

North Alabama Hospital Heroes Honored

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DECATUR– Ten area hospital employees were honored for their dedication to the health care industry today at a luncheon in Decatur hosted by the North 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."

North Alabama honorees included: Cary J. Payne, MHA, former Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Athens-Limestone Hospital, Athens; Tina Jones, Laboratory Assistant and Phlebotomist, Cullman Regional Medical Center, Cullman; Allyson Baker, RN, Care Coordinator, Kerry Bradford, RN, BSN, Medical Necessity Coordinator, and Toueria Morris, Charge Capture Analyst, Decatur General Hospital, Decatur; Emily Broussard, RN, Staff Nurse, and Lila S. Gray, CDM, BA, Director of Food Services, Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital, Florence; Lori Moore, RN, BSN, Charge Nurse, Helen Keller Hospital, Sheffield; Belinda Johnson, RN, BSN, Chief Nursing Officer, and Beth Pirtle, RRT, Respiratory Therapist, Russellville Hospital, Russellville.

Cary J. Payne, MHA, former Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Athens-Limestone Hospital, Athens

Cary J. Payne, MHA, a 35-year-veteran of the health care industry, recently retired as CEO of Athens-Limestone Hospital in Athens. He was described by his staff as a dependable person possessing perseverance and a positive attitude. Mr. Payne was said to be an innovator, the driving force behind many improvements and additions to hospital services, all to provide the residents of Limestone County with access to the best health care. He was instrumental in recruiting specialized health care resources, such as cardiology, neurology and pediatrics, to prevent patients and residents from having to travel for health care services. He promoted healthy lifestyles in the community through the hospital's wellness center and developed exceptional primary care clinics. Mr. Payne also spearheaded a partnership with Huntsville Hospital in Huntsville, which helped stabilize the hospital financially, save more than 500 jobs and provide much-needed resources. Even though he will no longer be at the hospital, Mr. Payne will be remembered for his vision and his leadership that employees say made Athens-Limestone a better place.

Tina Jones, Laboratory Assistant and Phlebotomist, Cullman Regional Medical Center, Cullman

Although Tina Jones has only been in the health care industry for three years, her generosity, dedication to patients and leadership have already left an impression at Cullman Regional Medical Center in Cullman. A laboratory assistant and phlebotomist, Ms. Jones works tirelessly to ensure that every person walking in the doors of the hospital feels welcome. Co-workers say her unconditional love for those around her became apparent in September of 2009 when she donated one of her kidneys to a co-worker and friend battling a kidney disease. "Her kidney donation is a true testament as to the kind of person Tina is – always willing to help someone else," explained Maria Stanford, marketing director. "Her daily walk is a journey filled with values such as: leading by example ... providing service with compassion and valuing each patient, visitor, employee and physician at Cullman Regional Medical Center and in our community." Since beginning her career at the hospital in 2006, Ms. Jones has been awarded Employee of the Year and the Star Performer of the Month.

Allyson Baker, RN, Care Coordinator, Decatur General Hospital, Decatur

After 27 years in the health care industry, Allyson Baker, RN, care coordinator at Decatur General Hospital in Decatur, still possesses an unmatched tenacity to assist patients and provide for them the best level of care even when they leave the hospital. “Allyson is intelligent, responsible and compassionate in all she does,” said Terry Jones, oncology center director. “Her demeanor places people at ease and she earns and maintains the trust of her patients and co-workers.” Ms. Baker began a prostate cancer support group called “Man to Man” and hosts monthly Ladies Lunches and Partner’s Meetings, support groups that help patients adapt to life after therapy. She is also actively involved in Bosom Buddies, where she facilitates meetings, arranges speakers, coordinates community events and writes a monthly newsletter. On top of her other activities, Ms. Baker also helps plan, implement and provide oversight for the hospital’s semi-annual adult cancer survivor camp. In addition, she serves as a board member of the American Cancer Society and plans the Society’s survivors’ dinner for more than 250 people each year.

Kerry Bradford, RN, BSN, Medical Necessity Coordinator, Decatur General Hospital, Decatur

Co-workers of Kerry Bradford, RN, BSN, medical necessity coordinator at Decatur General Hospital in Decatur, describe her as a “true champion for patients.” The 32-year health care veteran has gained the respect of her co-workers through her willingness to go beyond her daily job requirements to help others. “Kerry’s advocacy does not end with the patients she serves,” declared Karla Gray and Leigh Hays, human resources director and marketing director, respectively. “She consistently goes above and beyond to support her co-workers and the community, and ... makes a true difference in the lives of others.” Ms. Bradford recently started a community service project that helps provide coats to Morgan County residents. When she learned of two children who could not afford the school trip to New York, Ms. Bradford immediately began cooking meals and selling them, raising the funds needed to send the children off with their classmates. She volunteers in the Community Free Clinic in Decatur and assists friends, co-workers and family members by driving them to appointments, cooking for them or doing whatever is needed.

Toueria Morris, Charge Capture Analyst, Decatur General Hospital, Decatur

Toueria Morris works three jobs. She teaches piano, works at a Decatur-area retail shop and is employed full time as a charge capture analyst at Decatur General Hospital, Decatur. Despite her

many responsibilities, Ms. Morris is unrelenting in her resolve to leave a positive impression on every patient. “By consistently giving of herself, she touches the lives of everyone she encounters and encourages all of those who know and work with her,” explained Karla Gray and Leigh Hays, human resources director and marketing director, respectively. Co-workers and supervisors describe her as “dedicated to meeting the needs of everyone she encounters.” In fact, Ms. Morris recently found time to take a nurse tech class to improve her understanding of the health care industry and to provide greater insight in her dealings with nursing staff. Aside from her work responsibilities, Ms. Morris also finds time to be active in the Decatur community. She helps at her husband’s church by playing piano, cleaning the facility and accompanying her husband on home visits to the sick and elderly.

Emily Broussard, RN, Staff Nurse, Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital, Florence

Emily Broussard, RN, actually began working in health care during her final year of nursing school. Now, 25 years later, she is a staff nurse in the nursery at Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital in Florence, helping mothers bond with their new babies. When asked about her experience with Ms. Broussard, one patient explained, “Emily was like a mom to us. Without her I would have never breast fed. She made me feel comfortable... [and] I will never forget her kindness.” Even new fathers are known to compliment Ms. Broussard, claiming that she makes them feel equally a part of the new arrival. Staff members praise her competence and note the respect she endears from co-workers and physicians. They talk of her efforts to follow up with families after discharge, such as the parents of an infant born with a terminal condition that ended his life at 17 days old. In addition to her visits with the family, Ms. Broussard would frequently call the mother, offering words of advice and encouragement. For her efforts, she received the hospital’s first Nurse of the Year Award.

Lila S. Gray, CDM, BA, Director of Food Services, Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital, Florence

Lila S. Gray, CDM, BA, has worked in the health care industry for 27 years. As director of food services, Ms. Gray is the supervisor of all food services operations throughout the hospital. In her role as director, Ms. Gray displays a demeanor of professionalism and passion. “Lila Gray loves people and uses every available moment seeking ways to make life better for those around her,” explained Ms. Gray’s co-workers. “She is one of the most respected and appreciated employees of the Coffee Health Group and loves to share her knowledge and expertise with any director or

manager regarding patient and/or employee satisfaction.” Ms. Gray was instrumental in reducing special diets in order to provide a larger variety of food choices for the residents; therefore, improving patient satisfaction ratings. She also reduced employee turnover by nearly 70 percent when she took on the role as director. Outside of the hospital, Ms. Gray volunteers her time mentoring high school students and working with women at the Freedom House, a Florence-area organization that assists young women overcoming drug and alcohol addictions, to help locate job opportunities.

Lori Moore, RN, BSN, Charge Nurse, Helen Keller Hospital, Sheffield

“Her greatest attribute is her compassion and empathy,” explained co-workers asked to describe Lori Moore, RN, BSN, charge nurse on the Medical/Surgical unit at Helen Keller Hospital in Sheffield. Ms. Moore shares her love for others by making baked goods for patients, taking home patients’ laundry to wash and purchasing necessities for patients in need. Ms. Moore also works to improve patient care by participating on several hospital committees and serving as a preceptor for new nurses, as well as a clinical instructor. “Lori is a compassionate, caring individual who always puts her patients and their families first,” declared Martha Sue Safford, RN, director of medical services. “Lori not only cares for her patients ... but her co-workers and community, as well as strangers.” Ms. Moore volunteers for Habitat for Humanity, bakes meals for others and donates her homegrown produce to the community during harvest season. In fact, when a large plant closed in the area, Ms. Moore and her husband used their grist mill to grind 100 five-pound bags of meal to give to employees who lost their jobs.

Belinda Johnson, RN, BSN, Chief Nursing Officer, Russellville Hospital, Russellville

Belinda Johnson, RN, BSN, the chief nursing officer at Russellville Hospital, has spent more than 24 years in health care. During this time, she has developed a reputation as a leader who is committed to continuously improving patient care and encouraging others to do the same. Her caring and compassion were strengthened during her own recent challenge, a battle with breast cancer. Not only did Ms. Johnson defeat the disease and finish in the top 10 in a breast cancer marathon, but she dedicated herself to increasing awareness and early detection of breast cancer in the community. Ms. Johnson has been recognized as a “Hero of Hope” by the American Cancer Society and has held a number of leadership positions with the organization, including serving as an advocate for cancer research on the state and national level. She is known to spend many weekends

participating in fund raisers or writing encouraging notes. A fellow Cancer Society advocate said, “Her infectious message of hope has served as a beacon of light to so many individuals battling this terrible disease we call cancer.”

Beth Pirtle, RRT, Respiratory Therapist, Russellville Hospital, Russellville

“Staying busy” is a term Beth Pirtle, RRT, respiratory therapist at Russellville Hospital understands well. The single mother holds two full-time jobs and is attending school to obtain a master’s degree in nursing. Colleagues say her tenacity is matched only by her compassion and competency. Physicians trust her care and often seek her opinion on treatment plans. She works hard to stay current on the industry and to better know her patients’ needs. “Beth’s expertise is exceptional and is mirrored by her compassion, dedication and merciful spirit in her daily life,” said Jeff Rice, nurse manager. “She has positively impacted the lives of her patients and co-workers by being a true leader through the organization and community.” The White House recognized Ms. Pirtle as a Business Woman of the Year, and she currently serves as president of the Boys and Girls Club, chairman of Rape Response, and a member of the Westway Board and the Greater Shoals Rotary Club. She is known for the cakes she bakes for friends and co-workers, always delivered with a smile.

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.