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Today, Alabama’s Medicaid program is the most restrictive in the country. Women and children make up most of the eligible patients in the program. For hospitals, Medicaid pays us about 60 cents for every dollar of cost in providing health care services. Someone asked recently why the hospital would want to provide services at such a low rate. The answer is simple—first, we have no control on what we are paid; and more importantly, the patients will come to our hospital regardless. The approval of the recent General Fund budget by the Legislature simply increases the burden on hospitals. Sooner or later that burden impacts the care and services available for all patients. That impact will be very significant in the outlying hospitals in our region—in Limestone, Morgan, Marshall, Lawrence, and Colbert Counties. Of course, it will also impact our services locally, especially in the Women & Children’s Hospital where all of our babies and children are cared for. A major cut in Medicaid could severely threaten the availability of some pediatric subspecialty services which are now here for all of the children in our region.

We recognize that our state faces budgetary challenges and we appreciate the dedication of our elected representatives in working for solutions. But, we also know that the health of our people—especially mothers and children—cannot be overlooked. Underfunding the Medicaid program threatens that care, as well as the state’s transition to the new Regional Care Organization delivery approach which is only months away from its scheduled roll-out. The RCO model has the promise of delivering care to Medicaid enrollees more efficiently and more effectively. It was approved by the Legislature in 2013. Thank you for being informed on this complicated but critical issue of Medicaid. Caring for all of our patients is at the heart of our mission.
Coming from a family of nurses, Sandy Cross, RN, knew from an early age that she wanted to work in health care. But she wasn’t sure she would get the opportunity after being diagnosed with dyslexia in fifth grade.

It’s safe to say Cross overcame that barrier and then some: the 27-year nursing veteran was recently named Huntsville Hospital’s 2015 Employee of the Year for her work with newly-diagnosed breast cancer patients.

A breast patient navigator with the Breast Center, Cross provides crucial information, answers and guidance to women who have just been diagnosed.

“I try to give them a picture of what their journey for the next year will look like,” she said. “Then I keep up with them through the whole treatment process.”

Jennifer Brewington, RN, Director of Outpatient Health at Huntsville Hospital for Women & Children, said Cross is “almost as well known as (WAFF TV 48 news anchor) Liz Hurley when it comes to breast cancer.”

“She just really listens,” said Brewington, “and has a heart for the patient.”

Her compassion extends far beyond the hospital. Cross founded a benefit tennis tournament for breast cancer patients in Florence, assists Athletic Club Alabama with the popular Tennis for Ta-Tas fundraiser in Huntsville, and helps organize the annual Cook-Off for Cancer in Morgan County. Collectively, those events have raised more than $100,000 to assist unemployed or uninsured breast cancer patients with mortgages, car payments and utility bills.

Huntsville Hospital Health System CEO David Spillers said Cross “goes miles beyond expectations” to help women with breast cancer.

In her early 20s she happened upon a serious car wreck in Opelika. Cross pulled one person from a mangled vehicle and used a ripped shirt to create a tourniquet for a man with a severed artery.

“That was kind of an ‘a-ha’ moment for me,” she said.

Cross became a paramedic, later got accepted to nursing school at Calhoun Community College and was hired by Huntsville Hospital in 1989. Before joining the Breast Center in 2009, she honed her nursing skills in the hospital’s Medical Intensive Care and Surgical Trauma Intensive Care units. She also spent four years with Huntsville MedFlight, an air ambulance service that covers North Alabama and southern Tennessee.

“Sandy has done probably the most intense nursing that anyone could do,” said Brewington, “and has done it very well.”
ATLANTA BRAVES HERO

Dale Murphy headlines Athlete of the Year Banquet

The 14th Annual Huntsville Hospital Sports Center Athlete of the Year Scholarship Banquet at the Huntsville Museum of Art honored 32 high school seniors who were nominated as Athlete of the Week for the 2015-2016 school year. To qualify, applicants must be a high school senior, have a minimum GPA of 3.5, and display a history of athletic and academic accomplishments, as well as community/civic involvement. Of the weekly winners, two will be awarded a $1,000 scholarship at the banquet.

This year, Huntsville Hospital was excited to welcome a very familiar face as its guest speaker. Dale Murphy, everyone’s favorite Atlanta Brave, visited the Rocket City to speak to the student-athletes.

Murphy played nearly 20 years in Major League Baseball, but his most recognized years were those with the Atlanta Braves. He is a two-time National League Most Valuable Player Award winner, a seven-time Major League All-Star and a five-time Golden Glove Award winner. Murphy was very well known for his philanthropic work in and around the city of Atlanta and he will be our “MVP” when he shares words of inspiration and encouragement to these outstanding young men and women.

To learn more about the Athlete of the Year program, visit huntsvillehospital.org/aoy.

WellnessWorks FOSTERS HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

Huntsville Hospital is serious about its commitment to employee wellness.

The American Heart Association took notice, recently naming the hospital one of just seven Platinum Fit-Friendly Worksites in Alabama for 2016.

But the hospital’s wellness efforts aren’t limited to its own workforce. Through its WellnessWorks program, Huntsville Hospital helps businesses across North Alabama develop strategies and techniques for proactively managing the health of their employees.

“We’re currently working with about 200 companies,” said Heather Whorton, RN, the hospital’s Corporate Wellness manager.

For some businesses, that might be as simple as an annual employee health screening. For businesses that want a more comprehensive approach, WellnessWorks can arrange health coaching, flu clinics, chronic-disease management support, tobacco cessation programs and more.

Huntsville Utilities is one of the program’s largest customers. President and CEO Jay Stowe said the utility’s 600-plus employees are getting healthier overall through the partnership with WellnessWorks.

“We are seeing improvements in blood pressure, cholesterol and waist circumference,” Stowe said. “All those things are trending in the right direction.”

Huntsville Utilities employees, retirees and covered dependents have access to the Local Government Employees Health Clinic at the downtown Medical Mall. An alliance between the city-owned utility, Huntsville Hospital and Madison County, the clinic is staffed by family physician Dr. Joe Sharp.

“The employees can get in to see the doctor quickly, get help for whatever their problem is and stay healthy,” said Stowe. “That’s good for our customer service.”
Every Day Examples: Compassion & Care

Huntsville Hospital staff provide special care

Respiratory Care Unit staff sing "Amazing Grace" to dying woman

Huntsville Hospital patient Virginia Wigley heard that nurse D.J. McCormick liked to sing. For days, she had been teasing him for a tune.

McCormick went one better: he organized a chorus of Respiratory Care Unit nurses and other staff to serenade Wigley. The DeKalb County woman requested “Amazing Grace.”

Song sheets in hand, the staff members – McCormick, Tara Cochran, Lisa Gosnay, Andrea Hall, Sharon Holloway, Jennifer Joe, Spencer McNeal, Sarah O’Brien, Ashley Wright and UAH nursing student Katrina Wood – gathered around Wigley’s bed and lifted their voices in song.

“Mother was weak, but she sung with them,” said Wigley’s son, Greg Wigley.

As it turned out, the nurses’ Jan. 25 version of “Amazing Grace” was the last song Virginia Wigley, 77, would hear. She died before sunrise the next day.

Greg Wigley said his family will forever be grateful for the special attention Virginia Wigley received at Huntsville Hospital.

“With all of the nurses, you felt the sincerity when they spoke,” he said.

Observation Unit staff buys injured Florida man bus ticket home

Nurses and other team members in the Huntsville Hospital Emergency Department’s Observation Unit recently had an encounter with a patient they won’t soon forget.

The man was attempting to walk from Bowling Green, KY., to his mother’s home in Florida. He made it as far as Huntsville when his severely blistered, swollen and infected feet forced him to stop. He showed up at Huntsville Hospital a few hours later and was started on IV antibiotic therapy for the infection.

“We found out he hadn’t taken his shoes off in three months,” said Candi Bickers, an RN in the Observation Unit. “All the skin was just peeling off.”

Touched by the man’s plight, the staff took up a collection. They raised almost $250 – enough to buy him a bus ticket to Florida plus new shoes, socks and underwear. Employees also insisted on giving the man $20 and some snacks for the long ride home.

“We wanted to get him to a place where he has family to pick him up when he’s down,” said Bickers.

Maternity nurses play starring roles in surprise marriage proposal

Several nurses at Huntsville Hospital for Women & Children were willing accomplices in a surprise January marriage proposal.

Owens Cross Roads resident Nick Schrimsher used the occasion of his son’s birth to pop the question to Latoshia McElyea, his longtime girlfriend. Schrimsher had been planning to propose for months and wanted to make it memorable.

The day after Landon Shawn was born, Schrimsher asked nurses from the Mother/Baby unit to dress his son in a body suit that said “Will You” on the front, and “Marry My Daddy?” on the back.

When Schrimsher brought Landon back from the nursery, McElyea quickly realized what was happening and broke into tears.

“I was so shocked that I didn’t even say yes right away,” she said.

Mother/Baby nurses added their own touches to the proposal, ordering a chocolate cake and sparkling white grape juice from the cafeteria. They even twisted diapers into the shape of a three-layer wedding cake.

“The nurses really went above and beyond to make everything special for us,” said McElyea.
NEW SPACE MATCHES ADVANCED CARE

Huntsville Hospital is preparing to welcome patients to its redesigned and renamed third-floor Heart Institute. Scheduled to open this spring, the 17,000-square-foot area will serve patients coming in for heart catheterizations, cardiac interventions, structural heart procedures, electrophysiology (EP) procedures and transesophageal echocardiograms (TEE), vascular interventions and nuclear stress tests. Huntsville Hospital cardiologists performed about 14,000 cardiac catheter, interventions and EP procedures last year.

Vice President of Cardiology Services Larry Johnston said the opening of the Heart Institute represents a major commitment to growing a cardiovascular program already ranked among the nation’s 50 best by both Healthgrades and Truven Health Analytics.

“The way we maintain that ranking is by hiring the best physicians and staff, as well as investing in state-of-the-art facilities and technology,” said Johnston. “If we do all of those things, it will propel us forward for the next 20 years.”

The Heart Institute includes 36 new private patient rooms, comfortable reception area and spacious family waiting room – all adjacent to the hospital’s cardiac cath, EP and TEE labs.

In designing the institute, the hospital set out to create a space that would work equally well for patients, families, physicians and employees. It’s going to be both modern and efficient, Johnston said, including four consultation rooms where physicians can meet privately with patients and their families.

“The goal is to give our patients a five-star experience,” said Cath Lab and Cardiac Short Stay Director Chris Thornton, RN.

Thornton said the hospital needed to expand the current 28-bed Cardiac Short Stay area based on growing patient volumes. When the Clinical Laboratory relocated from the third floor to the Twickenham Place office building last year, the old lab space was earmarked for the Heart Institute.

Renovations started in November 2015 and recently wrapped up.

“Huntsville Hospital has been a great partner in providing the needed space, equipment and staffing to allow our large group of cardiovascular specialists to provide the latest technology of cardiovascular care while ensuring safety and quality of outcomes as our primary goal,” said Paul B. Tabereaux, MD, Huntsville Hospital Heart Center Chairman.

Patients coming to the Heart Institute for outpatient cardiac procedures will go directly to the third floor to check in. When they step off the elevator, the first thing they will see is the institute’s stylish and comfortable reception area.

“That’s going to become the new front door for the entire cardiology program,” Johnston said.

Patients will be escorted to a private room to be prepped for their procedure. Afterward, they will return to the same room to rest and recover for up to 24 hours.

The opening of the Heart Institute is the first phase of a long-term plan to consolidate many of the hospital’s cardiovascular services on the third floor, Johnston said.
When Joey and Laura Bogus brought their son to the Huntsville Hospital for Women & Children Pediatric ER in December of last year, they were desperate to know what was causing his abdominal pain and other worsening symptoms. The family traveled from Lexington in northwest Alabama to Huntsville Hospital for Women & Children on the recommendation of their pediatrician, who suspected that 18-month-old Luke might have intussusception—a condition in which part of the intestine slides, or “telescopes”, into an adjacent part of the intestine causing blockages and cutting off blood supply.

James O’Donnell, MD, one of the Pediatric ER pediatricians, quickly confirmed their suspicions and admitted Luke to the Pediatric Unit. The next day Luke was in surgery with North Alabama’s only board certified pediatric surgeon, James Gilbert, MD, at the helm.

“Luke’s case was complicated because the severity of the intussusception caused injury to his intestines,” said Dr. Gilbert.

After surgery, Luke was admitted to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. Under the care of Dr. Gilbert and the Pediatric Intensivist team, led by Maude Dull, MD, Luke spent weeks fighting dangerous infections caused by perforations of an intestinal wall made thin and delicate by the intussusception. He also required three more surgeries to remove part of his intestines and address troublesome scar tissue that formed on the intestines.

By all accounts it was a lot for a little boy to endure. “It was scary, but the whole time Dr. Gilbert assured us that he had this,” said Laura. “He was so confident and that was comforting.”

For Joey, the worst part was when Luke was on a ventilator for 18 days. “Sitting by the crib and he’s just not being Luke—that was hard.”

Luke’s hospital stay lasted 2½ months. The family, including grandparents put everything on hold to better focus on Luke and his recovery. They even postponed Christmas at the request of Luke’s four-year-old sister, Lexi.

“Lexi wrote Santa a letter asking him not to come until her brother could be home, too,” said Laura. Of course Santa obliged, and when Luke came home the family had a special Christmas celebration.

The family also celebrated Luke’s return to good health, which they attribute to Dr. Gilbert and the other specialized pediatric physicians and nurses at Huntsville Hospital for Women & Children. “I’ll put it like this,” said Joey. “We live an hour away, but if my children have so much as a hangnail, I’m bringing them here.”

**LITTLE LUKE AND HIS BIG DOCTOR**

A serious medical case with a happy ending leaves a lasting impression.
10 TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR KIDS SAFE THIS SUMMER

1. Make water safety a priority. Be sure your child can swim—Take lessons by licensed swim instructors available at all Huntsville Hospital Wellness Center locations. Call (256) 265-WELL to register. Also, give kids your undivided attention around water. Non-stop supervision, without distraction is essential. Always have your children wear a life jacket approved by the U.S. Coast Guard while on boats, around open bodies of water or when participating in water sports.

2. Help them be safer when home alone. Even if your child does not plan to be a babysitter, our Safe Sitter® class teaches valuable safety skills including rescue breathing and anti-choking techniques. Classes offered in Huntsville and Madison. Call (256) 265-7440 or visit hhwomenandchildren.org/classes to register.

3. Wear a helmet for biking, ATV and other wheeled sports. It is the single most effective safety device available to reduce head injury and death from falls and crashes.

4. Use your car seat correctly. A quick and free appointment with a nationally certified Child Passenger Safety Technician at Huntsville Hospital for Women & Children can help you and your child be road ready. Call (256) 265-7296 to register.

5. Stay hydrated. Kids should bring a water bottle to practice and games and drink plenty of water before, during and after play.

6. Take a new parents class. Parenting Classes offered in Huntsville and Madison cover important safety concerns including when to call the doctor, infant CPR, safe sleep and home safety. Call (256) 265-7296 to register.

7. Never leave your child alone in a car, not even for a minute. Remember to ACT – Avoid heatstroke, Create reminders, and Take action if you see a child left alone.

8. Know the ABCs of safe sleep for babies. Create a safe sleep environment for your baby to help prevent unintentional suffocation, the leading cause of injury-related death among children under 1. For a free, downloadable guide on safe sleep visit hhwomenandchildren.org/maternity.

9. Teach safe walking rules. Teach kids at an early age to walk on sidewalks or paths and to cross at street corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks. It’s also important to put down their devices and pay attention to their surroundings.

10. Visit SafeKids.org for more tips. Safe Kids Huntsville, a local coalition of Safe Kids Worldwide, is a non-profit organization that seeks to reduce unintentional injuries to children ages 14 and younger. Huntsville Hospital has been the lead agency for Safe Kids Huntsville since 1997.

CHILDREN EXPERIENCE SIMULATED HOSPITAL

Almost 3,000 first graders were “admitted” to the 31st Annual Let’s Pretend Hospital in March. Students from 44 schools in Madison County interacted with University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) nursing students in a variety of virtual hospital settings including emergency room, X-Ray and laboratory, operating room, patient room and pediatric playroom. The event, which is coordinated by Huntsville Hospital Volunteer Services, is a partnership between Huntsville Hospital and the UAH Nursing program.
Dottie, the Endearing Robo-Courier

Dottie has made quite an impression in the Clinical Lab since starting work in January. As Huntsville Hospital’s only robotic courier, her job is to shuttle vials of blood and other specimens within the lab.

Dottie transports an estimated 9,000 specimens a week. “The work she does allows smart people to do smart things,” said Automated Laboratory Manager Nichola Marcus. “If you’re not running around so much you can stay focused on your specimen, which keeps you focused on the patient.”

Clinical Lab Coordinator P.J. Sanford, Dottie’s main programmer, gave her an endearing personality. She can be complimentary when greeting a colleague: “You guys are working hard.” Self-deprecating when she bumps into a chair: “I haven’t had my coffee today.” Even a little snarky if someone blocks her path: “Am I invisible?”

Visit facebook.com/HuntsvilleHospitalFan to see Dottie in action.

OB Simulator Joins Women & Children Team

Women & Children recently welcomed a new team member to the Labor & Delivery department. Her name is Victoria and she is a full-body interactive maternal and neonatal birthing simulator. Outfitted with the latest technology, she realistically simulates any birthing scenario providing valuable training to help clinical staff develop their skills and knowledge.

Take the 2016 Community Health Survey

Like a person’s annual physical exam, communities also need to have an occasional checkup on their overall health. That’s why Huntsville Hospital and all affiliates are conducting an online community health survey across North Alabama. The survey findings will help communities and Huntsville Hospital Health System establish priorities and health improvement strategies for the future.

To take the 2016 Community Health Survey scan the QR code or visit surveymonkey.com/r/2016CommunityHealthAssessment

Madison Hospital Expands Imaging Area

Madison Hospital upgraded and expanded its Imaging Services department for an improved patient experience. A large unfinished area on the hospital’s ground floor space was converted into two echocardiogram rooms and six private bays where multiple patients can be prepped for outpatient imaging studies. Previously, there was just one patient prep space.

“We’re now able to bring back more than one patient at a time, which gets them finished with their study in a more timely manner,” said Ryan Murray, MSN, RN, Director of Emergency Department, Imaging, Cardiopulmonary and Registration Services. “It’s also a more controlled and private area for prepping patients.”

Madison Hospital offers a wide range of diagnostic services including MRIs, CT scans, echocardiograms, treadmill stress tests, nuclear medicine, electrocardiograms and Holter monitors.

“With our continued growth, we are fortunate to have unfinished space that we can grow into,” said Madison Hospital President Mary Lynne Wright. “When the hospital was designed, this was intentionally done to accommodate for growth and expanded services.”
The Huntsville Hospital Heart Center has opened a cutting-edge treatment center specializing in venous and peripheral arterial disease.

The Vascular and Vein Center is primarily devoted to correcting blood flow problems affecting the arms, legs and abdomen. In addition, problems caused by varicose veins can be treated with specialized procedures.

The new center specializes in peripheral vascular and venous intervention. Physicians restore normal blood flow to arteries by removing plaque deposits or placing a stent. The center also offers treatments for venous problems ranging from obstruction of abdominal veins to varicose veins and stasis ulcers. Obstruction of veins in the abdomen, which causes swelling in the legs, is treated by placing a stent.

George Soliman, MD, one of four Heart Center cardiologists treating patients in the new center, said about 40 percent of people with heart disease also have significant vascular disease.

“But because this condition is often underdiagnosed and undertreated,” Dr. Soliman said, “many patients don’t even know they have it.”

He said the Vascular and Vein Center is designed to be a “one-stop-shop” where patients with vascular disease can have diagnostic studies to determine the problem and receive treatment in the same location.

Three other Heart Center cardiologists – Drs. Michael Butler, Mihir Kanitkar and Michael Ridner – are also using the new center for outpatient vascular and venous interventions.

“The Vascular and Vein Center will provide a more personalized and convenient service,” said Joshua Hewiett, director of cardiology services. “Patients can park 50 feet from their private room where their families can stay with them.”

Time is not on your side during a stroke. When a blood vessel inside the head is blocked by a clot or rupture, the brain is robbed of the oxygen and nutrients it needs to survive. For every minute treatment is delayed, nearly two million brain cells die.

Physicians and nurses on the front lines of stroke care can often prevent catastrophic neurological damage – when the diagnosis is made and treatment started quickly.

A new high-tech telemedicine program led by Huntsville Hospital aims to improve stroke care across the region by allowing neurologists in Huntsville to remotely examine stroke patients at outlying hospitals that may not have a neurologist available.

The North Alabama Neuro-Stroke Network launched in early April at Marshall Medical Center North in Guntersville and Marshall Medical Center South in Boaz.

Madison Hospital also recently joined the network. Other Huntsville Hospital Health System affiliates – Athens-Limestone Hospital, Decatur Morgan Hospital Decatur campus, Decatur Morgan Hospital Parkway campus, Helen Keller Hospital in Sheffield and Red Bay Hospital – will be added in the coming months.

Before the program went live, members of Huntsville Hospital’s Stroke Team traveled to Marshall Medical Center North and South to train emergency room physicians and nurses on best practices for neurological exams.

The training also included use of a portable, high-definition video camera system known as a telestroke cart that allows neurologists at Huntsville Hospital to see and talk with stroke patients in emergency rooms across North Alabama. The cart is wheeled to the patient’s bedside.

“It’s the same as having a neurologist walk into the exam room,” said Marshall Medical Centers CEO Gary Gore. “He just can’t touch the patient. This is a way to better coordinate our services to help stroke patients.”

Amit Arora, MD, is medical director of the North Alabama Neuro-Stroke Network. He said the program will bring timely, high-quality stroke care to every hospital in the network.

“There aren’t enough neurologists in the region to have one available at all hours at each hospital, so we’re using telemedicine,” said Dr. Arora. “We can examine stroke patients from Huntsville and help the local hospital make a timely decision. This gives the patient a chance to receive treatment faster.”

The goal is to remotely examine stroke patients and facilitate treatment within an hour of their arrival in the ER, he said.

Here’s how the program works:

When a stroke victim arrives at a North Alabama Neuro-Stroke Network hospital, emergency room staff will gather the person’s medical history, conduct an initial stroke assessment and order a CT brain scan. The scan provides detailed images of any potential blood clots, damage or bleeding within the brain.
If the hospital does not have a neurologist available, one of Huntsville Hospital’s six staff neurologists will examine the patient remotely – day or night – using the high-definition video camera system. The telestroke system allows neurologists in Huntsville to see and talk to the patient in real time, review their CT scan images and collaborate with the patient’s emergency room doctors and nurses on a treatment plan.

“We can use the camera to assess a stroke patient’s gaze, their strength, their speech, their ability to understand and communicate,” said Dr. Arora. “We’re also using it for people who have seizures and other neurologic symptoms that we may be able to help treat in their local emergency room.”

Following the remote assessment, neurologists in Huntsville decide whether to start the patient on the tissue plasminogen activator (tPA), a powerful clot-dissolving medication that can greatly increase a stroke patient’s chances of survival if administered within about three hours of the first symptoms.

Gore said Marshall Medical Center has historically transferred most stroke patients to Huntsville Hospital, which has the region’s only Neuro Intensive Care Unit and is also a Certified Primary Stroke Center by The Joint Commission.

By examining patients remotely, Huntsville Hospital neurologists can now make a more informed decision on whether to bring the person to Huntsville or let them receive care closer to home.

“The nursing education and protocols we’re putting into place with the North Alabama Neuro-Stroke Network are going to help patients tremendously,” said Dr. Arora. “We’re doing this because it’s the right thing to do.”

The North Alabama Neuro-Stroke Network is Huntsville Hospital Health System’s first venture into the growing field of telemedicine. It also represents the first time most health system campuses have joined together in a system-wide approach to treating patients.

“We have seven different medical staffs, seven different ERs and multiple hospital administrators all working together as a team,” said Dr. Arora. “That’s really unique.”

The program comes along at a critical time. Stroke is now the fifth-leading cause of death nationally and the leading cause of serious, long-term disability. Alabamians are particularly at risk due to lifestyle factors such as fried foods and lack of exercise, said Dr. Arora. The state is part of the so-called Stroke Belt – a region of high stroke mortality stretching from Texas to the Carolinas.

“Alabama is really the buckle of the Stroke Belt,” said Arora.

Not surprisingly, Huntsville Hospital treats a large number of stroke patients – more than 1,000 in 2015.

Huntsville Classic To Benefit Neuro-Stroke Network

Rock and Roll Hall of Famers Earth, Wind & Fire will headline the 28th Annual Huntsville Classic on Thursday, May 12 at the Von Braun Center Propst Arena.

Tickets are $45 and are on sale at the VBC Box Office and ticketmaster.com.

Before Earth, Wind & Fire takes the stage at 8:30 p.m., there will be a seated dinner and live auction on the arena floor. Proceeds benefit North Alabama Neuro-Stroke Network.

A benefit golf tournament will be held Saturday, May 14, at the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail Hampton Cove course.

For more information, call the Huntsville Hospital Foundation at (256) 265-8077.

DID YOU KNOW?

Adults 65 and older face the highest risk of stroke, but it can occur at any age. Strokes are classified as either ischemic or hemorrhagic.

Here are 5 warning signs that you may be having a stroke:

1. Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm, or leg (usually on one side of the body)
2. Sudden confusion, difficulty getting words out, slurring of speech
3. Sudden change in vision in one or both eyes
4. Sudden difficulty with walking, dizziness, or loss of balance and coordination
5. Sudden severe headache with no known cause

Risk factors for stroke include high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, smoking, family history of cerebrovascular disease, past brain trauma, sedentary lifestyle, obesity, poor diet habits, alcohol use, high cholesterol and illegal drug use.
The six-year-old boy winces as Shane O’Neill, MD, looks in his right ear. Obvious ear infection. Dr. O’Neill tells the boy’s mother he is going to prescribe an antibiotic that should fix the problem, plus ibuprofen for pain. He sends the family outside to wait while Derrick Lee, RN, carefully counts out the pills.

A few minutes later, Lee hands the mother two bottles. “This is a blessing for me today,” she says. “I needed it.”

The woman, who has no health insurance and lives at Huntsville’s Downtown Rescue Mission, took her son to the doctor a day earlier. He was prescribed antibiotics, but she didn’t have enough money to get the prescription filled at the drug store.

Dr. O’Neill, a Huntsville Hospital Emergency Department physician, is determined to make stories like that less common among the city’s homeless residents. He is volunteering his time to take medical care directly to residents of the Downtown Rescue Mission.

In January, the hospital’s Mobile Medical Unit (MMU) began offering free medical clinics in the mission parking lot. The MMU is funded by the Huntsville Hospital Foundation and generous donors who want to help make health care more accessible to our community.

So many people showed up at the first clinic that Dr. O’Neill and Mobile Medical Unit Coordinator Pranteek (Tee) Patnaik decided to return every two weeks.

Several other Huntsville Hospital employees, including a handful of ER nurses, are helping with the clinics. They greet patients, draw blood for lab tests, give steroid shots.

Collaboration on the new homeless outreach program extends beyond the wall of the hospital. The Community Free designed the MMU’s patient registration software. Thrive Alabama offers free HIV screenings. Angela Caires, CRNP, an instructor at the UAH college of Nursing, rotates with Dr. O’Neill treating patients.

Kerry Walker, PhD, senior director of program ministries at the Downtown Rescue Mission, said the hospital “answered a prayer for us” by bringing free urgent care to the area’s largest homeless shelter.

The mission has a “very medically needy population” with limited ability to pay for care, said Walker.

“Our residents realize going to the ER is not the appropriate place for some of their issues, but it’s been their only option until recently,” said Walker. “We’re just so excited about this program. I’d like to see it become kind of a second Community Free Clinic site for our residents as well as people who live nearby.”

The Community Free Clinic, in downtown Huntsville, receives grant dollars from Huntsville Hospital’s Community Health Initiative.
An ER physician and father of seven children, Dr. O’Neill is accustomed to chaos. Mobile Medical Unit clinic days at the mission suit him. He sees patients in rapid succession in the small exam room at the back of the RV.


A few feet away, Lee reaches into the Mobile Medical Unit’s well-stocked medicine cabinet to fill free prescriptions – mostly antibiotics, pain relievers and anti-inflammatories.

“Most of us don’t have cars, so it’s really nice that they’re bringing these clinics to us,” said mission resident Jennifer Carpenter.

In the first few weeks of the Downtown Rescue Mission clinic program, Dr. O’Neill encountered a number of patients with diabetes, high blood pressure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. He also tested several people for HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis and Hepatitis C.

“We’re really just starting to find out what their needs are,” Dr. O’Neill said.

The Jean Wessel Templeton Community Health Initiative is celebrating its 20th Anniversary in 2016.

Launched by Huntsville Hospital in 1996, the grant program has awarded a total of $8.8 million to nonprofit agencies working to make Madison County healthier through education, prevention and early detection of disease.

The tally will climb to $9.3 million with the next round of grants being distributed in June.

As the Community Health Initiative enters its third decade, Project Coordinator Pranteek (Teek) Patnaik said the mission remains unchanged: give local nonprofit health providers the “seed money” they need to change lives for the better.

Grants generally go to agencies helping underserved, uninsured people with a variety of problems including substance abuse, homelessness, autism, mental illness, teen pregnancy and general access to health care.

“We look to fund organizations that are bridging gaps in health care,” said Patnaik. “Prevention of illness and population health management are big priorities for Huntsville Hospital. The days of waiting on sick people to come to us are over.”

Dozens of nonprofits have benefited from the program’s continuing generosity. They include the Community Free Clinic, First Stop, HEALS Clinics at four area elementary schools, New Hope Children’s Clinic and Autism Resource Foundation.
At some point during his long fight against childhood brain cancer, Eli Williams decided he likes Ford Mustangs. Really likes them.

The 11-year-old Athens boy has amassed a collection of Mustang memorabilia that would make any muscle-car lover drool. Parents Victor and Kristie Williams wanted to create a special Mustang Room, but they’ve been too busy dealing with Eli’s fragile health.

Enter Huntsville Hospital’s Hospice Family Care, which provides medical care and support for children and adults with terminal illnesses in Madison, Limestone, Morgan, Marshall and Jackson counties.

After signing Eli up for Hospice in February, the Williamses learned about Rooms of Refuge. Launched in 2014 as a partnership between Hospice Family Care and Refuge Church of Huntsville, the program sends specially-trained volunteers to perform extreme bedroom makeovers for children with terminal or life-threatening illnesses.

“This gives them a special place where they can focus on their life instead of their illness,” said Lee Shaw, Hospice Family Care’s business development director.

The volunteers were determined to finish Eli’s Mustang Room in a single night so he could see it before leaving for an immunotherapy drug trial in Augusta, Ga. Eli was diagnosed at age seven with medulloblastoma – cancer of the cerebellum.

Refuge Church Pastor Jason Parks dreamed up the Rooms of Refuge idea one night while watching the reality TV show, “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition.”

“I told my wife, ‘Wouldn’t it be great if we could do this on a smaller scale for children with terminal illnesses?’” said Parks.

He approached Hospice Family Care. Shaw loved the idea and quickly got approval to start the program. A little girl with cancer named Leilani received the first bedroom makeover.

She asked for a giant beach mural to remind her of her Make-A-Wish trip to Hawaii.

Heather Green, a Huntsville artist and photographer, is the creative force behind Rooms of Refuge. She starts by talking with the child about what their dream bedroom might look like.

Eli wanted a revved-up Ford Mustang room, and that’s exactly what he got.

Green, her husband, Sam Green, and Mike O’Neal – all members of Refuge Church – spent a February evening hanging framed racing posters and “Mustang Alley” street signs and photos of Eli behind the wheel of a vintage red Mustang. They even built a glass-topped coffee table to display his model car collection.

“Having these wonderful volunteers come decorate for us means that I can spend more quality time with Eli,” said Kristie Williams.

Interested in becoming a Rooms of Refuge volunteer? Call Lee Shaw at Hospice Family Care, (256) 650-1212, or send an email to lshaw@hospicefamilycare.org.
Why is North Alabama so hard hit by spring allergies? We've got answers.

Cindy Whitten is a Certified Nurse Practitioner at the Huntsville Hospital Walk-In Clinic. We asked her about sinus infections and spring allergies, which have made an earlier appearance than normal this year.

Q. Spring allergies and sinus infections are a nuisance in North Alabama this time of year. How can someone tell if they are suffering from allergies versus a sinus infection?
A. Many symptoms are the same in the beginning. When pollen enters the body of an allergy sufferer, vessels of the nose dilate causing swelling, itching, inflammation and excess fluid and mucus. Individuals who develop sinus infections generally experience pain or pressure of the face over the sinus areas. Many people also have headaches, sometimes fever, stuffy nose and nasal congestion. Symptoms lasting longer than 7-10 days with yellow or green mucus draining from the nose are signs of infection.

Q. Is the 2016 allergy season shaping up to be any worse than what we typically experience around Huntsville?
A. While it is still early, we may see an atypical allergy season due to the effects of a warm and very wet winter. We are seeing trees and plants blooming earlier, and the wetness has increased the amount of mold.

Q. At what point should someone seek medical attention for sinus problems or spring allergies?
A. People should seek treatment for their symptoms if breathing is compromised or symptoms worsen and the usual treatments are not working. If you have symptoms lasting longer than 7-10 days and have a fever or at any time feel uncertain about the symptoms you are experiencing, you should have a professional evaluation.

Q. How are spring allergies and sinus infections treated, and are all of those remedies available at the Walk-In Clinic?
A. Generally spring allergies are treated with antihistamines, decongestants, nasal sprays and occasionally inhaler and steroids. Sinus infections are treated with the above as well as antibiotics, cough suppressants and analgesics. We are prepared to evaluate and treat you with the appropriate regimen.

Q. Why is our area so vulnerable to seasonal allergies?
A. Over half of the 100 worst cities in the U.S. for allergies are in the South, including Birmingham and four cities in Tennessee. Temperature, pollen and mold are all known to influence allergens. In the Tennessee Valley we tend to have shorter and warmer winters, in addition to plenty of lakes and multiple types of blooming trees and plants that pollinate heavily during the spring. This results in our area having a large number of individuals who experience spring allergies.

If you need help controlling sinus infections and spring allergies, visit the Walk-in Mon–Fri from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and is located at 700 Airport Road, across from Holy Spirit School.

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Call 256 265.8077 or visit huntsvillehospitalfoundation.org for more information
Comedian **Jay Leno**, headliner at the 2015 Huntsville Classic, generously auctioned several trips to his garage in California. One of the groups that won a trip not only enjoyed what they described as an “incredible” tour (Leno owns enough cars and motorcycles to fill a 130-car garage), but also got to meet the star himself. Pictured are **Bill Morton**, **Joe Campbell**, **John Blackwell**, **Leno** and **Phil Bentley**.

**Bob Jones** and **James Clemens High School** softball teams played in their annual Breast Cancer Awareness softball game. All proceeds (gate, bake sale, T-shirt sales, and more) were donated to the Foundation’s Liz Hurley Breast Cancer Fund. Team members recognized loved ones affected by breast cancer, and released pink balloons in their honor.

The 24th Annual Cardiology Update, held in February, was the largest and most successful to date. Featured speakers were experts in the field of cardiology and cardiovascular surgery. **Patricia Bailey** (2nd from left), Update coordinator, is pictured with Huntsville Hospital Heart Center speakers **Dr. Paul Tabereaux; Dr. Carl Gessler**, Cardiology Update founder and director; **Dr. Ben Washburn**; and **Dr. Herb Haught** (not pictured: speaker **Dr. José A. Tallaj**, medical director of UAB’s Heart Transplant Program and Heart Failure and Transplant Clinics).

Thank you to Birthday Club member, **Austin Page Slaten**, who recently celebrated her 8th birthday and requested donations to the Neonatal ICU instead of receiving birthday gifts. Austin Page has done this for all eight of her birthdays, and we appreciate her generosity this year, and every year!
A sell-out crowd supported the Huntsville Havoc and the Melissa George Neonatal Fund at the 10th annual benefit game in January. The Havoc raised $44,431 through their hockey stick and game jersey auctions, and fans donated thousands of baby items to the Neonatal ICU.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

DONATE MONTHLY THROUGH OUR GIVE SIMPLY PROGRAM
MAKE PURCHASES WITH A FOUNDATION CREDIT CARD
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PURCHASE A HUNTSVILLE HOSPITAL CAR TAG
GIVE THROUGH AMAZON SMILE & KROGER REWARDS PROGRAMS
HONOR A SPECIAL DOCTOR OR NURSE AS YOUR CARE CHAMPION

There are many ways to support your hospital! Whether you make a donation, volunteer at an event, or serve on a committee, you are helping to save lives and change lives, and it just doesn’t get any better than that. When you support Huntsville Hospital Foundation, you are helping to provide equipment and programs that wouldn’t be possible otherwise.

Our patients appreciate you, and so do we!

For more information, please call the Foundation at (256)265-8077.
FOR MEMBERS OF SENIOR

TASTY TUESDAY

Tuesday, June 21, 11:30 a.m.
Location: Trinity United Methodist Church, Wesley Hall
Cost: $5
11 a.m. – Blood Pressure Checks
11:30 a.m. – Catered box lunches by Honey Baked Ham

“Shining a Light on Human Trafficking in Alabama and Its Most Vulnerable Child Victims”

Lynn Caffery, with the statewide Task Force on Human Trafficking and ENDITAlabama.org, will share alarming information on how Huntsville sits in the middle of some of the worst human trafficking sites in the country. Alabama, with its I-65 corridor running from Mobile to Huntsville and northward to the Great Lakes, is a major thoroughfare for the second largest criminal industry in the world (behind the drug trade); human trafficking. Attendees will become familiar with the warning signs of human trafficking and its impact on communities.

LOCAL OUTINGS

“Me Before You” (PG-13 rated movie)
Friday, June 3, Matinée time, cost and location TBA

Louisa lives in a quaint town in the English countryside with no clear direction in her life. The quirky and creative 26-year-old goes from one job to the next in order to help her tight-knit family make ends meet. When she faces her newest career challenge as caregiver to a wheelchair bound stranger, they both find their lives and hearts changing in ways neither one could have imagined. The film is based on Jojo Moyes’ best-selling novel.

Summer Picnic
Thursday, June 9, 11:30 a.m.
Location: Madison County Nature Trail at Green Mountain Pavilion
Cost: $5 (A barbecue lunch will be catered. Advance reservations are required by June 2.)
DAY TRIPS

Gadsden, AL
Date: Friday, June 17, Noon – 11 p.m.
Cost: $88 per person
Registration/Cancellation Deadline: May 12
Reservation Limit: 48

Celebrate early summer with an enjoyable day and evening in Northeast, AL. We will begin our visit to Gadsden at the majestic Noccalula Falls park area which will include a 1-mile, scenic ride around the park, on an open train. A brief walk (on a sidewalk) will take us to the falls where local legend tells of the tragic, native American maiden, Noccalula, who jumped to her death rather than marry someone she didn’t love. Our group will dine at Classics on Noble in Anniston, a premier, fine dining restaurant featured in magazines across the South. We will return to Gadsden for the Tony Award winning musical production of “Big River”, based on Mark Twain’s classic 1884 novel, “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn”.

Tuscaloosa, AL
Date: Thursday, August 25, 7 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Cost: $75 per person
Registration/Cancellation Deadline: July 20
Reservation Limit: 40

During our last visit to “T-town,” we enjoyed all things Crimson Tide including a campus tour and the impressive Bryant-Denny Stadium. Our friendly guide invited us to return and enjoy some local color and culture. We will be visiting the Mercedes-Benz International US Visitor Center & Factory, the Tuscaloosa Museum of Art featuring the Westervelt-Warner Collection of American paintings, sculpture, and furniture and the circa 1859, Italianate style Jemison-Van de Graaff Mansion which is one of the few surviving examples of pre-Civil War architecture in the area. Lunch will be at the charming Cypress Inn restaurant overlooking the Black Warrior River.

The Secret Life of Pets (G-Rated movie)
Thursday, July 14, Matinée time, cost and location TBA

From the humans who brought us the movie “Despicable Me,” the “Secret Life of Pets,” an animated film set in a Manhattan apartment building, is a comedy about the lives our pets lead after we leave for work or school each day.
Above, Visiting the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in Tuscumbia. Left, Sara Little and Jennie Coe enjoying the Red Bay dinner and show.
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