dr. Victoria Blossman. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / St. Tammany Health System)

## SIMPLY THE BEST

St. Tammany Quality Network presented its Medical Director's Award for the first quarter of 2023 to Dr. Victoria Blossman, a family medicine practitioner based out of the St. Tammany Physicians Network clinic in Folsom, for excellent patient care and achieving outstanding population health outcomes.

"Dr. Blossman joined St. Tammany Health System in September 2022, and from the first patient she saw, her focus has been on wellness and prevention. She supports all screening efforts to enhance the well-being of the patients in our community. We are thankful for her focus on wellness and being proactive in making St. Tammany a healthier parish," said Dionne Williams, assistant vice president of St. Tammany Physician Network (STPN).

Population health measures management of chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes and congestive heart failure. Cancer screening rates are included in the measures. Dr. Blossman has achieved very high completion scores in all these areas.

Dr. Blossman has been in practice at the STPN Folsom clinic since completing a rural family medicine residency in Bogalusa.

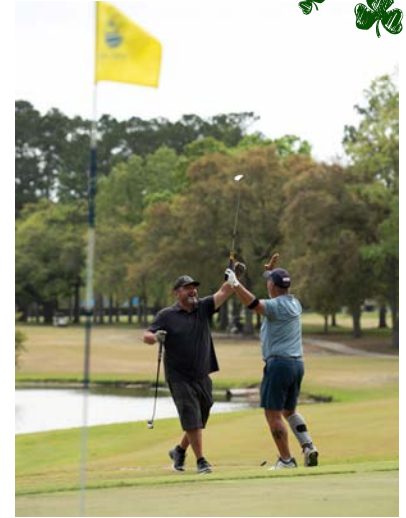
*St. Tammany Quality Network is a Northshore medical community made up of physicians aligned with St. Tammany Health System in the interest of delivering quality care at more affordable costs.* ■



He takes aim ...



.. he sinks it ...



... and he celebrates.



A golfer lines up his shot before a rapt audience of two during the Get Lucky! Golf Tournament on March 16, 2023. The first-place team award this year went to Kasey Jones, Brad Fremen, Trey Carnegie and Paul Triche, while the putting contest winner was STHS's own Dr. Rick Casey.

## Luck of the Irish

For the first time in its 12-year history, St. Tammany Hospital Foundation's Get Lucky! Golf Tournament was held on the day before St. Patrick's Day, and Irish eyes were clearly smiling on the event. In addition to picture-perfect weather, the tournament saw its first-ever hole-in-one win, earning one lucky linksman a free set of clubs. The real winner, though, was St. Tammany Health System's pediatrics programs, which will benefit from the more than \$55,000 raised. How lucky is that? (Photos by Chuck Billiot for St. Tammany Hospital Foundation)



Kelly McHugh Jr., far right, is photographed with his Get Lucky! teammates. McHugh won a set of golf clubs after recording the 12-year-old tournament's first-ever hole-in-one.



St. Tammany Hospital Foundation Executive Director Nichole Suhre presents Greg Lucia of title sponsor Five Star Food Service – formerly Refreshment Solutions – with a token of gratitude for his longtime support.



It wouldn't be St. Patrick's Day without the wearing o' the green, and this year's 'Best Blarney Costume' award went to Eric Suhre, pictured above at right.

# Now boarding

## Meet the three newest members of St. Tammany Hospital Foundation's Board of Trustees.

By *STHS Communication Department*

With the start of the new year, St. Tammany Hospital Foundation welcomed three new faces to its 17-member Board of Trustees, and, as with the board as a whole, they bring to the table an array of backgrounds and skills.

Meet them below:

### JIM BRADFORD

Some people come to support St. Tammany Hospital Foundation through a personal healthcare experience. Some come to it through an interest in medicine. Jim Bradford was born into it.

"My father is a physician here on the Northshore and was on the medical staff here (at St. Tammany Parish Hospital) for his entire career," Bradford said. "He's James L. Bradford Jr., an ear, nose and throat surgeon, so I kind of grew up in and around St. Tammany Hospital."

The younger Bradford is a lawyer by trade, a managing partner and 25-year veteran of the firm Daigle Fisse & Kessenich. For him, the law isn't just a job. It's a passion. So, when he was recruited by former foundation board member Darci Senner to serve on the board, he figured his legal expertise could be of use.

"Well, it's the hospital, particularly," he said when asked what made him decide to sign up. "It is near and dear to our family."

There's also the fact that St. Tammany Parish is home. A married father of two, Bradford has lived almost his entire life on the Northshore, outside of school (University of Notre Dame and LSU



Jim Bradford

Law) and two early-career years practicing law in New Orleans.

"Also," he said, "it's a public hospital – there are so few of them – and it gives so much to the community. I felt like it would be shameful for me not to give a little bit back."

### MARK GRAYSON

Mark Grayson will be the first to tell you he has no background in medicine. He's not a doctor. He's not a nurse. He's not a surgeon.

The longtime Northshore resident does, however, have a background in running a business, building teams and has served on several boards over the past two decades. That, along with a passion for supporting his community, made him a natural to serve on the foundation board.



Mark Grayson

"As we see the population grow on the Northshore, it's critical that we provide good healthcare not only to the younger families moving into the area, but also to our older residents as well," he said. "I've personally utilized the services at St. Tammany and it's a wonderful hospital, with a caring and professional staff."

Grayson, who has over 30 years of management experience, now serves on the executive team at ISO Services, a division of Ergon Construction Group. He is married with three grown children and one granddaughter.

With the kids out of the house, Mark and his wife now spend more time traveling – and of course visiting their children in Dallas and Connecticut.

"Serving on this board was a very easy decision for me," he said

when asked why he joined the foundation board. "I'm excited about the opportunity and I think it's a tremendous cause."

### KEVIN MASHBURN

Kevin Mashburn is first and foremost a money man, serving for the past 28 years as a financial adviser with Merrill Lynch. But he's also a Northshore man, and so he jumped at the opportunity to serve his community by serving on the foundation board.

"I know people who have been on the board in the past and who are currently on the board, and I've always looked at it and thought, 'That's an organization that really has an impact on the community that I'd love to get involved with someday!'"

Mashburn said. "I've been on other boards in the past, and I like feeling like I'm contributing. I know this hospital and foundation do great work, and I wanted to be part of that."

Originally from Baton Rouge, he and his wife lived in Lakeview when 2005's Hurricane Katrina hit, sending them to the piney woods of St. Tammany. There, they raised their two sons: Bradley, a University of Georgia grad, and Jack, a former member of the LSU Tigers football team.

"We planted roots and have been happy ever since," he said.

Now, he figures, it's time to give back to the community that gave his family so much.

"I love to help the community in any way I can," Mashburn said. "I'll never pick up a stethoscope, but maybe I can use some of the experience I have to help the board do what they do better." ■



Kevin Mashburn

# For Kevin Gardner, giving back is good business

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

In the beginning, it was personal for Kevin Gardner.

It still is, quite frankly. But the small cancer fundraiser he and business partner Mike Ford started almost a decade and a half ago to honor their mothers, both of whom had battled breast cancer, has grown to become much, much more.

In that first year, it raised some \$55,000 for cancer care on the Northshore, which would be considered a success by any standard. Last year, however, THE Gala — now a fixture on the local social calendar and the premiere fundraiser for St. Tammany Hospital Foundation since 2018 — raised \$212,000 for St. Tammany Health System’s cancer services, nearly quadruple the amount from those early days.

And all because of the vision of two friends who love their mothers and their community.

“Every year, I’ve been super proud of how it’s grown,” Gardner said recently, reflecting on the event’s evolution. “We started it in the early years basically at a restaurant. It evolved into an event at Franco’s Athletic Club, in their gymnasium, which they prettied up. Once the foundation took it over, it really went to a different level. It really became a true, significant, professionally managed fundraiser.”

Not to mention a whole lot of fun, with each year bringing a suitably whimsical theme ranging from Willy Wonka to disco to “Into the Woods” — style fairy tales — each with food, drinks, music, silent auctions and other themed embellishments.



St. Tammany Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees Vice Chairman Kevin Gardner and wife Mary, pictured at the foundation’s 2022 gala to raise money for cancer care. Gardner and business partner Mike Ford started the event nearly a decade and a half ago. In that time, it has become a fixture on the local social calendar. (Photo by Chuck Billiot)

“Getting to work with Kevin is a true gift. His passion for quality cancer care paired with his in-depth understanding of how it takes a community, led by the business sector, to support large-scale fundraising endeavors like THE Gala, makes him the perfect ambassador for this work,” foundation Executive Director Nicole Suhre said. “His leadership has made all the difference in growing this event to what it has become and in everything that it will achieve in the future.”

Although the foundation today handles the heavy lifting from a logistics standpoint, Gardner is still very much a driving force behind THE Gala through HUB International, the global insurance broker for which he serves as vice president — and which remains the event’s title sponsor.

It all ties into his belief in giving back



**“(Kevin’s) leadership has made all the difference in growing this event to what it has become and in everything that it will achieve in the future.”**

**– Nicole Suhre,  
St. Tammany  
Hospital Foundation  
executive director**

to the community, both from an individual and a corporate standpoint, and it all gives him a well-earned sense of accomplishment.

“The part that’s most gratifying is how it got so many people involved,” said Gardner, who also serves in a volunteer capacity as vice chairman of the foundation’s Board of Trustees. “One initial snowball rolling downhill got all of our employees excited, involved, engaged. Today, it’s not just us. There are so many people involved. It just takes a small

snowball rolling downhill to make your community a better place.” ■

*THE Gala this year is scheduled for Thursday, Oct. 5, 2023, at Tchefonct Country Club. Learn more about it and other ways you can support St. Tammany Health System’s healing mission at [STHfoundation.org](http://STHfoundation.org).*

# Meet our starting lineup

A team is only as good as its members; here are ours



STHF Executive Director Nicole Suhre

**“Our team is grateful every day to serve the community through its support of St. Tammany Health System.”**

Greetings, and happy spring!

In this edition of Heart to Heart, you were able to meet three of our new board members. Now I would like to take a moment to introduce (and, in some cases, reintroduce) our foundation team.

- **Nicole Suhre, executive director** (That’s me!) – I’ve been with the foundation since 2006, and I am proud to lead a team of talented nonprofit professionals as they all work together with our Board of Trustees to connect the community with our mission.
- **Emily Revere, foundation coordinator:** The backbone of our team since 2016, Emily is our database and fund manager. Additionally, Emily manages donor stewardship, fund disbursement and Board of Trustees activities.
- **Melanie Rudolph, foundation specialist:** Melanie joined the foundation team in 2016 and directs its Corporate Giving and Special Events programs, which includes our signature event, THE Gala. Additionally, she oversees the foundation’s external communications and social media platforms.
- **Kathleen Gross Thomas, major gifts specialist:** Kathleen is the newest member of the team, having just brought her talents to us in 2023. Kathleen directs major giving as well as the awareness and fundraising efforts for STHS’s cancer programs.
- **Doug Walker, foundation specialist:** Having been with the foundation since 2018, Doug directs its annual support and individual giving programs, including the successful colleague giving campaign. Additionally, he manages the volunteer program for the foundation.

To learn more about the staff at St. Tammany Hospital Foundation or contact us, visit [www.sthfoundation.org/team](http://www.sthfoundation.org/team).

Our team is grateful every day to serve the community through its support of St. Tammany Health System. Please reach out to any of us at any time. We would love to hear from you!

Sincerely,

Nicole Suhre, CFRE  
STHF executive director

## Foundation calendar Save the dates!



### Autism Awareness Month

April 1-30

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

**Details:** (985) 898-4141 | [STHfoundaton.org/autism](http://STHfoundaton.org/autism)

### NFLPA Celebrity Waiter Tailgate

April 27, 6:30 p.m. | Benedict’s, Mandeville

Watch the first night of the 2023 NFL Draft and bid on a variety of sports memorabilia while former NFL players wait your table, all to raise money for local cancer care. Presented by Gallagher in partnership with the New Orleans chapter of the NFL Players Association.

**Details:** (985) 898-4174 | [STHfoundation.org/celebritywaiter](http://STHfoundation.org/celebritywaiter)

### Man Up community screening event


June 16, 5 to 8 p.m. | Covington Beer Garden

In recognition of June as National Men’s Health Month, the STHS Be Well Bus – a 40-foot mobile health unit – will be at the beer garden, where it will offer a variety of screenings along with fun and fellowship.

**Details:** [StTammany.health](http://StTammany.health)



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World-class emergency care, close to home in Mandeville.



Life can be unpredictable. Sometimes that's a good thing. Other times, it lands you in the ER. Luckily for Mandeville area residents, St. Tammany Health System now operates a full-service, free-standing facility across the street from the Mandeville Post Office that expands the reach of our board-certified emergency medicine specialists while shortening the drive for you.

So, go ahead. Live life. And when the unexpected happens, rely on St. Tammany.



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