

## **Southeast Alabama Hospital Heroes Honored**

For more information: Rosemary Blackmon, Alabama Hospital Association,  
(800) 489-2542

DOTHAN – Ten area hospital employees were honored for their dedication to the health care industry today at a luncheon in Dothan hosted by the Southeast Alabama Regional Hospital Council of the Alabama Hospital Association (AlaHA).

The luncheon is one of seven regional awards presentations being held in January as part of the association's seventh-annual statewide "Hospital Heroes" contest, an effort to recognize the great accomplishments and compassion of hospital employees and to highlight health careers. The contest will culminate with a banquet in February where up to 10 of the regional winners will be honored as statewide heroes.

"If you've ever been in a hospital, chances are you've had a special caregiver who went above and beyond the call of duty to make sure your stay was not only productive, but comfortable," said J. Michael Horsley, president of the Alabama Hospital Association. "It is these types of individuals we honor each year as Alabama's Hospital Heroes, people who consider their work more than a job, who consider it a calling."

Southeast Alabama honorees included: Carol Gordon-Brantley, RN, BSN, MSN, quality review clinician, Burnell Seals, RN, BSN, MHA, nursing supervisor, and Robert Wages, chief engineer, Flowers Hospital, Dothan; Mary Ann Bearman, RN, charge nurse, Medical Center Enterprise, Enterprise; Debbie Franklin, RN, MS, risk management, Cheryl Hampton, nursing administrative assistant, and Larry Jones, director of materials management, Mizell Memorial Hospital, Opp; Julia Bignoli, RN, critical care nurse, Steve Clayton, bio medical safety technician, and Liz English, RT(R), radiology supervisor, Southeast Alabama Medical Center, Dothan.

**Carol Gordon-Brantley, RN, BSN, MSN, Quality Review Clinician, Flowers Hospital, Dothan**

Carol Gordon-Brantley is a 34-year veteran of the health care system having practiced nursing in five states in a number of different specialties. She is characterized as being “committed to improving patient safety and quality before it was considered the hot topic in health care.” As a quality review clinician at Flowers Hospital in Dothan, Ms. Gordon-Brantley is credited with helping Flowers Hospital achieve the number one ranking in the nation on Hospital Quality Measures, a standardized set of measures created by The Joint Commission and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. “Through Carol’s selfless pursuit of gaining and sharing knowledge, she has positively impacted the quality of care provided to our patients,” explained Amy Butler, chief quality officer. Ms. Gordon-Brantley received the Above and Beyond Award from AQAF, a statewide quality improvement organization and the Outstanding Staff Service Award from Flowers Hospital. She spreads her passion for quality care with students at Wallace Community College where she teaches each semester on the importance of evidence-based, quality measures.

**Burnell Seals, RN, BSN, MHA, Nursing Supervisor, Flowers Hospital, Dothan**

Burnell Seals claims her nursing career began at the age of six when she cared for her sister who innocently swallowed half a bottle of her father’s pills. Now in her thirty-sixth year as a nurse, she serves as a nursing supervisor at Flowers Hospital in Dothan. Ms. Seals is described as viewing each day as an opportunity to have an impact on someone’s life. As a breast cancer survivor, she is very active with the American Cancer Society helping other women affected by the disease. She strives for excellence, completing her master’s degree in health administration while going through chemotherapy, losing two parents and working full time. Ms. Seals received the Outstanding Nursing Practice Award from the Alabama State Nursing Association and has received numerous employee awards at Flowers Hospital. “Burnell is a consummate professional with an innate ability to hold those around her to a high standard,” said Dan Cumbie, chief nursing officer at Flowers Hospital. “Burnell has earned the respect of physicians and employees who know she expects the best care for our patients.”

**Robert Wages, Chief Engineer, Flowers Hospital, Dothan**

Robert Wages, chief engineer of plant operations at Flowers Hospital in Dothan, spends his days ensuring the hospital's environment is working properly so doctors, nurses and other caregivers can do their jobs. Hired by Flowers Hospital in 1978 as an electrician, Mr. Wages understands the importance of his "behind the scenes" position at the hospital; it is said he knows the location of every valve, pipe and circuit breaker in the hospital. He is respected for his logic and calmness during emergency situations, his desire for excellence (having achieved eight different types of engineering certifications), and his unparalleled dedication to those around him. Co-workers state he worked 60 hours straight to repair a broken phone system and during a major reconstruction project he worked every day of the year, only taking a little more than a week's break. "I can truly say that Robert places Flowers Hospital's staff, patients and guests second only to his own family," said Aaron Smith, director of plant operations. "No matter how complex the project or how critical the failure, Robert's focus is on our mission to serve people."

**Mary Ann Bearman, RN, Charge Nurse, Medical Center Enterprise, Enterprise**

Even after working in the health care industry for 40 years, Mary Ann Bearman, a charge nurse, has an energy and joy that is contagious to her co-workers at Medical Center Enterprise, Enterprise. Ms. Bearman is known by the staff as someone who is always aware of the needs of those around her and willing to help out in any way she can. "She is observant of the needs of this hospital such as good policies, best charting practices, meeting National Patient Safety Goals ... [and] does not hesitate to suggest better ways to do something and offers to help implement such ideas," explained Serena Lewis, fourth floor nurse manager. Ms. Bearman enjoys sharing the knowledge that she has of health care by helping train new staff members and assisting everyone around her. She is also proactive in creating educational boards and volunteering to assist with other duties that may arise outside of her work area to help out at the hospital. Ms. Lewis said, "Mary Ann is eager to make this hospital the best."

**Debbie Franklin, RN, MS, Risk Management, Mizell Memorial Hospital, Opp**

At Mizell Memorial Hospital, Debbie Franklin, a risk management nurse, has the reputation of being a great motivator, encourager and educator. "I cannot thank her enough for empowering me to overcome obstacles and to succeed in my trials," declared Shirley Lee, emergency

department and intensive care unit manager. In an effort to help new staff members better prepare for their future at the hospital, Ms. Franklin developed and implemented an orientation program. In addition, she stays abreast of new innovations and educates staff on these changes. Under her leadership, the hospital has received the Alabama Quality Award twice, and she was asked to serve as an examiner for the program. Understanding the importance of exercise, she has worked to promote the hospital's wellness center in the community and volunteers at various local events, offering blood pressure and glucose checks. She is an active member of her church, playing the piano and serving on various committees, and serves on the Advisory Committee for the local community college's health care programs.

**Cheryl Hampton, Nursing Administrative Assistant, Mizell Memorial Hospital, Opp**

Cheryl Hampton, nursing administrative assistant, wears numerous hats at Mizell Memorial Hospital in Opp, including fundraiser, team leader and computer guru. Every year, Ms. Hampton works tirelessly help with Mizell Foundation activities, such as the annual gala and other fund raising events that help raise monies to address community needs. She also eagerly helps managers and staff members develop tools to streamline tasks and track the efficiencies of hospital processes. Despite her various roles at the hospital, Ms. Hampton remains focused and always has a smile on her face. "Cheryl has the most positive, 'can do' attitude of anyone here," said Shirley Lee, emergency department and intensive care unit manager. "She exhibits the classic example of teamwork, compassion and care that makes her a joy to work with." In addition to her active role at the hospital, Ms. Hampton also finds time to volunteer at her church and take part in community activities, such as raising money for the local high school band and serving on her church's Women's Ministry Team for seven years.

**Larry Jones, Director of Materials Management, Mizell Memorial Hospital, Opp**

Larry Jones, director of materials management at Mizell Memorial Hospital in Opp, began his health care career as an emergency department technician at Piedmont Hospital in Georgia. Later he moved back to his hometown of Opp and accepted a position at Mizell where he has been for the past 32 years. During this time, he has developed a legacy of helping others. "On his weekend off, he would often come to the hospital to help out," said Laura Mitchell, ICU nurse at Mizell. "For example, there have been times we've had infants in the ICU that needed

items the hospital didn't regularly stock. All we had to do was call Larry, and he would drive to the store on his days off to purchase what we needed and bring them to the hospital." Co-workers highlight his thoroughness in obtaining the best products and supplies for patients that still fit within the hospital's budget. In the community, he is noted as being a friend anyone can count on, always quietly seeking opportunities to help others, including elderly neighbors, co-workers, and friends.

**Julia Bignoli, RN, Critical Care Nurse, Southeast Alabama Medical Center, Dothan**

After several years as a purchaser, Julia Bignoli decided to pursue a career in the health care field. She went back to school while working full time and completed her nursing degree with a perfect average. For seven years, she was the director of nursing for a nursing home in Dothan and later moved to Southeast Alabama Medical Center's critical care unit. She worked nights so she could care for her husband during the day who, now in remission, was suffering with cancer. "Julia's challenges at home did not deter her from doing what she loves – caring for the less fortunate," said co-worker Gabby Gassman. "She often helps fellow nurses in times of need and only asks in return that they pass along the gift of helping someone else when they are in need." Ms. Bignoli, who also volunteers to give flu shots in the community, has received SAMC's highest award, an award presented to those who consistently go above and beyond in their duties.

**The late Steve Clayton, Bio Medical Safety Technician, Southeast Alabama Medical Center, Dothan**

Steve Clayton, served as a bio medical safety technician at Southeast Alabama Medical Center for seven years before his recent death due to a lung disease. Known as "Rocket Man" around the hospital, Mr. Clayton never let his five-year battle with the illness interfere with his job. As the disease began to take its toll, he would ride around the hospital on his scooter, thus the nickname, or field calls from his work station if he wasn't able to use the scooter. It is said he even worked on the equipment in his own hospital room one time ... while he was a patient. Mr. Clayton was also active in the community serving on various committees and caring for others, whether it was taking friends meat he had smoked or fixing something in his music shop for a church at little or no charge. He also served as the pianist, a deacon and a Sunday School teacher

at his church. Mr. Clayton's sister was quoted as saying, "He would give the shirt off his back to anyone in need."

**Liz English, RT(R), Radiology Supervisor, Southeast Alabama Medical Center, Dothan**

Elizabeth "Liz" English, a radiology supervisor, has worked for Southeast Alabama Medical Center for almost 40 years. During her many years at the Medical Center, Ms. English is said to be the same eager worker and motivating presence she was on her first day at the job. She is known to staff members as someone who will go to any lengths to comfort a patient, co-worker, friend or family member. For example, Ms. English befriended David, a Hurricane Katrina-evacuee that acquired a job at the Medical Center. When she heard that he had been diagnosed with cancer, she did everything in her power to assist him, knowing he had no family in the area. Her care came in the form of cooking his meals, taking him to doctors' appointments and ensuring that he was never alone in his battle with the disease. Ms. English has done similar acts of kindness to others. One of her co-workers explained, "It's the little things that don't register with most people that Liz takes to heart."

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The Alabama Hospital Association, based in Montgomery, is a statewide trade organization that represents more than 100 hospitals and numerous other health care providers in their efforts to provide quality health care.