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Family comes first for the Crains, in both business and in lively Windsor Thanksgivings

In Good Company





BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

Cure All

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY HAS A LONG HISTORY OF GENEROUS EFFORTS TO ENSURE THAT MEDICAL AND DENTAL CARE REACH ALL RESIDENTS

As someone who has lived and worked in New York City, Chicago and Los Angeles, I appreciate the high level of health care services that our county of 160,000 holds as a standard. For nearly 100 years, selfless acts have been taking place in our community to establish institutions and systems that enhance the health and well-being of our residents.

It began in 1932, when Garnett L. Radin, a registered nurse, spent \$22,000 of her own money to establish our first hospital. Two decades, much fundraising, and several locations later, the 35-bed hospital was certified by The Joint Commission on

the Accreditation of Hospitals; it was the smallest hospital at the time to be so accredited. In 1959, when the Indian River County Hospital District was formed, ownership was transferred, and a seven-member board of elected, unpaid trustees was created to oversee the hospital's operations.

A growing population and changing health care landscape over the next several decades eventually resulted in a transfer of day-to-day responsibilities from the Hospital District to a new, nonprofit corporation, Indian River Memorial Hospital Inc., while the district shifted its emphasis to providing funds for uninsured and



BRENDA AHEARN

Treasure Coast Community Health provides dental care for both adult and pediatric patients, regardless of their ability to pay.

underserved populations. The legacy of this shift in priorities can still be seen today in organizations such as Treasure Coast Community Health, We Care, the Mental Health Association and VNA, to name just a few.

On Jan. 1, 2019, the health care landscape continued to evolve when Cleveland Clinic completed its \$250 million acquisition of the hospital, by then renamed Indian River Medical Center. This transaction

wrapped up efforts, more than a year in the making, by the Hospital District and Indian River Medical Center to find a long-term solution to save and sustain a beloved community hospital that employs more than 2,000 people.

“This has been a very long road, with countless hours of effort by not only our trustees and the IRMC board members but from people across our community,” said Hospital District Chair Marybeth Cunningham at the time. “We can all be very proud of how transparently the process was conducted, and this terrific end result of that hard work.”

More than two years and one unprecedented global pandemic later, the acquisition has not gone without its challenges, the most significant of which involves bringing an independent community hospital’s technology and health information management system into compatibility with Cleveland Clinic’s systems. However, the hospital recently completed its latest survey for accreditation by The Joint Commission, receiving high marks and solid recognition for the quality of patients’ experiences.

Today, Cleveland Clinic Indian River Hospital operates independently, and the Hospital District

trustees have an even greater opportunity to continue funding and expanding health care services to underserved residents. This focus, combined with responsible civic leadership and philanthropy, has been instrumental in developing a web of organizations, proven programs, and promising practices that are making our community a healthier place for all residents.

Increasing access to primary care is arguably one of the most important steps in improving health care. Treasure Coast Community Health, founded in 1993, has operated as the first and

Continuing to support organizations that advance health priorities in our community is a powerful investment in our future well-being.

only Federally Qualified Health Center in Indian River County. Its mission is to deliver care to all, regardless of ability to pay. Under the long-term leadership of veteran health care CEO Vicki Soulé, TCCH employs almost 300 caregivers; together, they provided medical, dental and

behavioral health services to nearly 25,000 people last year.

In the same period, patients ranging from infants to seniors made close to 80,000 visits to the eight locations throughout the county, reporting high patient satisfaction. A community of our size is



KELLY ROGERS

Cleveland Clinic purchased Indian River Medical Center in 2019.

fortunate to have such an established, well-run operation providing health care for our most vulnerable members.

While most of TCCH's operating income is derived from government contracts, grants and health insurance, philanthropy helps to offset the costs of care for uninsured and low-income patients. Some of the most important of these services include adult dental exams and cleaning, adult annual physicals, and breast diagnoses. While dental care and physicals may run from \$150 to \$200 each, a single month's worth of insulin can cost \$1,000, and specialized health screenings cost even more.

The We Care program was established in 1991 as a cooperative venture between the Indian River County Medical Society and the Indian River County Health Department to provide free medical treatment to county residents who

are otherwise financially unable to afford specialty care.

Longtime We Care President Dr. Dennis Saver, who volunteered for the organization for decades and recently passed away, described his volunteer service as an obligation "to follow a long and honorable tradition in medicine of using my training to give back and treat the poor."

More than 100 local doctors and other health professionals have followed his lead by providing specialty care that includes cardiology, otolaryngology, dermatology, family practice, internal medicine, neurology, orthopedics, general surgery, ophthalmology and urology.

While actual medical care and procedures are provided with donated time, charitable contributions raised by the We Care Foundation are used to help patients pay for expenses incurred following treatment and throughout recovery. "I



BRENDA AHEARN

TCCH employs nearly 300 health care workers who treat thousands of patients at eight locations in Indian River County.

went to We Care with no insurance after finding a lump on my breast. Without the donations that paid for my specialized surgery and follow-up care," says one grateful patient, "I would probably not be here."

When it comes to mental health care, Indian River County has one of the highest provider ratios in the state of Florida, with 747 residents to one provider. One of the local charitable organizations responsible for

this positive trend is the Mental Health Collaborative, established in 2004 to build a continuum of care for mental health in our community. Its membership comprises private and public funders, mental health providers, and individuals who advocate increased access to behavioral health care.

Over the years, the Mental Health Collaborative has been responsible for conducting assessments and developing educational opportunities to identify specific needs among residents and gaps in care. It led to the development of the Mental Health Association's Walk-In Center, the recruitment of the University of Florida to operate the Center for Psychiatry and Addiction in Vero Beach, and the creation of the Mental

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Health Court.

In recent years, the Mental Health Collaborative successfully launched and now operates the McCabe Connections Center as a central access point for supporting the behavioral health needs of Indian River County residents.

Today, mental health problems rank as the second-highest reason for hospitalization among county residents, along with high rates of alcohol use by teens and older adults. The Mental Health Collaborative is working to raise awareness about the importance of addressing these issues.

It is also leading efforts to bring promising practices to our community to alleviate human suffering and lead to healthier, more prosperous lives.

Adults over the age of 65 are the fastest-growing age group among Indian River County residents. Estimates predict that older adults will make up more than 40% of the county's population by 2030. At least one-third of these residents will live alone, and more than half will be in the low-income bracket.

After cancer and heart disease, accidents in the home represent

the third-highest cause of death among county residents. Stroke, chronic respiratory disease, Alzheimer's disease and diabetes follow, all of which have higher rates among the 65-and-older population.

For more than 40 years, VNA of the Treasure Coast has provided high-quality, dependable home-based care to ill and injured residents of our community. Today, the organization and its team of servant leaders is led by Lundy Fields, president and CEO.

"VNA provides private home care, home health and other support

to patients and their caregivers," explains Fields. "Most of our patients recuperate and go on to live healthy, active lives. When circumstances change, however, our Hospice program is here to help our patients and their families to experience a dignified end of life with spiritual care, pain management and grief counseling."

What will the rest of the 21st century have in store for the health and well-being of Indian River County residents? While our local health care continuum may not be perfect, we are fortunate to have such a strong foundation to build on, and we all have a role to play to ensure that we keep improving. Continuing to support organizations that advance health priorities in our community is a powerful investment in our future well-being.

The Community Foundation website at ircommunityfoundation.org has a variety of resources available to help you make informed giving decisions.

There are many good places to live, but we have all chosen this special community. I encourage you to continue to give generously to support the health and well-being of all our friends and neighbors. ☀

BOBBI KLEINSCHMIDT



Multiple agencies and organizations joined forces to administer COVID-19 vaccines to Indian River County residents.