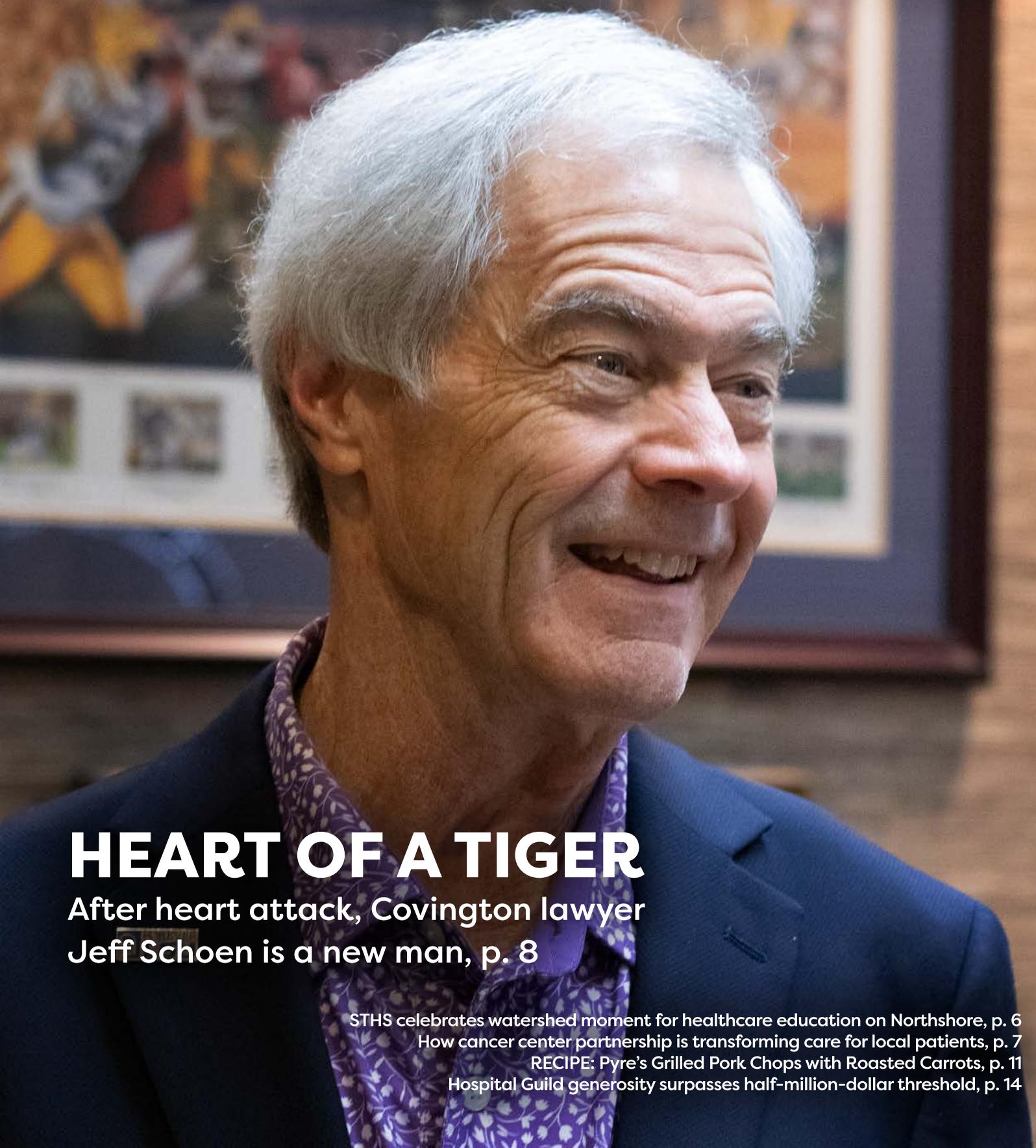


Vol. 20, No. 2 / Spring 2024



# Heart to Heart

A publication of St. Tammany Health System



## HEART OF A TIGER

After heart attack, Covington lawyer  
Jeff Schoen is a new man, p. 8

STHS celebrates watershed moment for healthcare education on Northshore, p. 6

How cancer center partnership is transforming care for local patients, p. 7

RECIPE: Pyre's Grilled Pork Chops with Roasted Carrots, p. 11

Hospital Guild generosity surpasses half-million-dollar threshold, p. 14

NO BONES ABOUT IT

At St. Tammany Health System's Bone and Joint Clinic, fellowship-trained physicians are experts in everything from pediatric orthopedics and sports medicine to osteoarthritis care and robotic-assisted total knee and hip replacement. What's more, we offer on-site rehab and we're backed by a world-class health system.

Along with our partner Ochsner Health, we provide a full range of care, connecting you to the very best, not just on the Northshore but in the country.

AUTISM CERTIFIED

# ST. TAMMANY MANY REASONS WE'RE #1 IN ORTHOPEDICS



WORLD-CLASS HEALTHCARE. CLOSE TO HOME.



**MISSION**

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

**VISION**

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

**VALUES**

Teamwork. Trust. Compassion. Quality. Innovation.

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

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

**EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP**

- Joan M. Coffman FACHE, President and CEO
- Sharon Touns FACHE, SVP/Chief Operating Officer
- Kerry Milton BSN RN MSHA, SVP/Chief Nursing Officer
- Patrick J. Torcson MD MMM, SVP/Chief Medical Officer
- Sandra DiPietro MBA, SVP/Chief Financial Officer
- Christopher Ford SHRM-SCP, SVP/Human Resources
- Margaret Collett RN JD, VP/Chief Compliance Officer
- Craig Doyle, VP/Chief Information Officer
- Michael K. Hill MD, VP/Quality and Utilization Mgmt.
- Jack Khashou M.ED MS, VP/St. Tammany Quality Network
- Kelly Rabalais FACHE, VP/Communication and Strategy

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

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



**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

- Kevin Gardner, Chairman
- Paul Davis, Vice Chairman
- Laura Brown, Secretary-Treasurer
- Mark Grayson
- Joan Coffman, FACHE
- Penny Dastugue
- John A. Evans
- Liz Healy
- Chip Lavigne
- James L. Bradford III
- Timothy A. Lentz
- Renee Maloney
- Sunny R. McDaniel, DNP, APRN
- Becky Carson Parks
- Kevin B. Mashburn
- Norma Richard
- Jim Woodard MD

Nicole Suhre, Executive Director

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

Heart to Heart magazine is a quarterly publication of St. Tammany Health System  
Vol. 20, No. 2; Spring 2024

- 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

## Appreciating the echoes of excellence



Joan Coffman, FACHE

**“Almost daily, I hear from someone eager to share a story of a positive interaction they had at the health system or, in the case of this issue’s cover story, a life-changing experience in which we were privileged to play a part.”**

Paging through this latest issue of Heart to Heart, it occurs to me that among the many blessings of being a part of St. Tammany Health System are the regular reminders I get of the profound impact our colleagues’ work has on the lives of our Northshore neighbors.

It by no means stops at the door of our Covington hospital or the two-dozen-plus clinics and specialty centers we operate throughout the community. Rather, the compassionate work of our team of 2,900 healthcare professionals echoes loudly and repeatedly.

Almost daily, I hear from someone eager to share a story of a positive interaction they had at the health system or, in the case of this issue’s cover story, a life-changing experience in which we were privileged to play a part.

Additionally, we have the satisfaction of seeing many of our community-focused initiatives create their own lasting reverberations, like our quarterly Eat Well, Live Well cooking demonstrations and the Healthier Northshore coalition we help spearhead, both of which continue to grow.

I sincerely hope these stories and the others you will find in the pages that follow resonate with you as loudly as they did with me, and that the dedication of our team inspires and uplifts you as they do for me every day.

Thanks go to them for their unflagging compassion – and to you for trusting St. Tammany Health System with your family’s healthcare.

Gratefully,



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



### Keeping it local

St. Tammany Health System President and CEO Joan Coffman cuts the ribbon Feb. 29 on the rededication and rebranding of Braswell’s Drugs, now St. Tammany Health System Pharmacy at Braswell’s. The health system purchased the iconic Covington drug store in September, merging the two local healthcare institutions and ensuring Braswell’s stays in local hands. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

## Brothers' keepers

### Retired STHS doctors among Franklinton's Citizens of the Year

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

In 1984, when Drs. Libeau Berthelot and Mark James joined the small family medicine practice opened some 16 years earlier in Franklinton by Dr. Gerald Foret, their intentions were fairly straightforward.

They wanted to join Dr. Foret in providing convenient access to quality medical care for the families of rural Washington Parish and other parts of the Northshore. Simple as that.

There were a few logistical bumps in the road along the way, resulting in an eventual relocation to Folsom and the St. Tammany Physicians Network Clinic there. Regardless, the three now-retired men of medicine lived that initial mission for more than three decades each.

On Jan. 23, those years of caring for the community were recognized, as Drs. Berthelot, Foret and James were



From left, retired STHS family medicine physicians Dr. Libeau Berthelot, Dr. Gerald Foret and Dr. Mark James are photographed in February upon being named Citizens of the Year for 2023 by Franklinton Mayor Gregory Route. (STHS image)

named Citizens of the Year for 2023 by Franklinton Mayor Gregory Route.

"I felt they had never really been recognized for everything they've done here in Franklinton," Mayor Route said in explaining his decision to honor them. "I was happy to do it. They've just been a blessing to Franklinton."

He would know. Before he was mayor, Route got to know the three when he worked at Franklinton's Riverside Medical Center.

"They were the heart and soul

of Riverside Medical Center, those three doctors," Mayor Route said.

The three former St. Tammany Health System physicians were among six recipients of this year's award, all of whom were honored during a recent meeting of the Franklinton Board of Aldermen.

The others honored were former SUNO professor Dr. V.T. Johnson, retired Franklinton High baseball coach Jeff Tajeant and community volunteer Armand Barker. ■

## Two STHS colleagues recognized for support of U.S. service members

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

Technically, St. Tammany Health System's trademark color is a hue called "burgundy berry." But it was recently supplanted temporarily by shades of red, white and blue.

On Feb. 29, representatives of the Louisiana National Guard presented two health system colleagues – Director of Care Coordination Monique Brewster and Social Worker Supervisor Melissa Johnson – with its Patriot Award, bestowed upon individuals who are especially supportive of team members who are also service members.

Brewster and Johnson were nominated for the award by Guard member and STHS Social Worker Caroline Redman.

"Anything I need, they don't question it. They just do it," Redman said. "And that's allowed me to be the social worker I am."

In addition to an American flag lapel pin, Brewster and Johnson received certificates recognizing them "for contributing to national security and protecting liberty and freedom by supporting employee participation in America's National

Guard and Reserve Force."

Among those members of health system leadership in attendance at the Patriot award presentation was STHS President and CEO Joan Coffman, who said:

"This just melts our hearts. There's so much that goes on here that you don't see, so many great stories, and it happens every day."

The Patriotic Employer Award initiative is administered by the Employer Support of the Guard and the Reserve, a program of the U.S. Department of Defense. ■

# Flower power

With spring come blooms, and St. Tammany Health System is no exception. Here is our latest crop of Daisy Award winners and Sunflower Award winners.



A surprised Melinda Cox, right, a nurse practitioner in St. Tammany Parish Hospital's Pediatric ICU, reacts after being informed by Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton that she was a recipient of the Daisy Award for Extraordinary Nursing. Melinda was nominated for the honor by Kimberly Pearson, the mother of a patient, who wrote: "Words cannot really express the blessing that Melinda is to our family or the gratitude we have for the concern she showed for our son. I believe our paths crossed for a reason and I thank God for putting her at the hospital at the times she was there during our stay." (Photo by Jan Budenz/STHS)

Christa Moliniare-Martin, center, a registered nurse with the health system's Emergency Services Department, poses for a photo with team members upon being awarded a Daisy Award for Extraordinary Nursing. Christa was nominated for the award by the family of patient Elijah Bonano, who wrote: "Christa was well skilled at inserting Eli's IV and had a great understanding of his symptoms. She displayed concern in all facets of her work and worked extremely hard to relay this to the doctor. Eli ended up being admitted overnight, and Christa was so sweet and cared so much that she left the ER to check on us!" (Photo by Jan Budenz / STHS)



STHS Parenting Center Health Educator Marla Rabalais, center, poses for a photo with members of the Parenting Center team after being awarded a Sunflower Award. "Marla is definitely a Sunflower," colleague Jodi Tolliver wrote in nominating her for the award, which recognizes the contributions of non-nursing members of the health system workforce. Among other things, Marla is a certified car seat technician who assists local parents in making sure their children's car seats – including those designed for children with special needs – are properly installed. (Photo by Jan Budenz/STHS)

STHS Diabetes Educator Kelli Braud, third from left, poses for a photo with members of the STHS Diabetes Education team after being awarded a Sunflower Award. Kelli was nominated by colleague Jamie Romage, whose mother was a patient of Kelli's. "My mother felt Kelli became a personal friend to her because of the assistance she provided," Jamie wrote. "... She never made my mother feel that she was too busy or bothersome, and she was always professional, nurturing and compassionate. When my mother was admitted to the hospital last (year), she asked to see "her friend Kelli." (Photo by Jan Budenz/STHS)



# STAT!

Quick hits from the STHS newsroom

## By STHS Communication Department

Women's Choice Award has once again ranked St. Tammany Health System among the **Best Hospitals in America**, placing it in the top 10% in 10 distinct specialty areas for 2024, including **Patient Safety** (top 6% in the country), **Cancer Care** (top 1%), **Obstetrics** (top 1%), **Mammogram Imaging** (top 1%), **Women's Services** (top 2%), **Minimally Invasive Surgery** (top 4%), **Stroke Care** (top 4%), **Heart Care** (top 5%), **Comprehensive Breast Care** (top 7%) and **Emergency Care** (top 10%) ... The New Family Center at St. Tammany Health System's flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital has been designated a **Blue Distinction Center+ for Maternity Care** by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana, in recognition of the high quality and cost effectiveness of the care it provides. ... The New Family Center has also earned **Birth Ready+ designation** from the Louisiana Perinatal Quality Collaborative, a program of the state Department of Health. ... Congratulations to **Drs. Angela Buongura, Natalie Fitton** and **Jennifer Daly** of the STHS Women's Pavilion, recipients of the St. Tammany Quality Network Medical Director's Award for the fourth quarter of 2023. ... Congratulations to STHS colleagues **Tien Necaise**, who retired in February after 30 years of service, and **Christine Holmes**, who retired in March after 25 years. ■

Is there a St. Tammany Health System employee you'd like to honor? Find out how at [StTammany.health/ThankYou](https://StTammany.health/ThankYou) or by scanning the code at right.





St. Tammany Health System President and CEO Joan Coffman cuts the ribbon on the new St. Tammany Academic Center, surrounded by members of the Board of Commissioners, the health system's executive leadership team, local education and government representatives, and local nursing students. (Photos by Tory Mansfield/STHS)

## A milestone moment

STHS cuts ribbon on St. Tammany Academic Center for Northshore healthcare students

### By STHS Communication Department

In what is being hailed as a watershed moment for healthcare education on the Northshore, St. Tammany Health System leaders were joined on Jan. 21 by local education stakeholders and government officials to cut the ribbon on the St. Tammany Academic Center, a free-standing education facility in Covington designed to train the region's next generation of healthcare professionals.

"Education, training, coaching and mentoring have always been part of who we are at St. Tammany Health System. It is embedded in our core philosophy," St. Tammany Health System President and CEO Joan Coffman said. "Today, we enter into a new realm of education that speaks directly to our mission."

The result of an ongoing partnership between the health system, Southeastern Louisiana University and Northshore Technical Community College, the nearly 12,000-square-foot facility is grounded in continuing education, workforce



A mural adorns a wall in the lobby of the newly opened St. Tammany Academic Center, the result of a partnership between St. Tammany Health System, Southeastern Louisiana University and Northshore Technical Community College.

development, and career growth and advancement, Coffman added.

With its five classrooms, two skills labs and four hospital simulation rooms — all outfitted with financial help from donors to St. Tammany Hospital Foundation — the facility will cater to students at various levels of the healthcare spectrum. That includes those enrolled in an accelerated nursing program through Southeastern, two cohorts of NTCC students working toward associates degrees in science and nursing, and additional educational offerings including a component designed to reach interested high school students at Covington's

St. Scholastica Academy.

The center will also cater to current St. Tammany Health System colleagues interested in furthering their healthcare education, according to STHS Assistant Vice President of Workforce Development Bronwyn Doyle, who spearheaded the center's founding.

"So the value here is twofold," Doyle said.

In addition to providing students an opportunity to earn needed skills without leaving western St. Tammany Parish, the center was designed to bolster the local healthcare workforce, providing a direct pipeline of talent to St. Tammany Health System and other local healthcare organizations.

"This partnership builds directly on what we already have: nursing colleagues who set the standard for nursing care in our region, as well as mentoring, fellowship and education," STHS Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton said. "We want to broaden opportunities for individuals, especially our Northshore neighbors, by bringing these education opportunities close to home." ■

Scan the QR code or visit [StTammany.health/AcceleratedNursing](https://StTammany.health/AcceleratedNursing) to learn more about St. Tammany Academic Center offerings.



# ‘The sky is the limit’

## Cancer center partnership brings innovative therapy to Louisiana patients

By *STHS Communication Department*

Technically, when MD Anderson’s Dr. Sairah Ahmed visited Covington recently for a presentation to a room full of physicians at the Southern Hotel, the topic at hand was chimeric antigen receptor T-cell therapy, or CAR T-cell therapy, an innovative treatment for diffuse large B-cell lymphoma.

But for many, the session was just as noteworthy as the realization of a promise to bring leading-edge cancer therapies to the region as part of MD Anderson’s nearly year-old partnership with Ochsner Health – and, by extension, to the cancer center built and operated jointly by Ochsner and St. Tammany Health System at the intersection of Interstate 12 and Louisiana 21 in Covington.

“I have great respect for MD Anderson, and I was fortunate to do my fellowship training there,” said Dr. Clark Alsfeld, an Ochsner hematologist in attendance at Dr. Ahmed’s presentation. “This partnership gives cancer patients in the greater New Orleans region access to cancer treatments that are among the most advanced in the nation, and it opens many doors for our patients as far as clinical trials and leading-edge treatment options.”

It’s not just the patients benefiting from the arrangement, either.

“For providers like me, the collaboration and learning opportunities combine the strengths of our organizations for a comprehensive and trusted approach to cancer care,” Dr. Alsfeld said.

That includes the presentation by Dr. Ahmed, associate professor of



St. Tammany Cancer Center – A Campus of Ochsner Medical Center was built in 2021 in Covington as a partnership between St. Tammany Health System and Ochsner. In June 2023, a partnership between Ochsner and MD Anderson Cancer Center brought the world-renowned expertise of MD Anderson to the center, including a recent presentation by Dr. Sairah Ahmed (inset) for local physicians. (STHS images)

lymphoma-myeloma and director of the CAR T program at MD Anderson Cancer Center, on the ins and outs of CAR T-cell therapy, which is just one example of how the partnership is paying dividends when it comes to enhancing cancer care on the Northshore.

“Through this Ochsner MD Anderson Cancer Center partnership, there is a carefully cultivated relationship with our partners that extends this expertise to a much larger population,” Dr. Ahmed said. “Through our nationally recognized cancer team, we combine the strengths of our teams in terms of technology and clinical trials and treatments to maximize this collaboration to stay true to our mission to end cancer.”

That mission is shared by the team at Covington’s St. Tammany Cancer Center – A Campus of Ochsner Medical Center, opened in 2021 by St. Tammany Health System and Ochsner, strategic partners since 2014.

The facility is one of the seven cancer

centers in the Ochsner network to be included in a separate partnership announced last June between Ochsner and MD Anderson to provide local patients access to leading-edge care based on the same protocols and practice standards as at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

In other words: That MD Anderson sign on the façade of St. Tammany Cancer Center is more than a mere sign. It is symbolic of the truly innovative cancer care being delivered inside.

“It is exciting to have this curative therapy here for our diverse population of patients,” Dr. Alsfeld said. “Our partnership with MD Anderson, coupled with access to treatments like this and clinical trials through one of America’s leading cancer care providers will continue to have an impact for our patients.”

He continued: “The sky is the limit from our standpoint. ... The depth of this partnership allows us to do what is best for our patients.” ■

# Heart of a Tiger

On the morning after Thanksgiving 2022, Covington native Jeff Schoen underwent an emergency heart procedure at St. Tammany Health System's flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital. It saved his life. It also changed it in ways he never imagined.

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

Jeff Schoen is no stranger to St. Tammany Health System.

He's lived in Covington his whole life. His family has been on the Northshore for some 150 years. As a managing partner in the local Jones Fussell law firm, he has even done legal work for the health system.

So, when the then-70-year-old woke up at 5:30 a.m. the day after Thanksgiving 2022 with severe chest pains – “like an LSU linebacker was just pushing down with his foot on my chest” – he knew what to do.

Rather than driving himself to the hospital, which experts strongly advise against, he alerted his wife, who loaded him into the car.

“And off we went to St. Tammany, which has always been my hospital of choice for a lifetime when I needed some type of medical care and help,” he said.

There, he knew, he would get world-class healthcare upon his arrival.

What he didn't expect was a life-changing experience.

“(It) was very remarkable and quite frankly saved my life – and continues to inspire me every day to be maybe a better patient, and post-patient, than I would be otherwise,” the LSU die-hard said in February, surrounded by a mini-museum of Tigers memorabilia in his Covington-area office.

“It helped me rehab my heart,” he added, “but it also helped me rehab my soul.”

## Only the beginning

When Mr. Schoen arrived at the hospital, he said, two hospital staffers were waiting for him with a wheelchair.



Lawyer Jeff Schoen is photographed in February 2024 in his Covington office. A year and a half after experiencing a heart attack, he is a changed man, thanks to lessons learned during a round of cardio rehab at St. Tammany Health System. ‘I enjoy the rehab element, I enjoy the physicality of it. I enjoy the other patients who are going through what I’m going through,’ he said. ‘... Maybe most importantly, getting to know that staff in that cardio rehab unit was really something that meant a lot to me.’ (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

Industry standards push hospitals to have chest-pain patients hooked up to an EKG machine, measuring their heart rhythm, in fewer than 10 minutes after their arrival. St. Tammany Parish Hospital averages fewer than four minutes.

In Mr. Schoen's case, it was even quicker.

## “It helped me rehab my heart, but it also helped me rehab my soul.” – Jeff Schoen

“Once I identified myself upon exiting the vehicle, I’m immediately in the wheelchair, off to triage,” he said. “I mean, these things happened immediately.”

After his care provider confirmed he was, indeed, having a heart attack, Mr. Schoen soon found himself in the hospital’s heart catheterization lab, undergoing a procedure to address multiple blockages.

Thankfully, everything went well, and he was soon sent home to begin his recovery.

And that’s where his personal transformation really started.

With the scary part over and Mr. Schoen out of the woods medically speaking, he was ready to get back to his busy schedule.

“I’m sort of thinking you go back to life now and pick up where you left off,” he said.

But that’s not how it works.

### Up to the challenge

When he was rolled into the Emergency Department that November morning, Mr. Schoen’s heart was functioning at just 33%, his cardiologist told him. If he wanted to continue enjoying a full, active life, he was going to have to attend regular cardiovascular rehabilitation sessions to rebuild his heart muscle.

Mr. Schoen embraced the challenge, fully committing to his thrice-weekly workouts.

That’s how he learned he had an inner gym rat he never knew existed.

“It became a pattern that I actually looked forward to, because I enjoyed the rehab,” he said. “It actually made me feel better. The further testing showed that my heart was getting stronger as a result of it. I was able to lose some pounds that I had not been able to lose for many years by going to rehab.”

He decided to attend his gym appointments in lieu of going out

to lunch, which gave him the added benefit of removing the gastronomic temptation presented by local menus.

But, to his surprise, there was more to it than that.

“What I didn’t realize was that by becoming a member of that cardio rehab ‘club,’ you not only make friends with the other patients that are there – because you see a lot of the same people at the same time on the same days, so you have buddies next to you – but you also get to know the staff,” Mr. Schoen said, adding, “All of a sudden, I have all these best friends at cardio rehab.”

He found himself so dreading the day he would “graduate” from rehab that he joined a local private gym for the first time in his life, to continue his journey toward good health. As of early 2024, he had dropped 55 pounds and still goes to the gym regularly.

The experience has changed his life so profoundly that he welcomed the opportunity to share his story, if only to inspire others experiencing a similar situation.

“It might educate others,” he said, “it might motivate others, it might encourage others to realize we’ve got a world-class healthcare facility in our community that has a specialized cardio rehab unit with wonderful people that work there that can help people just like me every day and in every way and with the utmost professionalism and care – but also, as I said earlier, with that feeling of love and respect and encouragement.”

“Because that’s not something you find in life all the time.” ■

*Visit [StTammany.health/Cardiac\\_Pulmonary\\_Rehab](https://www.sttammanyhealth.com/Cardiac_Pulmonary_Rehab) to learn more about St. Tammany Health System’s Cardiovascular Rehabilitation program.*



## STHS reaccredited as Chest Pain Center

*By STHS Communication Department*

The American College of Cardiology has once again recognized St. Tammany Health System’s flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital for its demonstrated expertise and commitment in treating patients with chest pain.

In March, STHS was awarded Chest Pain Center Accreditation with Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI) based on rigorous onsite evaluation of the staff’s ability to evaluate, diagnose and treat patients who may be experiencing a heart attack.

Percutaneous coronary intervention, also known as coronary angioplasty, is a non-surgical procedure that opens narrowed or blocked coronary arteries with a balloon to relieve symptoms of heart disease or reduce heart damage during or after a heart attack.

The triennial accreditation is valid through 2026.

Hospitals that have earned ACC Chest Pain Center with Primary PCI Accreditation have proven exceptional competency in treating patients with heart attack symptoms and have primary PCI available 24/7 every day of the year.

“St. Tammany Health System’s St. Tammany Parish Hospital has demonstrated its commitment to providing communities across the Northshore of St. Tammany Parish with excellent heart care,” said ACC Accreditation management Board Chair Deepak L. Bhatt, MD, MPH, FACC. “ACC Accreditation Services is proud to award STHS with Chest Pain Center with Primary PCI Accreditation.” ■

## Healthier Northshore takes root in Bogalusa

Community partnership to provide weekly harvests for families in need

**By STHS Communication Department**

Healthier Northshore, a community health initiative spearheaded by St. Tammany Health System, recently completed its first harvest and distribution of fresh produce for food bank clients at the Bogalusa Help Center.

The initiative, which will see such deliveries occur weekly, is a community partnership with key contributions from Nielsen's Farmacy, a two-acre community garden on which the produce was grown; the B.B. Sixty Rayburn Correctional Center, inmates from which harvested and bundled the produce; and the Bogalusa Help Center.

"It's a labor of love and a ministry of sorts," said pharmacist Bill Nielsen, who plants the garden annually on land adjacent to his pharmacy. "This is just a small way I can give back to the people of Bogalusa. The real credit, though, goes to God. Whatever good we can do comes from him."

In all, 200 bundles of freshly harvested mustard greens were delivered to the food bank. Each was accompanied by a recipe



Members of the Healthier Northshore initiative recently got help from inmates at the B.B. Sixty Rayburn Correctional Center to harvest 200 bundles of mustard greens from Nielsen's Farmacy, a two-acre community garden in Bogalusa. The bundled greens were donated to food bank clients at the Bogalusa Help Center. (Healthier Northshore photo)

card, along with information about Nielsen's Farmacy and the Healthier Northshore initiative.

Ben Nevers, former state senator, executive committee member of Healthier Northshore and lifelong resident of Bogalusa, gathered all the resources and entities to make this initiative a reality.

"Bogalusa is my community, and we want to spread the word about the wonderful resources available here and get this produce to people who need it most," Nevers said. "My lifelong friends and neighbors were anxious to come together to make this happen. We all

want people to know they can utilize this garden whenever they need it, to provide nutrition for their families."

The Bogalusa Help Center serves approximately 100 households each week.

The Healthier Northshore initiative was started in 2020 by local health systems, government officials, local experts and community leaders to serve as a network for healthcare-related education and resources in the region. Among other things, it promotes early detection and prevention to improve the health of Northshore residents. ■

## STHS announces free Advance Care Planning workshops for 2024

**By STHS Communication Department**

St. Tammany Health System's Palliative Medicine and Advance Care Planning Steering Committee has announced the continuation of their Advance Care Planning and Education Walk-Up Workshop series in 2024.

This series is designed to help community neighbors learn the steps needed to communicate their wishes about their medical care before they are faced with a serious illness that might result

in the inability to communicate those wishes with loved ones.

Attendees of the workshops will receive assistance in preparing living wills and related documents on-site at no charge.

Save the dates for the following workshops, all of which are free and open to the public:

**April 24**, 9 a.m. to noon at the STHS Cardiovascular Clinic, 1006 S. Harrison St., Covington.

**May 29**, 9 a.m. to noon at the St. Tammany Physicians Network clinic at 80 Gardenia Dr. Suite B, Covington.

**June 26**, 9 a.m. to noon at the Ochsner 65 Plus Clinic at 1581 North U.S. 190, Covington.

**July 24**, 9 a.m. to noon at the St. Tammany Physicians Network clinic at 201 St. Ann Dr. Unit B, Mandeville.

**Aug. 14**, 9 a.m. to noon in the St. Tammany Parish Hospital main lobby, 1202 South Tyler St., Covington. ■



Chef Jeff Mattia of Pyre BBQ in Mandeville shared his recipe for Grilled Pork Chops and Bourbon Roasted Carrots recently as part of Healthier Northshore's free Eat Well, Live Well cooking demonstration series. All attendees received a box filled with ingredients to recreate the dish at home, courtesy of Stone Creek Club & Spa. (Photos by Tory Mansfield / STHS)

## Fired up about flavor

Pyre BBQ chef-owner blends good health, bold tastes

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

Jeff Mattia is a passionate man. As the chef-owner of Pyre BBQ in Mandeville, he is passionate about food. He is passionate about flavor. He is passionate about using fire and wood smoke to maximize the quality of both.

But he's also passionate about his Northshore community — and about sharing his decades of amassed kitchen wisdom to help local residents learn how to combine good eating and good health.

Which is how Mattia ended up in front of a room full of home cooks recently as part of the latest Eat Well, Live Well cooking demonstration hosted by the American Heart Association and Healthier Northshore, a public health coalition spearheaded by St. Tammany Health System.

"I think it was my grandmother," Mattia said, discussing his kitchen passions. "She's the one who taught me how to cook."

He added to those early lessons with a four-year stint as a Marine Corps cook, followed by further culinary education that included time alongside such notable chefs as Tom Colicchio, Todd English and John Besh.

In that time, he has developed a kitchen philosophy that emphasizes fresh, whole food, sustainable farming and ramped-up deliciousness.

For example, his recipe for Grilled Pork Chops and Bourbon Roasted

Carrots — which he prepared for the cooking demo audience — calls for bone-in pork chops.

"You can use boneless," he said, "but if it has the ability to leave the bone on it, leave the bone on it. You'll get more flavor."

Similarly, he urged use of fresh herbs whenever possible in lieu of dried herbs.

"When they dry the herbs," he said, "they're drying all the natural oils and perfumes out of it. You'll still get rosemary flavor, but it won't be as intense."

Additionally, Mattia said he never uses canned vegetables, which are often filled with preservatives. He is, however, a fan of frozen veggies when fresh isn't available.

"Frozen is actually very good," he said. "The nutrient level is there, and they're frozen at the peak of their freshness."

In addition to getting a sample of Mattia's pork chops and carrots as part of the demo, attendees also received a box of fresh ingredients — as they do at all Eat Well, Live Well demos — so they could recreate the dish at home, courtesy of sponsor Stone Creek Club & Spa. ■

*Learn more about the Healthier Northshore initiative, including information on upcoming cooking demos, at [HealthierNorthshore.health](http://HealthierNorthshore.health).*



### Pyre's Grilled Pork Chops with Roasted Carrots

Yield: 8 servings  
Time: Approximately 35 minutes

#### Ingredients:

6T tarragon, chopped	1c Buffalo Trace bourbon (or any good bourbon)
3T rosemary, chopped	1c sugar
3T garlic, chopped	½ c water
8T oil (salad or vegetable)	3 bunches of baby carrots, each halved
8 pork chops (bone-in preferred)	3 cubes of cold butter
Salt and pepper to taste	

#### Directions:

Mix 3T of the chopped tarragon with the rosemary and garlic in a bowl with approximately 6T of the oil. Rub herb mixture on pork chops, seasoning with salt and pepper on both sides.

Grill pork chops on a hot grill pan or gas grill for 6 to 8 minutes per side or until an internal temperature of 135 degrees Fahrenheit is reached. Set aside.

Add the bourbon to a saucepan. Using a lighter, ignite the bourbon. Once the alcohol has burned off, add the water and sugar to the pan, then bring to a boil. Allow mixture to reduce by half or until it reaches a honey-like consistency. Remove from heat and put aside.

Add remaining 2T of oil to a large pan, preferably cast-iron, and bring to temperature over medium heat. Add the carrots and sear lightly, caramelizing them, about 5 minutes.

Remove carrots and discard oil from pan. Return the carrots to the pan and add the bourbon syrup mixture, stirring to glaze the carrots.

Turn off heat and add the butter, stirring until it is incorporated. Add the remaining 3T of chopped tarragon.

Place a pork chop on each plate. Serve a portion of carrots on the side, spooning the bourbon sauce on top.

Enjoy!



Look! Cut me out! I'm a bookmark for your favorite cookbook!

# 70 for 70: ‘Our heart and soul’

**Note:** This story is part of 70 for 70, a weekly series highlighting 70 key artifacts from St. Tammany Health System’s history as we count down to our 70th anniversary on Dec. 1, 2024. Find additional installments in this series at [StTammany.health](http://StTammany.health).

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

John “Pizzie” Romano was a nice guy, first and foremost. Ask anyone who knew him, and they’ll tell you the same.

But Pizzie was much more than that. The local businessman, restaurateur and longtime owner of the legendary Tugy’s Bar – the downtown Covington watering hole once favored by Northshore politicians – was also a deeply dedicated civic leader.

In addition to being a former member of the Covington City Council, he was also a founding member of the St. Tammany Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees and was for years a member of St. Tammany Health System’s Board of Commissioners, serving as a liaison between those two bodies.

But, once again, he was more than that.

“Pizzie was our heart and soul,” health system Board of Commissioners Chairman John Evans said upon Romano’s death in 2018. “When the hospital was first opened, he and his high school buddies washed its windows. From his earliest days to his very final days, Pizzie loved this hospital, and we all loved him back.”

That brings us to today’s installment in our 70-part series chronicling the first 70 years of St. Tammany Health System.

**Today’s artifact:** A plaque outside the St. Tammany Parish Hospital infusion suite, dedicating it in memory of longtime Board of Commissioners member John “Pizzie” Romano.

**Why it is significant:** A hospital



John ‘Pizzie’ Romano, a Covington businessman who served as a member of both St. Tammany Health System’s Board of Commissioners and the St. Tammany Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees, is photographed in fall 2018. (STHS photo)



Jackie Romano, the widow of longtime STHS Board of Commissioners member John ‘Pizzie’ Romano, reacts at the unveiling of a plaque dedicating the St. Tammany Parish Hospital infusion suite in Pizzie’s memory. (STHS photo)



Members of the Romano family gather for a photo in June 2019 to dedicate St. Tammany Parish Hospital’s infusion suite in honor of John ‘Pizzie’ Romano, who died in December 2018 after years of service to the health system. (STHS photo)

is only as good as the people behind it – and by all accounts, Pizzie was, indeed, a good one.

Although soft-spoken and good-humored, he took his role as a hospital leader seriously, using his

experiences as a patient to inform his work as a board member and to advocate on behalf of the hospital.

So, when Pizzie passed away in December 2018 at age 81, there was no question that the health system needed to do something to honor his legacy.

Six months later, in June 2019, that something became reality, as the Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution saluting his service. In October of that year, the hospital’s infusion suite was dedicated in his honor.

That included installation of a plaque outside the infusion suite reading:

“In memory of Pizzie, whose passion for St. Tammany Parish Hospital left a legacy of integrity and service for generations to come. We were blessed to benefit from his humor, kindness and wisdom, and offer our everlasting gratitude to his memory.”

That plaque remains in place today – as does Pizzie’s indelible impact on St. Tammany Health System. ■

*Do you have a St. Tammany Parish Hospital story or item to share? We’d love to hear about it! Email us at [CommDept@stph.org](mailto:CommDept@stph.org).*



The first-place team at the 2024 tournament consisted of, from left, St. Tammany Health System Director of General Medicine Brent Blazeovich, STHS Director of Emergency Services Bradley Leonhard, Ochsner neurologist Dr. Louis Cannizaro and STHS Director of Neuroscience Services Corey Olson.



In a four-photo sequence, a Get Lucky! golfer chips his ball toward the hole (top left), watches as it approaches the pin (top center) and hoots with joy (top right) before going airborne for a well-deserved high-five.



Crystal Domreis with the Bradley Murchison team grips it and rips it during St. Tammany Hospital Foundation's 13th annual Get Lucky! Golf Tournament.



## Lucky 13

The luck of the Irish was with participants in St. Tammany Hospital Foundation's 13th annual Get Lucky! Golf Tournament, held under gorgeous spring skies the week of St. Patrick's Day at Beau Chene Country Club. In addition to enjoying superb golfing weather and a fully catered afterparty, they got the satisfaction of helping a good cause, with \$55,000 raised in support of St. Tammany Health System programs and services. That amount raises the cumulative total to \$650,000 generated by the event since its inception. (Photos by Chuck Billiot for St. Tammany Hospital Foundation)



Representatives of Five Star Breaktime Solutions show off the trophy awarded to them as presenting sponsor of the Get Lucky! Golf Tournament.



Winn-Dixie shows their support with a snack stop for the golfers on the course.



Representatives of St. Tammany Hospital Guild, St. Tammany Hospital Foundation and the St. Tammany Health System executive team celebrate the guild's 2024 donation to the foundation, which – at \$45,000 – pushes the cumulative amount the all-volunteer group has donated to the foundation past the half-million-dollar threshold. (Photo by Mike Scott/STHS)

## Guild giving surpasses half-million dollar mark

### Hospital volunteers celebrated for milestone gift

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

Every year, when the all-volunteer St. Tammany Hospital Guild presents its annual donation to the nonprofit St. Tammany Hospital Foundation, it's a big deal. Like, literally.

As is customary for significant donations, the foundation trots out its giant, Ed McMahon-size check. Photos are taken. Applause rings out. General hoopla ensues.

This year, though, they just might need a bigger check.

For starters, the guild's 2024 donation, at \$45,000, is heftier than usual. But also, it pushes the cumulative amount the group has donated to the foundation past the half-million dollar threshold in the 21 years since the foundation was established in 2003.

Every dollar of that money has been invested directly into the health system and its programs.

"We love doing it," Guild President John Sammons said. "We look forward to making the donation every year,

and we get a lot of gratification that we were able to reach that milestone. But it really is a lot of people putting in a lot of effort."

Specifically, he name-checked Ken Lane, his predecessor as guild president, and St. Tammany Health System Volunteer Services Manager Shirley Primes. But, Mr. Sammons said, it also includes the work of hundreds of guild members who have donated millions of collective people hours to the hospital since the guild was founded in March 1955 in support of the then-new hospital's healing mission.

In that time, guild members have worked in nearly every square inch of the hospital, assisting patients, their families and staff in innumerable ways.

They also host various fundraisers, including yearly jewelry and linen bazaars, proceeds from which go toward scholarships for STHS staff.

The bulk of the guild's money, however, comes through operation of the hospital gift shop. After covering expenses, including the cost of Teddy

bears for pediatric inpatients, that gift shop money goes to the foundation.

Among other things, its most recent gift is earmarked for such initiatives as the health system's inpatient food pantry; operation of the Be Well Bus mobile health clinic; and the therapeutic food pantry and the transportation program at St. Tammany Cancer Center – A Campus of Ochsner Medical Center.

In the process, the generosity of the guild's membership has drawn both appreciation and admiration from all quarters.

"I completely share in the guild's excitement about crossing the half-million dollar threshold in donations," foundation Executive Director Nicole Suhre said. "Our foundation board continues to be in awe of the selfless work these volunteers do. The fact that they choose to spend their time in service to St. Tammany Health System is deeply humbling, and their generous contributions are just the icing on the cake." ■

Visit [StTammany.health/GiftShop](https://StTammany.health/GiftShop) or scan the code to support the guild in its giving mission.



# So many ways to say ‘thank you’

From donors to doctors to volunteers, we couldn’t do it without you



Nicole Suhre, STHF executive director

**“As a health system foundation, we are in the business of gratitude. ... THANK YOU for your loyal and generous support.”**

Happy spring!

I love this time of year. There is always such sense of renewal and purpose in the air. And though fall is usually associated with the season of gratitude, spring brings its own ways to show gratitude.

Did you know March 30 was National Doctors’ Day? Each year, the foundation hosts a campaign inviting the community to say “thank you” by making a tribute gift for their physicians. And you can do this all year long! Just visit [STHfoundation.org/DoctorsDay](http://STHfoundation.org/DoctorsDay).

Did you know April 21 to 27, 2024, is National Volunteer Week? This is a week to recognize the contributions of volunteers across the country, including those who support our efforts here in St. Tammany Parish.

Our foundation’s Board of Trustees is made up of 17 volunteer leaders in our community who ensure success for the mission of our foundation through advocacy, fundraising and strategic guidance. Additionally, numerous individuals and businesses volunteer each year on event committees and at our functions to help to make each one a triumph.

And of course, there’s the St. Tammany Hospital Guild, members of which selflessly volunteer thousands of hours aiding St. Tammany Health System in their work to care for patients in this community.

Finally, did you know May 6 to 12, 2024, is National Nurses Week? Excellence in nursing care has long been the hallmark of St. Tammany Health System. STHS takes great pride in saying thank you to our nurse teams with treats and displays of gratitude all week.

As a health system foundation, we are in the business of gratitude: finding ways to help others express their gratitude for care received at STHS’s facilities; and expressing continuous gratitude for our incredible donors and supporters. THANK YOU for your loyal and generous support. We truly appreciate it.

Sincerely,

Nicole Suhre, CFRE  
STHF executive director

## Foundation calendar Save the dates!



**Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month**  
April 2024

Proceeds raised through the foundation’s monthlong Autism Awareness campaign will support the health system’s efforts to better care for those with autism and other sensory sensitivities in our community.

**Details:** Call (985) 898-4171 or visit [STHfoundation.org/autism](http://STHfoundation.org/autism).

**Man Up! community screening event**  
May 31, 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 alongside fun and fellowship. The event is sponsored by Gastro Group.

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

**2023 Falaya Float Poker Run**  
June 1, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Enjoy a family-friendly float along scenic Bogue Falaya River benefitting St. Tammany Hospital Foundation’s initiative to care for local pediatric patients with autism.

**Details:** [Facebook.com/FalayaFloat](https://Facebook.com/FalayaFloat)

**Cancer Patient Appreciation Day**  
June 13, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
St. Tammany Cancer Center

The cancer center team invites you to celebrate our cancer survivors, those currently on their cancer journey, caregivers, families and friends at our annual Patient Appreciation Day celebration and picnic.

**Details:** Call (985) 338-5328 or email [kgthomas@stph.org](mailto:kgthomas@stph.org).



1202 S. Tyler St., Covington, LA 70433

 This publication is printed on responsibly sourced paper. Please recycle.



# Saying **thank you!**

Because extraordinary care deserves to be recognized.

Sometimes our patients want to offer a special thanks to a nurse, doctor or other St. Tammany Health System colleague who went above and beyond what was necessary to make sure they or their loved one felt comfortable, cared for and listened to.

Visit us online to learn how.



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