

Vol. 21, No. 2 / Spring 2025



# Heart to Heart

A publication of St. Tammany Health System



## Grief and gratitude

How love helped a brokenhearted couple endure, p. 8

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Heart to Heart magazine is a quarterly publication of St. Tammany Health System  
Vol. 21, No. 2; Spring 2025

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# Gratefully Yours

Leading with love – every patient, every touch, every time.



Joan Coffman, FACHE

**“So much of our team, in addition to possessing vast clinical expertise, enthusiastically embraces the Culture of Caring that is at the heart of everything we do.”**

Sierra and Hunter Smith’s story, which graces the cover of today’s issue, can only be described as a bittersweet one.

First came the bitter, in the form of a difficult diagnosis. But then came the sweet: an outpouring of compassion from St. Tammany Health System care providers that touched Sierra and Hunter so deeply that they reached out to share their experience and their gratitude.

It is a moving story and, I am proud to say, it is not all that uncommon here at St. Tammany.

That is because so much of our team, in addition to possessing vast clinical expertise, enthusiastically embraces the Culture of Caring that is at the heart of everything we do. First and foremost, of course, they are there to deliver world-class healthcare, but in doing so they lead with love – every patient, every touch, every time.

You can find evidence of that compassion in action again and again throughout this issue.

What a privilege it is to work every day alongside people so thoroughly dedicated to their community, and what a joy it is to read about their work.

Thanks go out to all of them for their proven dedication to our community, and thanks to you, dear reader, for trusting St. Tammany Health System with your family’s healthcare.

Gratefully,



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



### Honoring our certified nurses

St. Tammany Health System President and CEO Joan Coffman, center, chats with Director of Education, Training and Development Terri Johnston, left, and Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton at the March 19 unveiling of a Certified Nurses Wall of Honor at St. Tammany Parish Hospital. Read more about the certified nurses installation on page 9.

# Ask the STHS Experts

Talking breast health with surgeon Dr. Christopher Porter

**By STHS Communication Department**

Got healthcare questions? We've got answers, thanks to our team of seasoned medical experts.

With Women's Health Month coming up in May, we sat down with Dr. Christopher Porter, the newest member of the care team at St. Tammany Health System's High Risk and Breast Disease Clinic, to discuss breast health.

Here's some of what he had to say:

**At what age should women begin getting regular mammograms?**

**Dr. Porter:** The National Comprehensive Cancer Network and American Society of Breast Surgeons recommend women of average risk should get a mammogram every year starting at age 40, but you also want to have general breast awareness. Patients know their bodies the best; they're able to feel and see if there are any changes. If changes are noted or something seems different, then you go your primary care doctor, your OB-GYN or the St. Tammany Health System Women's Pavilion and say, "Hey, this has changed. What do I need to do?" And most of the time they'll say, "All right, let's get an ultrasound or a mammogram."

## 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.)*

But in general, for most people, at age 40 you'll go and get your annual screening mammogram, and the team will kind of take it from there.



Dr. Christopher Porter

**How does family history come into play?**

**Dr. Porter:** Only 5% to 10% of breast cancer cases can be traced to a familial or genetic cause. If there's anyone in your family who was diagnosed with

breast cancer younger than 50, or if you have an immediate relative with breast, ovarian or pancreatic cancer, it's important to have a heightened sense of awareness of your breast and discuss it with your doctors. In such cases, you should discuss your family history with your doctors to determine if you would qualify for enhanced screening or genetic testing. Similarly, if there's a male relative in your family who had breast cancer or any known genetic risk within your family, you want to have a heightened sense of breast awareness and consult with your doctors on appropriate next steps.

**How about prevention? Is there anything I can do to reduce my cancer risk?**

**Dr. Porter:** Pay attention to all the regular things people say about your general health: eat healthy, exercise, maintain a healthy weight, limit alcohol consumption, don't use tobacco products, practice healthy sleep habits. People who've already had breast cancer can reduce their risk of recurrence by almost half if they exercise regularly, so just living a healthy lifestyle can be a big help. ■

## STHS to host free Advance Care Planning workshops

**By STHS Communication Department**

St. Tammany Health System's Palliative Medicine program has announced the continuation of its free Advance Care Planning and Education Walk-Up Workshop series, designed to help community members learn the steps needed to communicate their wishes about their medical care before they are faced with a serious illness.

Attendees of the workshops will receive assistance in preparing

living wills and related documents on-site at no charge.

Upcoming sessions include:

- **April 16**, noon, Healthcare Decisions Day "donuts and documents" event, St. Tammany Health System Palliative Care Clinic (1010 South Polk St., Covington).
- **May 6**, 10 a.m., Cinco de Mamma event at Avanti Senior Living Center

(2235 Watercross Parkway, Covington).

- **June 19**, 4:30 p.m., Alzheimer's Support Group and Advance Care Planning event at Avanti Senior Living Center (2235 Watercross Parkway, Covington).

For more information or to set up an appointment to complete an Advance Care Plan, contact the STHS Palliative Medicine team at (985) 871-5975. ■

# FLOWER POWER

Every quarter, St. Tammany Health System recognizes nursing excellence with the Daisy Award and non-nursing colleagues with the Sunflower Award. Here are the latest to earn the honors.



STHS nurse Karina Bustillo Palma reacts with surprise upon being informed by Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton that she won a Daisy Award. 'Karina was my rock in the worst storm of my life,' wrote Charlene Forester, the wife of a patient. 'Please consider her for the Daisy Award, as she blooms every day with care and compassion.' (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)



STHS Emergency Services nurse Amanda Coomans celebrates her Daisy Award with Tommy Buckel, who nominated her for the award in recognition of the care she provided his mother. 'Her quick actions and relentless determination ... to make sure Mom was OK is greatly appreciated,' Mr. Buckel wrote in nominating her. (Photo by Tory Mansfield / STHS)



Neurosciences LPN Janae' Cohn is photographed with members of her team after winning a Daisy Award for exceptional nursing for the fourth quarter of 2024. In nominating her, patient Margo Dandry wrote, 'Janae' is a very bright light of a person who just makes you feel better!' (Photo by Tory Mansfield / STHS)



STHS Director of Infection Prevention Leslie Kelt reacts upon being presented with a Sunflower Award by Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton. Fellow STHS colleague Rosie Fondren nominated Leslie for the award upon her retirement in January after 18 years with the health system. (STHS photo)



St. Tammany Health System Chief Operating Officer Sharon Toups, right, presents STHS Nursing Assistant Demetria Toliver with a Sunflower Award for her support of the health system's nursing mission. At center is STHS Clinical Educator Shelia Wirt, who nominated Demetria for the award based on the care Demetria provided to Shelia's father. (Photo by Chloe Stephan / STHS)



A tearful Heidi Weiskopf-Gommel, who works as a mobility tech at STHS, collects a hug after learning she is a recipient of a Sunflower Award for the fourth quarter of 2024. 'Heidi is a true ray of light!' wrote Anne Doss, a patient family member, in nominating her. '... She is a vital part of St. Tammany, and me and my family are blessed to know her! Thank you for hiring her.' (Photo by Tory Mansfield / STHS)

# STAT!

Quick hits from the STHS newsroom

By STHS Communication Department

St. Tammany Health System, in collaboration with its partners at St. Tammany Cancer Center – A Campus of Ochsner Medical Center, has been **re-accredited by the Commission on Cancer**, a quality program of the American College of Surgeons, for three more years. ... Congratulations to the STHS Joint Camp team including **Dr. John d'Hemecourt; Dr. Roch Hontas; Sarah Delery, RN; Bert Lindsey, DPT; Toni Mitchell, RN; and Dawn Fournier, RN**, who were collectively named recipients of the St. Tammany Quality Network Medical Director's Award for the fourth quarter of 2024. ... In January, the St. Tammany Health System Women's Pavilion earned Press Ganey's prestigious **Human Experience Pinnacle of Excellence Award and Guardian of Excellence Award** for 2024, putting it in the upper echelon of U.S. healthcare providers for patient experience. ... In February, St. Tammany Sleep Disorders Center in Covington earned program reaccreditation from the **American Academy of Sleep Medicine**. ... In March, the New Family Center at St. Tammany Health System's flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital again achieved the **Birth Ready+ designation** from the Louisiana Perinatal Quality Collaborative, a program administered through the state Department of Health. ... Congratulations to STHS Director of Infection Prevention **Leslie Kelt**, who retired in January after 18 years; STHS Chief Operating Officer **Sharon Toups**, who retired in March after 23 years; and Pharmacist **David Russo**, who retired in March after 26 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.

# Changing of the guard

## Outgoing COO Sharon Toups reflects on 23 eventful years at STHS

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

In the waning days of her 23-year career at St. Tammany Health System, Chief Operating Officer Sharon Toups inevitably began marking notable “lasts”: Last ribbon cutting. Last colleague incentive celebration. Last budget meeting.

But the “last” she logged on Monday, March 10 – just two weeks before her scheduled March 21 retirement date – hit her particularly hard.

It was the last new-hire orientation she attended, and seeing all those fresh faces embarking on their STHS journey made her misty.

“I think what I’m going to miss the most – and that’s why I got teary-eyed – is the people,” she said.

“Anybody who joins our team is really hand-chosen to fit the culture of St. Tammany,” she added. “My message to them all the time is, they should pat themselves on the back because they were chosen to be here. We have a lot of applicants for the jobs that we have open, and we really do try and find people who will fit into our Culture of Caring.”

In a way, it was a full-circle moment for Toups. When she joined the health system as COO in February 2002, she was enlisted by then-CEO Patti Elish to help St. Tammany become a workplace of choice by creating an environment that would draw the best job candidates.

Twenty-three years later, that effort is still paying dividends, with health system leadership consistently citing its workforce as its most valuable asset.

“I tell the board this all the time: It’s not about the building, it’s about the care that’s going on in that building,” Toups said.



Former STHS Chief Operating Officer Sharon Toups, who retired March 21, said she is particularly proud of the family feel that remains among the workforce at St. Tammany Health System, despite decades of growth. “The one thing I always hear from people is, “Don’t lose that feeling,” she said. “The bigger you get, the more you risk losing that feeling of family and community. I really think we’ve been very methodical and purposeful in trying to keep that no matter where you work in the organization.” (STHS photo)



St. Tammany Health System Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton embraces outgoing COO Sharon Toups at a March 18 retirement celebration.

That philosophy, which has guided her over the past two decades, has been key to St. Tammany’s transformation into the thriving, regional health system it has become.



As impactful as her career has been, not even Toups saw it coming upon earning her Bachelor’s of Science from LSU School of Medicine in 1983.

“I started my healthcare career at Ochsner in New Orleans. I graduated as a physical therapist and never dreamed in my wildest dreams that I’d

end up in leadership or administration,” she said. “I remember when I started there, all the therapists were there five years, and I was like: ‘Five years? I’m not going to be anywhere for five years! I will have moved on.’”

Forty years later, she’s only worked for two employers in her healthcare career: Ochsner for 19 years and St. Tammany Health System for the last 23.

When she first arrived, STHS leaders were putting the finishing touches on their New Millennium expansion, a transformational capital project Toups helped see to the finish line. On her watch, the health system has only continued to expand capabilities and access.

She shepherded the award-winning Women’s Pavilion from the drawing board to reality – after having stood up a similar facility at Ochsner. She similarly helped make the Paul D. Cordes Outpatient Pavilion a reality. The list of initiatives in which she played a key role goes on: Mandeville Diagnostic



Longtime STHS Chief Operating Officer Sharon Toups delivers remarks at the 2022 groundbreaking for the \$75 million St. Tammany Health System Surgery Center on Bootlegger Road. Toups said she counts the establishment of the surgery center, which saw its first cases earlier this year, as one of her career high points.

Center. Covington Surgery Center. St. Tammany Health Foundation, along with its Healing Arts Initiative.

Most recently, there was this year’s opening of the St. Tammany Health System Surgery Center, a project in which she takes particular pride.

“It’s going to serve the community for years to come,” she said. “And so that one’s on the top of my list.”



As for what’s next, Toups hopes to travel. She’ll swing a golf club or two. Maybe play some tennis. Most importantly, she plans to spend more time visiting with and caring for her aging parents.

She’ll be around, though. She expects to remain involved with the health system in some capacity, and in the community as a whole.

When it comes to the health system, Toups says it is poised to continue its growth under incoming COO Jack Khashou, an 11-year St. Tammany veteran whose institutional knowledge she predicted will help him hit the ground running.

“When you have an organization like



Sharon Toups waves to the camera while serving up food to patients and their families at the 2024 Cancer Patient Appreciation Day at St. Tammany Cancer Center – A Campus of Ochsner Medical Center. Pictured with Sharon are Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton and Chief Technology Officer Craig Doyle. (Photos by Tim San Filippo/STHS)

St. Tammany that’s just performing on all cylinders, it’s hard to beat,” she said. “We’re large enough to where we’ve really become a regional health center, but we’ve really tried to keep that community, small-town feel.

“I don’t think you’re going to find a facility or another health system that really can check all the boxes, that are really performing at their best. We do that every day, and it takes work. It’s not easy. It’s not on autopilot. We always want to get better. But we keep trudging away and doing that every day.” ■

## Jack Khashou named new STHS chief operating officer

By STHS Communication Department

Jack Khashou, a Northshore healthcare leader with more than 30 years of experience, has been named chief operating officer of St. Tammany Health System.

He succeeds Sharon Toups, who retired March 21 after serving in the role for 23 years.

“Those who know Sharon know she leaves big shoes to fill,” Khashou said. “But as part of her legacy she also leaves a thriving health system built upon patient experience, operational excellence, colleague collaboration and quality care. Those characteristics will remain central to everything we do at every level of the health system, and I am honored to build on the strong foundation Sharon forged to continue to meet and exceed the needs of our community.



Jack Khashou, M.Ed, MS

“I also look forward to continuing to work with the St. Tammany Health System Board of Commissioners, leadership and with physicians throughout our community to maintain the health system’s status as the premiere destination for healthcare on the Northshore. To uphold and elevate this status, we will increase our focus on providing whole-person care, leveraging the investments in innovation made over the past several years.”

In his new role, Khashou will be responsible for daily operations of the health system. Khashou began his healthcare career in April 1993 and has held leadership positions – including a previous stint as COO – at for-profit and non-profit health systems throughout South Louisiana. Most recently, he has served as administrator of St. Tammany Cancer Center – A Campus of Ochsner Medical Center, a joint venture of St. Tammany Health System and Ochsner MD Anderson Cancer Center. ■

## Grief and gratitude

Sierra and Hunter Smith were shattered. Here's how love helped put them back together.



'St. Tammany Health System didn't just care for me physically,' said bereaved mother Sierra Smith, pictured above with husband Hunter. 'They cared for our hearts, our souls and our family. They provided a safe space filled with love during our most painful time. We are eternally grateful for the peace they brought us when it seemed impossible to find any.' (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)

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

"Anhydramnios": It's not a word with which Sierra and Hunter Smith were familiar when they first heard it. The Amite couple would learn all about it soon enough, though.

A medical diagnosis, it would be the catalyst for a healthcare journey that would break their hearts. It would also, however, begin the process of putting it back together again, reinforcing their faith in the power of human kindness.

"Every single person we encountered (at St. Tammany Health System) — from the nurses to the support staff — treated us with so much compassion and grace," said Sierra, whose overwhelming gratitude prompted her to share her family's story. "They made the hardest experience of our lives feel just a little more bearable because of how deeply they cared."

The kindness they felt wasn't just

professional, she said. It was personal. "They took the time to listen, to truly understand what we were going through, and they treated us with such love and tenderness," she added.



It all started on what should have been a happy day.

Hunter and Sierra, already the parents of a daughter — Kenleigh, now 4 — learned in January 2024 that their little family would be joined by a baby boy.

"We were so eager to meet him, to see his precious face and to watch him grow alongside his sister," Sierra said. "Everything seemed to be going perfectly."

Then, three months into her pregnancy, they learned that word: anhydramnios, a condition in which little to no amniotic fluid is present in the mother's womb. Her care team,

led by obstetrician Dr. Daniel Mokry, was compassionate but straightforward. The prognosis was dire.

"In that moment," Sierra said, "it felt like the ground fell out from under us."

Even if she somehow beat the odds and carried full-term, the chances of him surviving were heart-wrenchingly low. So, they did the one thing they felt they could.

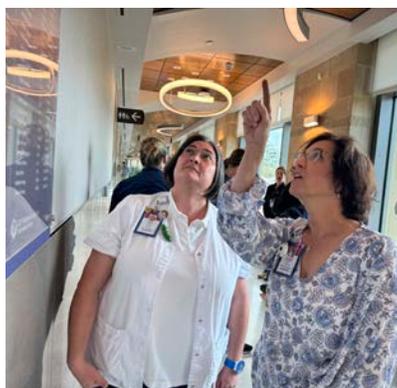
"We prayed — our family prayed, our community prayed — for a miracle," Sierra said. "And while we didn't get the outcome we had hoped for, what we did receive was an overwhelming outpouring of love and care from the staff at St. Tammany. They walked with us through every single moment, never leaving our side, and making sure we knew that we were never alone."



His name was Reid Thomas Smith, and he was born at St. Tammany



STHS Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton (far right); certified nurse Denise Campbell, a member of the health system's Shared Governance Professional Development Council (second from right); STHS President and CEO Joan Coffman; St. Tammany Health Foundation's Doug Walker; and others admire the STHS certified nurses recognition wall unveiled March 19 at St. Tammany Parish Hospital. (Photos by Tim San Filippo / STHS)



STHS Director of Education, Training and Development Terri Johnston, left, gets an up-close look at the new Certified Nurses Wall of Honor with AVP-Critical Care Teresa Krutzfeldt.



Some of St. Tammany Health System's 129 certified registered nurses pose for a group photo just before the unveiling of the new STHS certified nurses recognition wall March 19, which was also Certified Nurses Day.

## STHS unveils Certified Nurses Wall of Honor

By STHS Communication Department

March 19 was Certified Nurses Day, and St. Tammany Health System used the occasion to honor its cadre of certified nurses with the unveiling of a new recognition wall listing each current STHS nurse who has taken the initiative to earn certification in their specialty area.

In total, 129 St. Tammany Health System nurses have earned certification, many in multiple specialty areas. That represents an increase from the health system's 110 certified nurses last year.

"I am ecstatic over the number of certified nurses we have," STHS Chief Nursing Officer Kerry Milton said to those gathered after helping to unveil the wall. "It is quite an accomplishment for each of you. Thank you all for taking the initiative."

Located in the hospital's first-floor Conference Center Hallway near the Daisy Award and Sunflower recognition walls, the new Certified Nurses Wall of Honor was conceived by members of the STHS Shared Governance Professional Development Council and paid for with financial support from St. Tammany Health Foundation. ■

Parish Hospital's New Family Center on July 6, 2024. He died the same day. And although Sierra and Hunter did their best to prepare for that eventuality, they learned there really is no way for parents to prepare for such a loss.

Fortunately, their care team was.

"What stands out to me the most is how incredibly thoughtful and prepared they were for every single step," Sierra said. "They thought of things we never would have imagined, ensuring we had all the support we needed, both emotionally and practically."

They shared bereavement resources. They helped collect keepsakes, like Reid's handprints and footprints. They made sure Hunter and Sierra had the time and space to say goodbye to him.

Sierra sees STHS nurse Kristi Lamarque-Bordelon as more than a nurse; she became a friend. "We say she's an angel sent from heaven," Sierra said.

There were others, too. In addition to Kristi and Dr. Mokry, Dr. Kristine Chimento also helped carry the weight. So did nurses including Hillary Bryson, Kendra Caughman, Winnie Hernandez, Kaitlin Kellar, Lindsey Mongrue and

Alyssa Soto. The list goes on.

"St. Tammany Health System didn't just care for me physically," Sierra said. "They cared for our hearts, our souls and our family. They provided a safe space filled with love during our most painful time. We are eternally grateful for the peace they brought us when it seemed impossible to find any."

"They will forever be a part of our story, a place where our family has experienced both the joy of life and the heartache of loss. We couldn't have asked for a more loving and caring team to stand by our side through it all." ■

## New Family Center once more earns Birth Ready+ designation

State recognition underscores dedication to improved outcomes

*By STHS Communication Department*

The New Family Center at St. Tammany Health System's flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital has again achieved the Birth Ready+ designation from the Louisiana Perinatal Quality Collaborative, a program administered through the state Department of Health.

In addition to recognizing the health system's consistent, thoughtful healthcare and quality improvement work, the Birth Ready+ designation also celebrates improved perinatal health outcomes, the result of implementing safe, equitable and dignified clinical practices to improve outcomes for all people who give birth in Louisiana.

"Achieving the Birth Ready+ designation again this year is a testament to our unwavering commitment to providing excellent maternal and newborn care in our community," said Cindy Ingram, assistant vice president of Women and Children's Services at St. Tammany. "We believe that every mother deserves the highest quality of care, and we are dedicated to continually advancing our practices to ensure our new moms and newborns receive it. Our focus remains on fostering a supportive environment that prioritizes the well-being of families, and we look forward to further enhancing maternal and newborn care for the Northshore community." ■



The new St. Tammany Physicians Network primary care clinic in Bush is located at 79630 Louisiana 21, near the entrance to Money Hill subdivision. (STHS image)

## STHS opens primary care clinic in Bush

It is the sixth location for the fast-growing St. Tammany Physicians Network

*By STHS Communication Department*

St. Tammany Health System has announced the addition of a primary care clinic at Money Hill to its growing stable of St. Tammany Physicians Network locations.

The 5,034-square-foot clinic is located at 79630 Louisiana 21 near the entrance to Money Hill subdivision in the Bush/Waldheim area of St. Tammany Parish.

Opened on April 28, it operates from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, with same-day appointments available. "Among our priorities at St. Tammany Health System is to provide access to world-class healthcare to all of our Northshore friends and neighbors," St. Tammany Health System President and CEO Joan Coffman said. "The acquisition of this clinic addresses that goal, and we are excited for the opportunity to deliver our St. Tammany brand of compassionate care to the families of Money Hill and those throughout the Bush/Waldheim area."

In addition to providing convenient access to primary care, the Money Hill clinic will also include on-site capabilities including lab draws and imaging.

"I am so pleased by the addition of St. Tammany Health System to our Money Hill community and believe they are a huge asset to us and the region," said Mimi Goodyear Dossett, president of Money Hill. "I have a lot of faith in their established record of providing consistent, high-quality care and their commitment to serving the people of St. Tammany."

St. Tammany Physicians Network is the primary care arm of the Covington-based St. Tammany Health System. It includes six locations throughout western St. Tammany Parish. In addition to the new Money Hill office, it includes two clinics in Covington and one each in Folsom, Mandeville and Madisonville.

To schedule an appointment at any STPN clinic, call (985) 898-4000. ■

**“Gardening doesn’t have to be hard and eating fresh produce doesn’t need to be expensive.”**  
– Anne Pablovich, St. Tammany Health System director of Community Engagement

# Taking root

## Healthier Northshore volunteers help plant Folsom community garden

By *STHS Communication Department*

Volunteers with St. Tammany Health System and the Healthier Northshore coalition showed off their green thumbs March 22 by planting a community garden at Magnolia Park in Folsom.

Benefitting from picture-perfect springtime weather, volunteers gloved up to plant dozens of tomatoes, bell peppers, eggplants, herbs and other South Louisiana garden staples.

“This garden is not only a beautiful addition to the gem that is Magnolia Park but also an opportunity to provide access and education to our community on the value of nutrition,” said Anne Pablovich, Community Engagement director for St. Tammany Health System. “It helps to show that gardening doesn’t have to be hard and eating fresh produce doesn’t need to be expensive. We hope many come to learn a passion for growing, harvesting and eating their own food.”

Healthier Northshore is a community initiative composed of local health systems, government officials, experts and civic leaders across St. Tammany and Washington parishes united in the interest of improving stubbornly low population health metrics in the region.

The Folsom community garden project was designed to promote healthy eating as part of Healthier Northshore’s overall mission. It is the second local community garden established by Healthier Northshore, joining a previously planted plot on the Safe Haven campus in Mandeville. ■



Some of the helping hands that planted the new Magnolia Park community garden in Folsom pause from their work for a group shot. (Photo by Tory Mansfield / STHS)



Among those pitching in for the community garden project were, from left, St. Tammany Health System’s Community Engagement Director Anne Pablovich, VP-Quality and Utilization Management Dr. Mike Hill and VP-Communication and Strategy Kelly Rabalais. (Photo by Tory Mansfield / STHS)



The gardens were built under the auspices of Healthier Northshore, a coalition of local civic-minded people and organizations determined to improve stubbornly low healthcare metrics in South Louisiana. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)



Dozens of seedlings were planted in the new Magnolia Park community garden, including tomatoes, bell peppers, eggplant, herbs and other South Louisiana favorites. (Photo by Tim San Fillippo / STHS)



Volunteers get their hands dirty in one of several raised beds built by Magnolia Park staff to house the community garden. (Photo by Tory Mansfield / STHS)

Scan the QR code to learn more about the Healthier Northshore initiative.





With Spanish moss swaying in the breeze behind him, a golfer lets one loose at the annual Get Lucky! Golf tournament.



Former St. Tammany Health System Chief Operating Officer Sharon Toups lines up a putt.

## For(e) a good cause

In what has become a local rite of spring, St. Tammany Health Foundation hosted the 14th annual Get Lucky! Golf Tournament at Beau Chene Country Club in Mandeville on March 13, under (mostly) blue skies and with Louisiana oaks providing a postcard-worthy backdrop. In all, 33 teams participated in the event — once more sponsored by Five Star Breaktime Solutions — and nearly \$58,000 was raised to support the vital work of St. Tammany Health System.

Nailed it! A Get Lucky! golfer pumps his fist in celebration after sinking a putt.



New Orleans Saints fan favorite Rich Mauti, left, and son Patrick show off one of the sunscreen stations their Mauti Cancer Fund made available to golfers at the tournament.



Some of the STHS volunteers who helped make the day a success pause from their hydration duties for a quick group shot.



St. Tammany Health Foundation Executive Director Nicole Suhr presents an award of appreciation to Jordan Smith of Five Star Breaktime Solutions, the tournament's title sponsor.

# Choosing to include

## Foundation initiatives make profound impact for patients with autism

**By STHS Communication Department**

Nurse practitioner Sunny McDaniel has a story she likes to tell about one of her patients.

He was a little guy, about 6 years, and living on the autism spectrum. Like many kids with autism, he was also nonverbal, so McDaniel knew treating him would require a little special understanding.

Knowing he liked balls, she brought one into the exam room. She then sat on the floor, where he was, and, without saying anything, she quietly began playing with the ball.

“Well, you would think that he didn’t even know I was in the room,” McDaniel said. “That’s misleading. They absolutely know where you’re at and are listening. And so I sit there and I just take my time and wait.”

Soon enough, he came over, sat in McDaniels’ lap and began playing with the ball. As he did, she took the opportunity to gently give him a head-to-toe exam.

“Then I glanced over at the mom, and she’s crying,” McDaniel said. “I’m like, ‘What’s wrong?’ She said, ‘He’s never had a full head-to-toe physical exam.’”

“Now, when you think about that, when you think about kids and well-child visits, they start at 0, 2, 4, 6 months, 9 months, 12 months, 15, 18, 2 years, 3 years, 4 years, 6 years. And this was his first full exam? That makes you pause and go, ‘We’re not doing our job.’”

McDaniel hopes to change that. In fact, as a member of the St. Tammany Health Foundation Board of Trustees and a vocal advocate of expanding care for patients with autism, she already is.

As of April, which is recognized



As part of its effort to make St. Tammany Health System clinical spaces more welcoming to patients with autism, St. Tammany Health Foundation has assembled donor-funded 'sensory bags,' which contain items designed to help blunt any overstimulation a patient might be experiencing. (STHS image)

every year as Autism Acceptance Month, five St. Tammany Health System clinics or departments have earned the Certified Autism Center (CAC) designation, aided by financial support from the foundation. That includes its St. Tammany Pediatrics practice, its Bone and Joint Clinic, the Pediatric Emergency Department and Pediatric Inpatient Unit at St. Tammany Parish Hospital, and the STHS Parenting Center.

That CAC designation means no fewer than 80% of the staff at each of those locations are trained in how to interact sensitively with patients who have autism, ensuring children like the one in McDaniel’s story will be treated by understanding care providers.

“Autism is a medical diagnosis, but we do not treat autism medically,” McDaniel said. “A lot of people misunderstand that. Let’s say I have a kid that has anxiety and is autistic, I’m treating anxiety. If I have a kid that’s autistic and has a cold, I’m treating the cold. I’m never treating autism.”

To help in that, one of the newest autism initiatives undertaken by St. Tammany Health Foundation

involves supplying patients who have autism with a bag of aids designed to make their visit easier by blunting any overstimulation they might be feeling. Paid for with donations, these “sensory bags” contain such things as noise-cancelling headphones, visual aids, a whiteboard, a fidget toy and similar items.

Additionally, McDaniel arranged for a series of videos designed to help patients with autism to watch before visiting their doctor so they’ll know what to expect. They can be found at [StTammany.health/AutismSupport](http://StTammany.health/AutismSupport).

“We’ve got to do it better,” she added. “So, what we’re trying to do that makes St. Tammany a little unique is, we’re bringing both perspectives. We’re giving our patients help to be able to come to the table and feel prepared, and we’re also preparing the medical community to be able to take care of them when they are there.” ■

Visit [STHfoundation.org/Autism](http://STHfoundation.org/Autism) or scan the QR code to learn how you can support the foundation’s autism efforts.





'Balloon man' Paul Myers, Northshore Market president for Metairie Bank, costumed as Superman at Monster Mash 2020, a cowpoke in 2021, Captain America in 2023 and an eagle-riding Uncle Sam in 2024. (STHS images)

## They're baaa-aaaack ...

Metairie Bank Northshore extends Monster Mash sponsorship through 2027

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

Paul A. Myers wears a lot of hats. Like, literally.

By day, he is the Northshore Market president for Metairie Bank. But it is in his capacity as “the balloon man” at St. Tammany Health Foundation’s annual Monster Mash fall festival that he has been seen over the years sporting a comically oversized cowboy hat, a star-spangled Uncle Sam topper, and Captain America headgear, among others.

He wouldn’t have it any other way.

“It’s so heartwarming, seeing a child’s face when you hand them a balloon,” Myers said. “I always joke, saying I could be back in the tent blowing up the balloons, but, honestly — and this is a selfish thing for me — they get so excited about it, I can’t resist handing out the balloons.”

Fans of Monster Mash can expect those blue and gold balloons — and Myers’ penchant for costuming — for at least the next three years.

In March, Metairie Bank Northshore renewed its top-level sponsorship of the crowd-pleasing event through 2027. With the three-year renewal, the bank’s Monster Mash sponsorship will reach 11 years, dating to 2017.

According to Myers, that community support by the bank is central to its organizational identity. The fact that Monster Mash benefits the St. Tammany Health System Parenting Center only makes the sponsorship that much more of a perfect fit, given how central family is to Northshore residents.

“One of the things in our purpose statements is that we enrich the communities we serve,” Myers said. “We enrich them by helping them with financing — whether you’re a first-time homebuyer or you’re a real estate investor or a small business owner — but we also recognize that as a community bank, we have to support the community as much as we hope it supports us. It’s always about giving

back, establishing relationships.”

For him, support of the health system and its Parenting Center is also personal. Both of his children were born at St. Tammany Health System’s flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital. Even before he became a father, he took part in one of the Parenting Center’s popular “New Daddy Boot Camp” classes.

“Yes, we’re Metairie Bank, and our name tends to tie us geographically to the southshore,” Myers said, “but we’ve really worked to entrench ourselves in St. Tammany.”

**“We also recognize that as a community bank, we have to support the community as much as we hope it supports us. It’s always about giving back.”**

– Paul A. Myers, Metairie Bank Northshore Market president

Marking its 37th year this coming fall, Monster Mash is a large-scale, Halloween-themed festival that draws thousands of costumed guests each year to Covington’s Bogue Falaya Wayside Park. In addition to trick-or-treating, food and beverage options, and live music, the event also boasts inflatables, crafts, games and a range of other activities. ■

# Let us count the ways



Nicole Suhre, STHF executive director

**“St. Tammany Health Foundation strives to connect people to purpose by providing numerous opportunities to support our mission while providing tax and income benefits for you.”**

Spring is in the air, and our foundation team could give the Easter Bunny a run for his money with all the hopping around we have been doing.

Alongside the members of our Board of Trustees, we have been working on a comprehensive program of support for St. Tammany Health System that ranges from awareness campaigns for important health issues to securing major gifts and grants that make significant, lasting impacts on healthcare in our community.

St. Tammany Health Foundation strives to connect people to purpose by providing numerous opportunities to support our mission while providing tax and income benefits for you. When donors consider all giving options available to them, their philanthropic goals are met in the most impactful ways possible!

These ways include:

- Give a gift of cash.
- Give a gift of stock/securities.
- Donate real estate.
- Grant a bequest in your will, or name STH Foundation as the beneficiary of an insurance policy.
- Create a charitable gift annuity for a lifetime income.
- Establish a charitable remainder trust or provide an income stream with a charitable lead trust.

Every gift to St. Tammany Health Foundation is meaningful, and every gift is an opportunity for you to support a healthcare cause that is important to you and your loved ones. Our staff and board are committed to fostering a continued culture of philanthropy in this community, and we are grateful to each and every one of you who share your time, talents and treasure with us as we partner to support the healing work of St. Tammany Health System.

Sincerely,

Nicole Suhre, CFRE  
St. Tammany Health Foundation executive director

## Foundation calendar Save the dates!



### Celebrating YOU

May 1 | St. Tammany Cancer Center – A Campus of Ochsner Medical Center

The cancer center hosts diagnosed cancer patients, survivors and their caregivers for its quarterly celebration, including a day of food, fellowship, education and activities, including a look at the classes and other enrichment activities available at the center.

Details: [kgthomas@stph.org](mailto:kgthomas@stph.org) | (985) 338-5328

### Man Up! Men’s Health Event

June 5, 5 to 7 p.m. | Covington Beer Garden

St. Tammany Health System’s free annual men’s health screening event returns in recognition of June as National Men’s Health Month. Sponsored by The Gastro Group & Endocenter, the event will offer a variety of screening opportunities, education, games and, of course, beer.

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

### Falaya Float

June 7, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. | Covington

The annual Falaya Float Poker Run charity event will once more benefit St. Tammany Health Foundation, in addition for giving participants a chance to win prizes as they paddle down the scenic Bogue Falaya River. Cost is \$50; canoe and kayak rentals available at additional cost.

Details: [FalayaFloat.com](http://FalayaFloat.com) | (985) 898-4141



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## More than just a drugstore

In the spotlight this month at Braswell's is Cockeyed Farms' American Elderberry juice; locally crafted, naturally powerful. One of the many perfect gifts available now at the St. Tammany Health System Pharmacy at Braswell's.

[Braswelldrugs.com](https://www.braswelldrugs.com)

