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Statewide Hospital Heroes Honored

BIRMINGHAM – Ten hospital employees from across the state were honored as “Hospital Heroes” for their dedication to the health care industry today at a luncheon hosted by the Alabama Hospital Association (AlaHA). The association’s sixth annual statewide “Hospital Heroes” contest is an effort to honor the dedication of hospital employees and to highlight health careers.

“Each year, we ask hospitals to nominate their most dedicated employees, those that consistently go beyond the call of duty to serve their patients,” said J. Michael Horsley, president of the Alabama Hospital Association. “From this pool of nominees, a committee selects up to 10 winners from each of seven areas of the state. These winners are honored locally, and from these names, different judges selected those who are then recognized as statewide heroes at this luncheon.”

“The awards luncheon is extremely touching when you hear the stories of employees who have used their personal resources to help indigent patients fill prescriptions or organized a complete wedding ceremony in the hospital room of a dying patient,” added Horsley. “These are people who believe their job is more than a place of employment; they consider it a calling.”

Those named as the Alabama Hospital Association’s 2009 Hospital Heroes include: Marilyn Belcher, RN, restorative nurse coordinator, Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Tuscaloosa; the late Allan Bragwell, former director of Keller EMS, Helen Keller Hospital, Sheffield; Betty Grammer, RN, case manager, DCH Regional Medical Center, Tuscaloosa; Chasity Jackson, patient representative, Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital, Florence; Brenda Martin, RN, clinical coordinator of surgery, Flowers Hospital, Dothan; Benja Morgan, RN, CIC, manager, infection control, East

Alabama Medical Center, Opelika; Stuart Skinner, dietary aide, Dale Medical Center, Ozark; Cindy Underwood, RN, team leader-surgery, St. Vincent's East, Birmingham; Catherine Whelton, RN, BSN, MS, director of outreach services, Providence Hospital, Mobile; and June Woods, RN, nurse manager – endoscopy, Northeast Alabama Regional Medical Center, Anniston.

Marilyn Belcher, RN, restorative nurse coordinator, Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Tuscaloosa

Marilyn Belcher, RN, is an ordained minister and a nurse of 28 years. She helped implement the restorative care program at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, a program that helps individuals suffering with chronic diseases related to prolonged inactivity. The program offers a number of resources to assist patients in regaining their independence and returning to their daily activities. Employees believe much of Ms. Belcher's dedication to restorative nursing was gained through the care she provided to her sister who suffered brain damage as an infant. Through Ms. Belcher's determination, her sister was able to live in a group home and maintain gainful employment for a number of years. "Ms. Belcher is determined to assist our residents gain and/or maintain the respect and dignity they deserve," said Valeria Rudolph-Rivers, supervisor of home and community-based care programs, at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center. In addition to her work at the Medical Center, through her church, Ms. Belcher supports a regular prison ministry.

Allan Bragwell, former director of Keller EMS, Helen Keller Hospital, Sheffield

You know you've had an impact when co-workers ask "What would Allan do?" but that's what many of his fellow paramedics and other health care providers claim they did. Many describe him as one of the best paramedics they've ever worked with, noting his extreme skill and his gift for making his patients feel at ease in times of crisis. He is said to have raised the bar for everyone and shared his knowledge with others on the job and through his instruction at Shoals Community College. His expertise was noticed by the Air Evac Lifeteam, who asked him to join them as a flight paramedic, while still working full time at Helen Keller. It was in this

position, that he and two other flight crew members lost their lives when their helicopter crashed while searching for a lost hunter. While the hospital and the entire community mourned, they knew this hero's life had pushed them all to be better, purely by his example.

Betty Grammer, RN, case manager, DCH Regional Medical Center, Tuscaloosa

Co-workers say Betty Grammer's concern for others is her trademark. She has worked at DCH Regional Medical Center since 1974 and for the past 10 years has worked as a case manager, demonstrating empathy and courtesy in a very demanding situation. Ms. Grammer is said to never forget a birthday and to deliver a steady flow of thank-you cards to everyone who helps her along the way. She is credited with starting the West Alabama Chapter of the American Health Association's Stroke Support Group and served as a facilitator of the group until it merged with another. She has been active in the Alabama Nurses Association, currently serving as president of her district and as a state board member. She also finds time to serve as a preceptor for nursing students. Former patients have written notes about Ms. Grammer that speak of her character and her kindness to others, referring to her as a "servant, a role model and an excellent employee."

**Chasity Jackson, patient representative, Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital,
Florence**

Chasity Jackson, who serves as the patient representative at ECM primarily focusing on assisting patients in overcoming the financial challenges of their medical expenses, had her first entrée into social services at the age of 15. Ms. Jackson is credited with helping to raise funds in her small community to assist her father in founding a volunteer fire and rescue squad. She even served as a first responder. She's described as someone with a passion for helping others and as someone who's resourceful and persistent in finding assistance for less fortunate patients. Her belief is that everyone should have access to health care and not prolong taking care of the health needs because of an inability to pay. Ms. Jackson "does not accept the status quo" claim co-workers; she goes far beyond what is expected to make sure her

patients get the care they need. One example given was Ms. Jackson's efforts to help a cancer patient have a wonderful wedding ... all within the confines of a hospital.

Brenda Martin, RN, clinical coordinator of surgery, Flowers Hospital, Dothan

"Work with me to make this happen" is said to be the signature line of Brenda Martin, the clinical coordinator of surgery at Flowers Hospital. Living her mother's dream of being a nurse, Ms. Martin has worked in the health care profession for 30 years, beginning as an LPN on the orthopedic floor and eventually moving to surgery. In surgery, her leadership skills and ability to ensure surgeries ran smoothly eventually placed her in the role of clinical coordinator. "Ms. Martin has an uncanny ability to maintain balance in a high pressure environment by keeping a positive outlook and providing encouragement to colleagues," said Keith Granger, CEO of Flowers Hospital. "After 30 years of service, Brenda continues to go above and beyond the call of duty." Ms. Martin has been recognized with numerous hospital awards for her role in shaping the nature of nursing services. In addition to her hospital leadership, she serves on the advisory board for Wallace College's LPN program and is active in the American Cancer Society and her local church.

Benja Morgan, RN, CIC, manager of infection control, East Alabama Medical Center, Opelika

Benja Morgan has spent the last 39 years of her life in the health care profession, beginning as a registered nurse and moving into infection control, her current position at East Alabama Medical Center. She is said to have an excitement for infection control that's contagious. For example, she once organized a "Peace, Love and Cleanliness" rally in which she got 50 hospital employees, including the hospital's president and his mother, to walk through the hospital wearing hippie attire to emphasize the importance of hand washing. On another occasion, she put her own safety at risk by triaging patients in the parking lot during a measles outbreak, rather than exposing the emergency department staff. "Benja speaks to physician offices, churches, schools and numerous organizations about the importance of infection prevention," said Ashleigh Thompson, manager of

regulatory affairs, East Alabama Medical Center. “She is revered in the community as an expert in infection-related issues, spending much of her personal time spreading her belief that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Stuart Skinner, dietary aide, Dale Medical Center, Ozark

Stuart Skinner has been described as the “hardest working man in Dale County.” According to Vernon Johnson, CEO of Dale Medical Center, Mr. Skinner works full time in the hospital’s cafeteria, plus runs a car detailing business and is on call every night to deliver x-rays to the hospital’s radiologist. He is also the equipment manager for the Ozark High School football team and attends all home and away games with the team. “Stuart Skinner is completely immersed in the life of his community, and he does all of these things against all odds,” added Johnson. Born weighing only three pounds, Mr. Skinner faced many obstacles, but in spite of these learned to read and write, and as an adult leads a very independent life. “It is apparent that Stuart feels a sense of obligation to his father, community, hospital and himself. It is his determination to overcome obstacles, his strong work ethic and his dedication to his job that makes Stuart Skinner a Hospital Hero.”

Cindy Underwood, RN, team leader-surgery, St. Vincent’s East, Birmingham

Cindy Underwood, a nurse at St. Vincent’s East, is said to be a terrific nurse, working on the heart team in the operating room. However, she is best known for her work outside the hospital on the streets of Birmingham. Through her church, she began feeding a group of homeless people who lived in downtown Birmingham. When she noticed many of them had health needs, she began to minister to them and to enlist the support of other health care professionals. Now, on every fourth Tuesday, 60 – 70 homeless people are seen by volunteer nurses and physicians and are receiving a monthly supply of their medications. In addition, they receive personal care items, such as toothbrushes, thanks to the generosity of Ms. Underwood and of others who have been inspired by her service. She even made sure they received their flu vaccinations last year. Ms. Underwood also runs a food

pantry at her church where she and others feed approximately 300 people each month.

Catherine Whelton, RN, BSN, MS, director of outreach services, Providence Hospital, Mobile

A nurse of 36 years, Cathy Whelton is someone who has taken her clinical training and hospital work experience and applied them to the community. As director of outreach services, Ms. Whelton is said to be the person to go to if you have a problem. She's always finding solutions and engaging others along the way. She was instrumental in establishing the parish nursing program in Mobile and has been diligent in securing grants for programs to serve the poor and stretching the grant dollars often long beyond the grant cycle. She's worked with the Mobile County Board of Health to establish health education and translation services for Spanish migrant workers and even learned to speak Spanish so she could help patients who visit the Public Health Clinic. Ms. Whelton also directs an outreach program at Bayou La Batre, helping low-income residents with health needs. She has served in leadership with many community organizations, demonstrating not only her professional, but her personal commitment.

June Woods, RN, nurse manager-endoscopy, Northeast Alabama Regional Medical Center, Anniston

When her staff is busy, June Woods, the nurse manager for endoscopy services at Northeast Alabama Regional Medical Center can often be seen transporting patients. She's called a "super hero" by employees in her department who say she treats them with respect and provides an excellent example for them to follow. Ms. Woods even worked with her arm in a sling, after falling and fracturing a bone. She started IVs, pushed wheelchairs and did what was needed to care for her patients. "If it had been anyone else, they would have taken time off work, but not June," said Kay Brown, RN, charge nurse ambulatory care, Northeast Alabama Regional Medical Center. "She is a very caring person who tries to do what is best for patients and the hospital." Besides her hospital duties, Ms. Woods is also a full-time pastor's wife

and the current president-elect of the Alabama chapter of the Society of Gastroenterology Nurses and Associates.

The Alabama Hospital Association, based in Montgomery, is a statewide trade organization that represents more than 100 hospitals and numerous other health care providers by offering membership services designed to enhance the provision of health care in Alabama.

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