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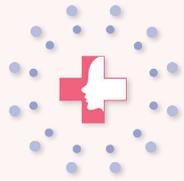
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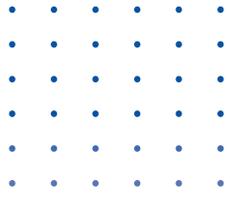
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## On the cover



NWSCC student Aidan Daniel, left, and EMS Director Chris DeMorse work together in an ambulance at Northwest Shoals Community College. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

# Lentz keeps children at the heart of practice

By Alyssa Sutherland  
Staff Writer

Dr. Robin Lentz, owner of Shoals Pediatric Dentistry, grew up in the dentist’s office.

While some children would find the thought terrifying, for Lentz, it was just part of her family, because her dad was a general dentist.

“By the time I was 12, I knew I wanted to be a dentist,” she said. “But I didn’t know I wanted to practice in pediatrics until really I got out of dental school.”

Lentz said after completing dental school in Memphis in 1997, she completed a general practice residency in Oklahoma City which was based out of a children’s hospital.

“We did sedations, we did hospital cases – people in the public sector would refer patients to us – but these were really sick kids,” she said. “That’s where I got my first exposure to working with kids. I realized, I kind of like this.”

Lentz was able to return to Memphis where in 2001, she graduated for a second time with a certificate in pediatric dentistry.

The scope of the work, when dealing with children, was often easier, according to Lentz. However, she learned she had to deal with behavior issues more frequently.

“I figured out that a lot of the kids are just scared,” she said. “They’re really young, and they don’t understand why they are doing what they’re doing. Lack of parenting can be a factor, but mainly, it’s just fear of the unknown.”

Lentz began her Florence practice in April 2003, and by June 2004 had moved into her new building on Cox Creek Parkway.

She said the building was designed and decorated with its patients in mind.



Dr. Robin Lentz, pediatric dentist and owner of Shoals Pediatric Dentistry, stands for a portrait. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



Dr. Robin Lentz, pediatric dentist and owner of Shoals Pediatric Dentistry, right, works with staff. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

# LENTZ

From Page S1

The walls of her practice are adorned with bright shades of green, yellow, red and more, and there are murals of children, clowns and other characters throughout.

She said one of the things that makes the office so child friendly is the fact that the patients are among their peers.

Often, Lentz performs procedures under oral sedation or nitrous oxide to help children relax, and she said she tries to always ease into cleanings and procedures, explaining and showing what she will do.

That is especially true for the youngest patients Lentz sees and those who come to her office with special needs.

"I'll tell a parent, they acted up today, but it's fine," she said. "In six months, it may be a completely different experience, so don't get frustrated.

"We'll eventually get where they like coming here."

While Lentz performs a lot of cleanings, fillings, crowns and even extractions, she said she veers clear of orthodontic work.

Her favorite thing is restoring a child's mouth to full health after they come in with full decay.

SEE LENTZ, S3



Dr. Robin Lentz, pediatric dentist and owner of Shoals Pediatric Dentistry, stands in the waiting room of her dentistry. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

## LENTZ

From Page S2

“I start seeing patients at one year old,” she said. “You can start seeing cavities as early as a year and a half to 2 years old. Most people don’t realize that it’s something transmissible – if parents have cavities and they kiss their child, or the child drinks after the parent, they can transmit that bacteria.”

Lentz said additionally, putting children to bed with a bottle or juice and not performing proper oral hygiene, like brushing with real toothpaste instead of training toothpaste, also

contributes to early decay.

Sometimes, she said she crowns a child’s entire mouth, and others, she performs a mixture of fillings and crowns.

A big part of her job, she said, is educating parents about the importance of beginning proper oral hygiene at a young age.

After more than two decades in the business, Lentz said she is beginning to understand another wonderful part of having a pediatric practice.

“Some of my patients I started to see as babies, they are in college now,” she said. “Some are even older with children of their own, and they bring them to me. It’s special.”

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CRNP Wes Hamilton and his wife, RN Lynn Hamilton, owners of Hamilton Family Urgent Care stand at their Cloverdale location. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

# Hamiltons focus on health care where it's needed

**By Alyssa Sutherland**  
Staff Writer

Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner Wes Hamilton and his wife, Registered Nurse Lynn Hamilton, have been in health care for 35 years.

Wes began as an EMT working on an ambulance, on medical flights and in

critical care nursing.

Lynn worked as a registration clerk in an emergency room, and EMTs invited her to ride along on their calls. She instantly fell in love and became an EMT herself before pursuing nursing.

Now, they own and operate four Hamilton Family Urgent Care locations across northwest Alabama – their

original practice on Cloverdale Road and practices in Killen, Muscle Shoals and Moulton.

“We’re both from this area, but I’m from Cloverdale,” Wes said. “When we opened here, we saw such a need.

“At the time, there was nothing really out this way and the west end of the county. If people were going to an

urgent care, especially after hours, they had to go to town. We filled that gap.”

The timing of their opening, however, was tricky.

The Hamiltons opened their first location in their original building on Cloverdale, which is across the street

SEE HAMILTONS, S5

# HAMILTONS

From Page S4

from their new building, in November 2019.

Just a few months into being business owners, the world would drastically change.

"We went from brand new, hoping we'd see three or four people a day, to COVID-19 hitting and initially getting really busy, then getting the stay-at-home order," Wes said. "We went to having zero patients and had to lay off everyone else but me."

Despite the difficult start, the Hamiltons quickly rebounded from 2020, building a strong client base and identifying other areas of need.

"Our locations are very specific," Wes said. "We're the go-between before the ER in places where people have to travel a distance to receive good health care."

"Seven days after we opened our Mouton location, it was announced their hospital was closing down. Immediately, for that whole county, we were it. That's where clinics like us need to be in rural places like that."

At those locations, the Hamiltons and their staff are able to perform X-rays, sutures and more in addition to offering treatment for a variety of illnesses.

They keep their hours 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and 2 to 6 p.m. on Sunday.

Keeping longer hours was a decision made to ensure those who lived at the furthest ends of the counties the Hamiltons serve could make it in for treatment, even with difficult working schedules.

Additionally, the Hamiltons see primary care patients and meet a need for self-pay patients.

"Our self-pay prices are really good — we've never increased them in our six years," Wes said. "We do that purposefully for people who don't have insurance or have high-deductible insurance."

While the Hamiltons had just one employee in 2020, they now have approximately 53 across all four locations according to Lynn, and the couple has "non-negotiables" expected from all those employees across the board.

"We want every patient to be faced with people who want them to be here," Lynn said. "We always ask when we interview, 'do you like people?'"



RN Lynn Hamilton, left, and her husband, CRNP Wes Hamilton, owners of Hamilton Family Urgent Care work with a patient at their Cloverdale location.

[DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

"Of course, they say yes, but then we give them a scenario. You have to like people to be in this profession."

Wes agreed, noting that he frequently tells staff to take care of folks the way they would want to see care given to their own child or 90-year-old grandmother.

"That's our no exception policy," he said. "We have to take care of folks and have a personal touch. From the moment you walk into a front desk, we want our patients treated in a way that reflects that standard."



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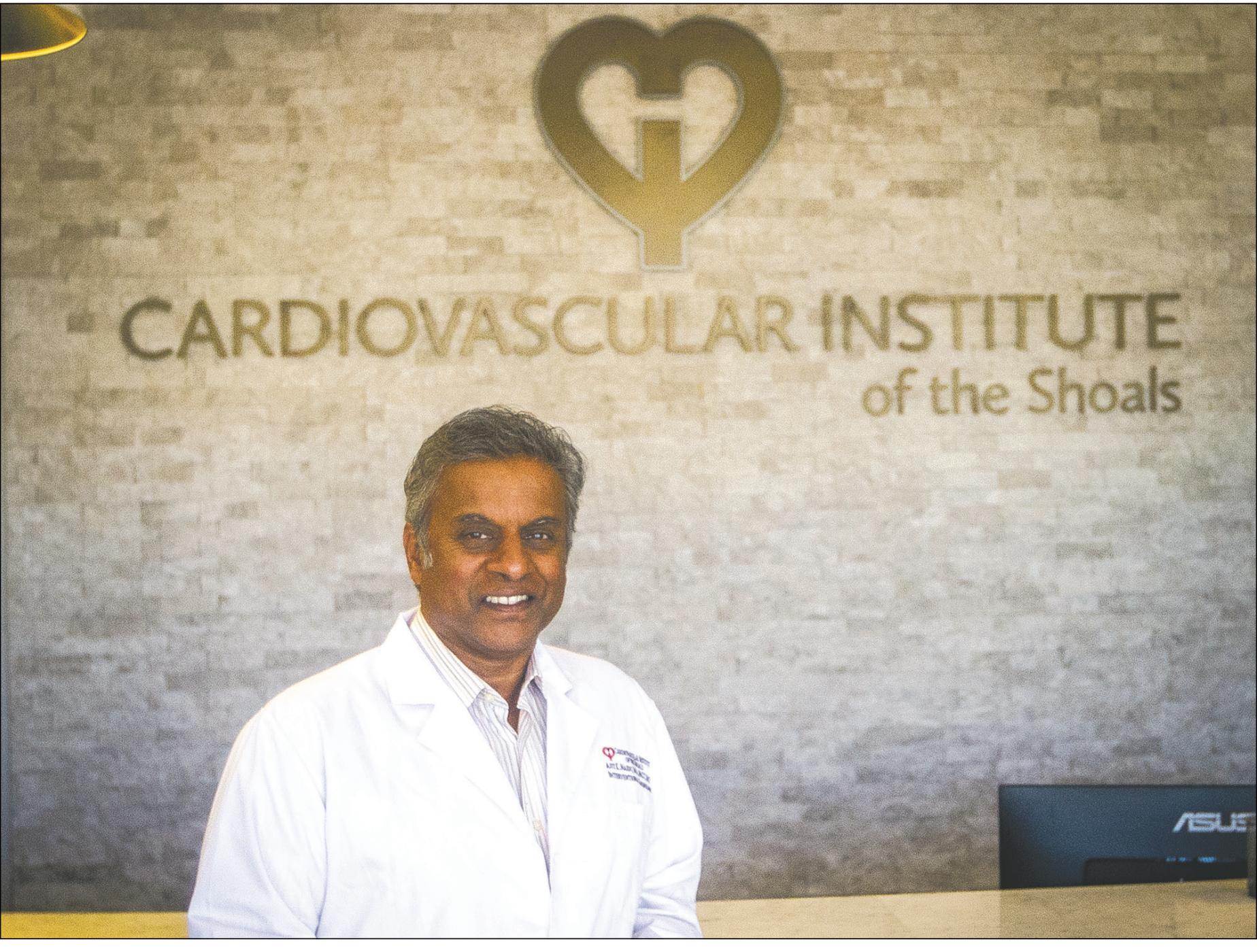
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Dr. Ajit Naidu stands at Cardiovascular of the Shoals in Florence. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

# Naidu offers world class care close to home

By Addi Broadfoot  
Staff Writer

The Cardiovascular Institute of the Shoals was founded on a simple idea that has guided its growth for more than a decade — patients in north Alabama should have access to the same level of cardiovascular care offered in major medical centers, without leaving

their community.

Since opening his private practice in 2011, Dr. Ajit Naidu has steadily expanded the scope of services available locally, combining interventional cardiology with an emphasis on quality of life.

Born in Switzerland, Naidu moved to the United States as a child and grew up in Chicago. His education took him

through the University of Chicago, New York Medical College and postgraduate training in Boston and New York, where he completed his cardiology fellowship in 2003. After years of training and practice in large urban health systems, he relocated to Florence in 2008.

“Just lucky, I guess,” Naidu said of the move to northwest Alabama. “My wife liked it here.”

Three years later, he opened the Cardiovascular Institute of the Shoals, shaping it into a practice focused on convenience, personalization and advanced care.

In 2017, he established the Shoals’ first outpatient cardiac catheterization lab inside his office, allowing patients

# NAIDU

From Page S6

to receive complex procedures without hospital admission or long distance travel.

He was also the first physician in the area to introduce radial artery catheterization, a technique that reduces recovery time and improves patient comfort.

"I've always had a vision of bringing world class care to everywhere," Naidu said. "Just because you're here doesn't mean you can't have great care."

That philosophy reflects both his training and his broader view of medicine. Board certified in cardiology and nuclear cardiology, Naidu treats a wide range of conditions affecting the heart and vascular system, including hypertension, peripheral artery disease, venous disease and circulatory disorders that limit mobility.

He said cardiology increasingly intersects with everyday function, especially as physicians encourage patients to remain active.

"They're always telling people to move, get your steps in," he said. "But we see a lot of patients who can't walk well because of circulation problems or pain."

That focus on mobility and function led Naidu to adopt genicular artery embolization (GAE), a minimally invasive procedure designed to reduce knee pain caused by osteoarthritis. Offered at the Cardiovascular Institute of the Shoals, the procedure targets inflamed blood vessels around the knee which contribute to chronic pain.

GAE does not repair joint damage or restore lost cartilage, but it can significantly reduce pain by limiting abnormal blood flow associated with inflammation. The procedure typically takes about an hour, requires only a small catheter and allows patients to return home the same day. In most patients, the relief lasts for around 2 years, he said.

"So, the relief is pretty immediate," Naidu said. "People feel better right afterwards."

Clinical outcomes have made GAE an appealing option for patients who want alternatives to surgery. Naidu said studies show a high success rate for those with early to moderate disease with meaningful improvement even among patients with more advanced arthritis.

He said the procedure aligns with



Dr. Ajit Naidu works at his computer in an exam room at Cardiovascular of the Shoals in Florence. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

a broader shift in medicine toward improving quality of life instead of focusing solely on survival.

The Cardiovascular Institute of the Shoals has become known not only for patient care but also for education. The practice has been recognized as a training site for other physicians learning venous and arterial stenting techniques.

Naidu has published research across multiple medical disciplines and regularly lectures on heart and vascular disease.

Outside the clinic, he is the founder

of the Joseph Naidu Foundation, a local nonprofit which provides free health screenings for community members who cannot afford regular medical care.

For Naidu, innovation like GAE is part of a larger commitment to ensuring that location does not limit access to advanced treatment.

"From a small area, you can still deliver world class care," he said.

His message to Shoals residents reflects that belief.

"They can have access to the best care in the world - right in their hometown," Naidu said.

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# EMS program provides progressive options for prospective first responders

By Alyssa Sutherland  
Staff Writer

Northwest Shoals Community College Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Director Chris DeMorse has seen a lot of changes during his time with the program.

DeMorse is in his sixth year as program director and his 15th year as an EMS instructor, and he said the biggest changes have been the expanded scope of skills expected of EMS careers and the technology-driven nature of the work.

However, the core values offered by the program have stayed consistent.

“Students can expect to learn life-long, lifesaving skills,” he said. “We try to prepare our students as much as possible for the real world, not only in the classroom, but with clinical rotations alongside paramedics or other EMS professionals.”

DeMorse said the learning curve for EMTs and paramedics is a little different than many careers, because while professionals never stop learning on the job, they have to be ready for hands-on diagnosis and treatment their first day on the job.

The NWSCC EMS program helps students gain the skills and confidence they need through simulations and labs, even utilizing the school’s own ambulance to train those in the program.

However, DeMorse believes many of the more valuable lessons come from the moments a student goes from observer on a clinical rotation, out in the field with professionals, to the one confidently calling the shots.

“When the student first starts, they are just there, following someone else’s lead,” he said. “The first few clinicals are more like entry level, introductory experiences. But by the end of the program, the students will be running the call while the EMS professionals stand back to observe and help as needed.”

The program includes tracks for students to earn emergency medical responder (EMR), emergency medical technician (EMT), advanced EMT and paramedic certifications and licensures.



NWSCC student Aidan Daniel and EMS Director Chris DeMorse load a stretcher into an ambulance at Northwest Shoals Community College. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

DeMorse said those certifications range from “advanced first aid” and “basic lifesaving capability” for EMR and EMT certificates respectively to advanced skills like administering IVs and medications and “doing any and everything it takes to save a life” for advance EMT and paramedic certificates.

Students also have the option to earn their associate’s degree through the program, which will qualify them for each certification as they pursue the degree.

Aidan Daniel will graduate with his associate’s degree this spring and officially become a paramedic shortly after.

Already, he works as an advanced EMT for Helen Keller Hospital’s ambulance service.

He began taking EMS classes through NWSCC in 2023 during his senior year at Brooks High School.

Though he comes from a family



EMS Director Chris DeMorse sits at Northwest Shoals Community College. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

## NWSCC

From Page S8

filled with medical providers, his own interest in the field came through unconventional means he described as “kind of a funny story.”

“We had mock interviews for school, and I’d never known what I wanted to do,” Daniel said. “I just made something up when I went in and was like, ‘I want to work on an ambulance,’ not

even being serious about it.”

DeMorse was Daniel’s interviewer, and before Daniel knew it, he was dual enrolled and on his way toward his first certification, and he quickly fell in love with the work.

“I love critical thinking, and while sometimes when you get to a scene, it’s obvious what’s going on, when you get to more complex diagnosis, like cardiology, you really have to look critically at what’s going on,” Daniel said. “A paramedic is kind of the last person

putting the puzzle pieces together to get someone the help they need.”

Daniel and DeMorse noted that since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a shortage of paramedics.

Now, instead of a paramedic responding alongside an EMT on every emergency call, EMTs are often paired together, and a paramedic will perform a “rapid response” to a scene, if necessary.

As a result, Daniel believes the skills learned through the NWSCC EMS

program are vital, because they ensure students are more than prepared to meet ambulatory needs in the community in as little as two years after beginning the degree program.

“I took longer than most to work through this, because I started working when I earned my advanced certificate before I came back to school to finish my degree,” Daniel said. “Now, I’m the one on a scene making the calls and doing everything, and I’ll be a paramedic at the end of the semester.”



Dr. Josiah Daily, left, and RN Karen Bohannon stand together for a portrait at Doctor's Diet of the Shoals. [ADDI BROADFOOT/TIMESDAILY]

# Helping the Shoals stay healthy safely

By Addi Broadfoot  
Staff Writer

Inside a medical clinic focused on wellness instead of emergency care, Dr. Josiah Daily is approaching weight loss as a medical issue which requires caution, education and individual attention.

Daily is a physician with Doctor's Diet of the Shoals, a clinic offering medically supervised weight loss, hormone therapy, vitamin and iron infusions and comprehensive lab work.

The clinic originally opened in December 2019 just before the pandemic disrupted health care nationwide. Daily, who also works

in emergency medicine, said COVID underscored the need to keep preventive care patients away from environments associated with illness and exposure.

Daily's experience in the emergency room heavily influences how the clinic operates. He said working in emergency medicine means seeing the end result of years of unmanaged health issues.

"You see a lot of people coming in generally unhealthy," Daily said. "Many of them have been through programs that did not prioritize safety."

The emphasis on safety shapes both the services offered and those intentionally excluded. While many weight

loss clinics now provide GLP 1 injections, Daily said he refuses to offer them because of safety concerns.

"If it is not safe, we are not going to do it," Daily said.

The clinic relies on structured weight loss plans which include diet and exercise education and medications such as phentermine when medically appropriate. Patients also have access to B12 and aquatonic injections, daily IV infusions, iron infusions and hydration therapy.

Karen Bohannon, a registered nurse at the clinic, said the variety of services allows staff to tailor care instead of applying a single solution to every patient.

"It covers a lot of different things," she said. "We can really meet people where they are."

The clinic also offers testosterone therapy, hormone testing and blood work conducted in house. Daily said having immediate access to lab results allows providers to identify underlying issues which may prevent weight loss.

"We have patients who are doing everything right and still not losing weight," he said. "They may have insulin resistance, PCOS or other conditions that are easy to miss if you are not looking at the whole picture."

Daily is certified in both emergency



Dr. Josiah Daily works inside Doctor's Diet of the Shoals. [ADDI BROADFOOT/TIMESDAILY]

## DAILY

From Page S10

medicine and obesity medicine, a combination he said allows him to approach patients with a broader clinical perspective. He said weight loss should never be treated as a one size fits all process.

"This is not a place where you come in, get a pill and get sent away," he said.

Education plays a central role in the clinic's approach, particularly during a patient's first visit. Bohannon said new patients receive detailed guidance on nutrition and lifestyle habits.

"A lot of people do not realize how certain foods affect them," she said.

Daily said those conversations are critical to helping patients sustain results rather than cycling through short term programs.

The clinic operates on a walk-in basis instead of scheduled appointments, a model designed to accommodate working patients. Bohannon said flexibility is one of the clinic's greatest strengths.

"We can do infusions early in the morning or late at night," she said. "That way people do not have to miss work."

Cost transparency is another defining feature. Lab work is priced upfront, and patients do not receive additional bills from outside laboratories.

The clinic is part of a larger network with locations in Cullman, Oxford

and Ardmore, Tennessee. Daily is the majority owner of the Shoals area clinic and said opening a location in the area was personal.

"I grew up in Red Bay," he said. "I knew this was a place that could benefit from something like this."

Daily said the mission of the clinic focuses on prevention and long term health rather instead of rapid weight loss.

"This is about helping people before they end up in the emergency room," he said.

For Daily, the clinic represents a way to address health issues upstream, offering patients care that prioritizes safety, education and sustainability.

"It is a good program," he said. "And it is good for people's overall health."

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Dr. Michael Hames, owner of Florence Foot Center, sits in a treatment room. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

# Hames works to get people back on their feet

**By Alyssa Sutherland**  
Staff Writer

Dr. Michael Hames has practiced podiatry locally for 21 years.

A graduate of Bradshaw High School and the University of North Alabama, he said over the course of his career, he has had over 200,000 patient interactions at Hames Foot

Clinic.

“I’ve seen a few people,” he joked. “Our new slogan is, ‘helping one sole at a time’.”

While Hames most frequently deals

with wound care, diabetic foot infections, ingrown toenails and heel pain, he found his way to podiatry because

**SEE HAMES, S13**

# HAMES

From Page S12

of its versatility.

“I get to do all the specialties,” he said. “Skin, bone and joint, internal medicine, neurology, vascular, orthopedics – I perform surgical procedures pretty much all day long. Podiatry is all the specialties in one area. That’s what keeps it cool.”

As far as what keeps Hames excited, he said reconstructive surgery and wounds are what he most enjoys treating.

Both aspects of podiatry make a huge impact on his patients, and he said both are also highly complex.

“Wounds are complex in the long term,” Hames said. “They take weeks to heal properly. Reconstructive surgery – instead of open procedures, we’re performing minimally invasive procedures.”

Hames said in 2019, he was the first surgeon in the state to be trained in minimally invasive bunionectomy.

The procedure is far quicker than open surgery, according to Hames, who said it can be completed in less than a hour.

Additionally, the recovery time is shorted by 50% for most people from eight weeks to four.

Minimal incision procedures are the future of podiatry, according to Hames, as are orthopedic implants which help with rebuilding the foot and maintaining movement.

He developed such an implant 12 years ago which is used in the mid-foot and the wrist.

Hames said a common misconception about the scope of his work is that all he does is wound care and ingrown toenail removal.

The reality is anything involving the foot or ankle can be handled in his office including bone and joint issues and dermatological problems.

“I just diagnosed some with melanoma,” Hames said. “We’re saving his life because we found that diagnosis. We’ll do surgery and rebuilding.”

Spring, summer and early fall are busy seasons for Hames.

He said as soon as winter weather breaks, people want to move more, and when they do, they often develop fatigue injuries from fractures and dislocations to Morton’s neuromas and turf toe.

Over the course of his career, Hames said the patients have made



**Dr. Michael Hames, owner of Florence Foot Center, works at his computer in an exam room.** [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

the journey worthwhile.

He said he enjoys getting them back on their feet – pun intended.

“Every person has a story, and it’s important to help make an impact

with every single person,” he said. “Though vague and broad, it’s the truth.

“We try to keep things light, even when it’s a tough conversation if

someone has ... cancer. You try to remind people what they’re here for, and no one’s expiration date is written on them. If you want to hear God laugh, tell him your plans.”



David Hood taps his feet on bells while working with Neurologic Music Therapist Lizzie Digiovanni as part of his Parkinson's therapy inside Helen Keller WellCare Center in Sheffield. [KEVIN TAYLOR/TIMESDAILY]

# Parkinson's Management Program provides hope to patients

**By Alyssa Sutherland**  
Staff Writer

David Hood admits he did not know much about Parkinson's Disease when he was diagnosed around four years ago.

The Swampers bassist, 82, said he did not experience the tremors

generally associated with the disease.

Instead, he had short term memory issues and spine problems, and the diagnosis came as a surprise to him and his wife, Judy.

That's when they discovered Bri Maharrey and the Helen Keller Hospital Parkinson's Disease Management Program.

"Parkinson's is extremely overwhelming," Judy said. "When we first got the diagnosis, I had so many questions. We came here, and everything I was worried about, Bri had an answer to or a resource for. We walked out of the office with hope."

Maharrey began the Parkinson's program five years ago, and in that

time, it has grown to regularly support approximately 70 patients each week, plus offer therapies and resources to others in the community who receive their care elsewhere.

"When someone get diagnosed with Parkinson's, we want them to find us

SEE KELLER, S15

# KELLER

From Page S14

here,” she said. “We have them come in, and we do a full personal evaluation beginning with when they were diagnosed and what information they do have.”

The evaluation includes a close look at the individual from a physical, social and emotional standpoint.

Then, the right resources are compiled.

“Every patient is different,” Maharrey said. “Sometimes, all they need is for someone to talk to them about the information they need. Other times, they might need physical therapy or help with nutrition.

“We try to help the patients and their caregivers recognize what to look for, so we can catch anything proactively that might happen. We figure out their lifestyle and what movement best fits their body, but it’s not just about the movement — it’s about the whole person and, as a person, how did this diagnosis impact you. We try to fill those gaps.”

Hosted at the Helen Keller WellCare Center, the program offers Parkinson’s specific physical therapy and speech therapy, exercise classes five days a week which are just for Parkinson’s patients, a neurologist just across the parking lot at the hospital, and currently a music therapist who comes from Huntsville one day per week.

Maharrey said there are some in the community who would benefit from the services offered, but they are unable to get to the center, because they do not have a caregiver or a ride.

“There are some barriers that we just can’t solve — yet,” she said. “It’s definitely beneficial when a patient has a caregiver as active in the care as Judy. As a team, we can really assess what the best next steps are on our end, and she can help build on that.”

David said he would be lost without help from his wife.

“I have a friend who has Parkinson’s and doesn’t have that kind of help,” he said. “I don’t know how he does it.”

David attends the Parkinson’s program for therapy three days per week, but the music therapy day is by far his favorite.

As the therapist plays her guitar — sometimes including pieces she learned especially for David — he



**David Hood listens to Neurologic Music Therapist Lizzie Digiovanni during one of his therapy sessions inside Helen Keller WellCare Center in Sheffield.**

[PHOTOS BY KEVIN TAYLOR/TIMESDAILY]

taps bells on the floor with his feet, carefully selecting the right note and following the rhythm.

“David’s first session, his right leg hadn’t been wanting to move correctly,” Judy said. “He did one half of a session and got up and was walking. We’ve done a video every session, and the progress is remarkable.

“We’re incredibly blessed in a community our size to have a world-class Parkinson’s program.”

Maharrey said David’s musical mindedness made him a perfect candidate for the music therapy trial, and she has been pleased with his success.

The foot bell exercises help with strength and weight shifting, but they also aid in executive function, according to Maharrey.

The mental battle associated with Parkinson’s, she said, is a huge part of the battle.

“One piece of the pie only gets you so far,” she said. “There’s equal percentage given to the physical part — the exercise and therapies — and the mental part, along with nutrition. We try to see where people are lacking and put it together individually for every person who walks in.”



**David Hood taps his feet on bells while working with Neurologic Music Therapist Lizzie Digiovanni inside Helen Keller WellCare Center in Sheffield.**



Allen Thornton Career Technical Center health science students practice taking blood pressure. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

# Health science program helps meet demand

By Bernie Delinski  
Staff Writer

The health science teachers' lounge at Allen Thornton Career Technical Center was a lonely place when Lawanda Corum came to work at the center

24 years ago.

"When I started I was the only health science teacher," she said.

Three instructors have been added since then, which is a good thing because health science is a popular field and is in high demand.

Corum said students receive real experience not only in the classrooms but in the field.

"They get real clinical [experiences] in nursing homes and hospitals," she said.

Corum is the certified nursing

assistant instructor.

Allen Thornton Principal Scott Jones said health science includes aspects such as foundations of nursing, medical terminology and diagnostics.

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# CORUM

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“Foundations class is required for all of nursing,” Jones said. “You have to take it first and then you can take those others. You can go straight to [certified nursing assistant] from it or can take medical terminology, depending how you want to do it.”

He said nursing students can go directly to Northwest Shoals Community College, the University of North Alabama or other colleges and universities.

“We had one work at a hospital while in nursing school in college getting her basics,” Jones said. “She was using the CNA [certificate] she got at Allen Thornton. That’s one thing about career tech is you get to see a lot of success stories.”

He said the center also has an emergency medical technician class every other year, which is a dual-enrollment class with Northwest Shoals Community College.

“They send an instructor and you get certified with the EMT program with the state,” Jones said. “If you pass the state registry you can go right on an ambulance when you turn 18. We’ve had them do that while still a senior [in high school]. They’d do it on weekends.”

He said Lauderdale County Commission members have told him there is a major need for EMTs in the county.

“A senior received a lifesaving award because he stopped the bleeding on a patient. He would not have been able to do if he had not had the program,” Jones said.

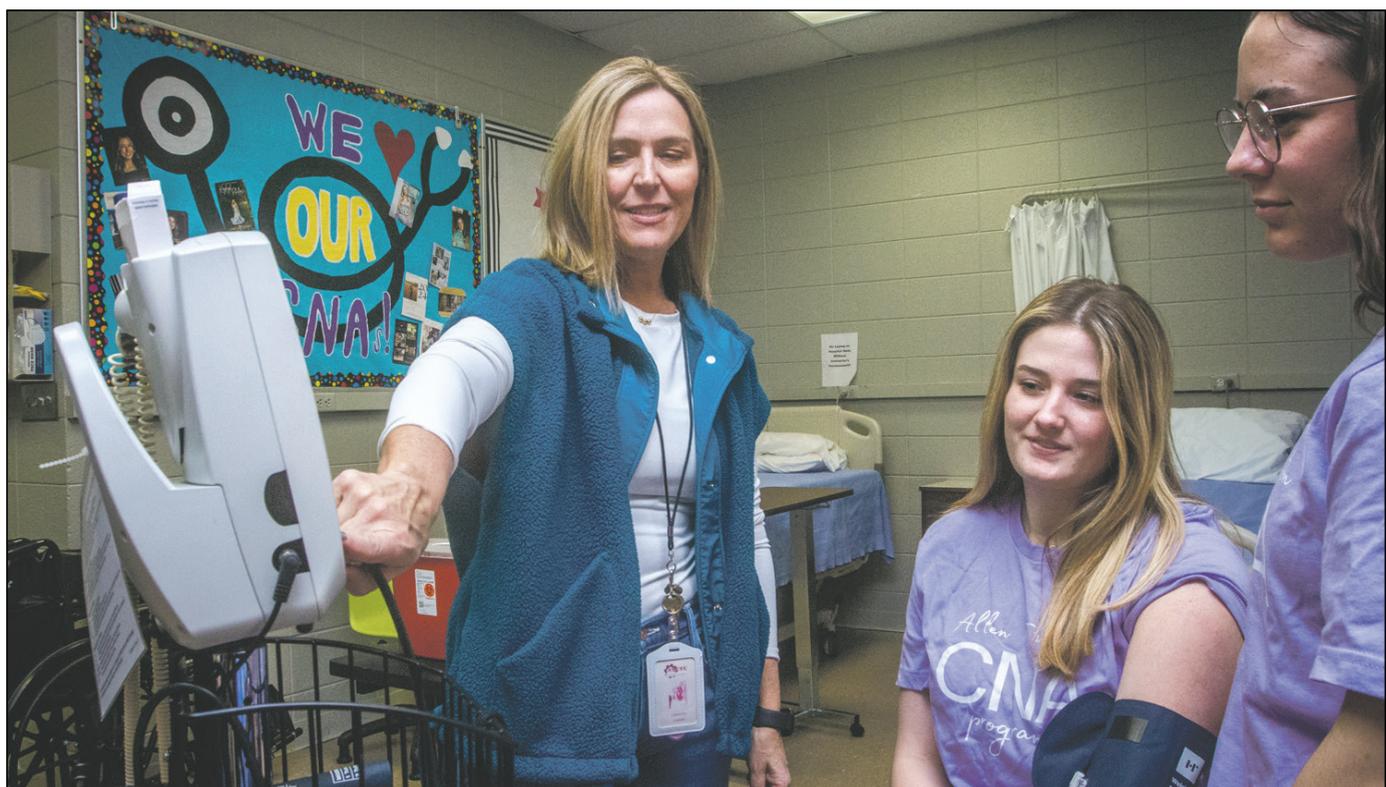
With the county school system’s technical center moving into the new Innovation Center at the Lauderdale County Agricultural Events Center this fall, officials are looking into ways to enhance its health science section.

“We’re looking at diversifying a little with that,” Jones said. “It’s still in the planning stages. We may add a physical therapy class. Right now all the insurances require you to have so much therapy before you have surgery.”

He said the students will enjoy the new facility.

“Every one of them is excited,” Jones said. “We’ve been going to the schools, talking with those who will be 10th graders next year and getting really good response.”

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Allen Thornton Career Technical Center health science instructor Lawanda Corum gives a lesson to students. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



Allen Thornton Career Technical Center health science instructor Lawanda Corum at a nursing instruction facility.

# UNA nursing program has a proud reputation

By **Bernie Delinski**  
Staff Writer

The Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions has high expectations for its students, and they consistently meet and exceed them.

Dean Tera Kirkman said the program's success is highlighted by its National Council Licensure Examination first-time pass rates. She said the pass rates have consistently exceeded the national benchmark of 80% and have remained above 90% for many years, including a 93% first-time pass rate in 2025.

"Graduate employment rates also exceed 90%, well above-accreditation benchmarks, reflecting the high level of preparation and practice readiness of UNA nursing graduates," Kirkman said. "Alumni are widely recognized for their competence in clinical practice and many return to the academic setting to pursue advanced degrees, further strengthening the profession."

Associate Dean Michelle Nelson said the program's tradition plays a role in carrying on its achievements.

"Through ongoing investment in programs, partnerships and resources, the university demonstrates its dedication to sustaining high quality nursing education and preparing graduates who are well equipped to meet the evolving health care needs of their communities," Nelson said.

The \$24.1 million, 55,000-square foot Laura M. Harrison Hall which houses the program opened in 2021, complete with a top-floor hospital simulation.

The undergraduate nursing program has an average of 578 students in fall and spring enrollments. That includes students in the program and seeking admission into it.

"Of this total, approximately 323 students are pre-nursing (freshmen and sophomores), while 255 students are enrolled in the nursing program, consisting of 243 in the traditional track and 12 in the accelerated track," Kirkman said.

There is an ever increasing demand for nurses nationwide and locally, which makes UNA's program additionally important.

"Many UNA nursing students are residents of Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi and a substantial number



**Nursing student Makenzie McQuire works with a simulation manikin at the University of North Alabama.** [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY FILE]

choose to remain in the region after graduation, helping address the strong local and national demand for nurses," Kirkman said. "While enrolled in the program, students complete their clinical experiences in the Shoals area, where they develop professional relationships with local healthcare systems that frequently lead to employment opportunities."

Kirkman said many students work as patient care technicians or nursing assistants at North Alabama Medical Center and other local health care facilities while they are in nursing school.

"It is allowing [the students] to support the local health care workforce, while gaining valuable hands on experience that often transitions into full time nursing positions following graduation," she said.

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**Brad Hardemon, left, and Caitlyn Weathers tend to a mock patient within a simulation lab inside the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions building at the University of North Alabama.**



Ashley Taylor, left, and Susan Potter stand together at Simple Healthcare Solutions. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

# Family business simplifies health insurance

By Addi Broadfoot  
Staff Writer

The phone rings almost constantly on a weekday morning inside a homely office on Avalon Avenue.

Questions range from whether a doctor is still in network to confusion over new insurance cards which arrived in the mail.

For Susan Potter and her daughter, Ashley Taylor, those calls are the heart

of their work. They are the reason they built Simple Healthcare Solutions nearly three years ago.

It is a full-service health insurance agency which focuses on helping people understand their options and

enroll in coverage that fits their needs. While the agency works with individuals under 65 through the health insurance marketplace, a majority of

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# HEALTHCARE

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its clients are seniors navigating Medicare for the first time or reevaluating their coverage.

“A lot of people just don’t know where to start,” Potter said.

That lack of understanding is something both women have seen repeatedly throughout their careers. Between them, Potter and Taylor bring more than 35 years of experience in the insurance industry. Potter spent about 18 years in health insurance, including 15 years with Humana, where she eventually served as the state director for Medicare in Alabama. Taylor began her career as an independent broker and has worked in insurance for roughly 17 years.

Despite their shared background, the idea of formally working together didn’t come until circumstances forced a change. Three years ago, Potter’s position with Humana was eliminated during a reduction in force.

That’s when she saw an opportunity. “When that happened, Ashley and I got together and started this agency,” Potter said. “It was kind of a moment of, ‘are we doing this together or not?’”

They chose together, initially working from home before opening their Avalon Avenue office in September.

The timing was less than ideal.

“Last year was chaos,” Potter said.

“We were really just getting into the office when enrollment season started.”

Even so, the transition reinforced why having a physical office mattered.

“It’s just so hard when you don’t have somewhere to meet somebody and sit down and talk about things,” Taylor said.

Finding the location turned out to be a stroke of luck, and the office has since become a place where clients can sit face-to-face with someone they trust. This is something Potter and Taylor say is increasingly rare in the insurance world.

That personal connection is central to their mission.

Potter said many of the calls they receive now involve people who are confused about provider networks or new plans.

“When you call one of these large insurance carriers, you’re on hold, you get transferred, and you may or may not get someone who can actually answer your question,” she said. “With our experience, we usually know



**Susan Potter, left, and Ashley Taylor work together at Simple Healthcare Solutions. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]**

what’s going on beyond what’s just on a screen.”

For Potter, that knowledge comes from years spent working directly with Medicare at the state level. For Taylor, it comes from finding her place in the industry after an unexpected career pivot.

Taylor originally entered the workforce as a financial advisor just as the stock market crashed in 2008. Fresh out of college, she quickly realized the role wasn’t the right fit.

“Nobody wanted to invest money, and they definitely didn’t want to invest with a young female,” Taylor said.

She shifted into insurance, eventually working in group worksite benefits before returning to Medicare full time. Unlike sales-focused roles she had held previously, Medicare allowed her to

lean into education instead of pressure.

“I’m an educator more than anything,” Taylor said. “Medicare fits my personality a lot better.”

That educational focus extends beyond one-on-one meetings. Simple Healthcare Solutions regularly hosts free, public classes aimed at people approaching age 65. The sessions walk attendees through the basics of Medicare, including when to enroll, what coverage is required, and how prescription drug plans work.

“When people turn 65, they have no clue what to do,” Potter said. “A lot of them don’t even know they need anything other than Medicare.”

Helping seniors make informed decisions has become deeply personal for Potter. She recalls early experiences visiting clients who had to choose between basic necessities and

insurance coverage.

“Being able to sit down and help them find solutions for that was a really big difference,” she said. “It was very rewarding.”

Nearly three years into business, Simple Healthcare Solutions continues to grow, fueled by market changes and ongoing confusion surrounding health care coverage. While the pace can be overwhelming, Potter and Taylor say the demand only reinforces the importance of their work.

“We feel like it’s very important that people have their own independent broker,” Potter said. “Someone local who actually understands how things work in this area.”

This mother-daughter team hopes to continue making sure patients do not have to navigate health care decisions alone.



Dr. Richard Pearlman stands by a poster at Alliance Cancer Care Center. [ADDI BROADFOOT/TIMESDAILY]

# Alliance Cancer Care offers treatment close to home

By Addi Broadfoot  
Staff Writer

Alliance Cancer Care Radiation Oncology was built on the idea patients

should not have to leave their community to receive high level cancer treatment.

Inside the clinic, that philosophy shows up in both the technology used

and the way care is delivered, combining decades of local experience with modern radiation therapy.

Radiation oncology has been part of the Shoals medical landscape for more

than 40 years. Long before Alliance Cancer Care existed under its current name, the specialty was introduced to

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# PEARLMAN

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the area by early practitioners committed to expanding cancer treatment locally.

That legacy remains visible today. “Some of the people here have been around since the very beginning,” Dr. Richard Pearlman said. “That experience really matters, because this is a field where precision and consistency are everything.”

The practice eventually became part of Alliance Cancer Care, a regional network serving north Alabama.

Its focus has stayed local.

Patients are treated during standard business hours in a clinic designed to run with efficiency and predictability. Treatments typically last about 10 to 15 minutes, but the planning behind each session is detailed and highly individualized.

Radiation oncology differs from other cancer treatments by relying on targeted energy rather than surgery or medication. Pearlman said distinction was what initially drew him to the specialty.

“We can cure cancer without using drugs or operating,” he said. “We still work alongside those treatments, but radiation has its own role, and it’s very different from anything else in medicine.”

That difference is rooted in science. Treatment plans are shaped by physics, imaging and biology, with constant reference to clinical research. Pearlman said the field’s reliance on evidence is one of its defining characteristics.

“Everything we do is grounded in trials and data, and that’s something I really enjoy about it,” he said.

Alliance Cancer Care offers a wide range of advanced radiation therapies, including stereotactic body radiation therapy, stereotactic radiosurgery, intensity modulated radiation therapy, volumetric modulated arc therapy and high dose rate brachytherapy.

Pearlman said the equipment and techniques available locally match what patients would find in much larger cities.

“We’re delivering the same treatments you’d get at major cancer centers,” he said. “The difference is people don’t have to travel hours away to get them.”

That access is central to the clinic’s mission. Alliance Cancer Care treats patients regardless of insurance status,



**Dr. Richard Pearlman, left, works with a patient at Alliance Cancer Care Center. [ADDI BROADFOOT/TIMESDAILY]**

ensuring financial barriers do not prevent care.

“We take care of everybody in the community,” Pearlman said. “No one is turned away.”

Pearlman joined the practice after completing extensive training which took him from Alabama to Michigan and back. Born and raised in Birmingham, he earned his undergraduate degree at Birmingham Southern College before receiving his medical doctorate from the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. He completed his residency in radiation

oncology at Wayne State University in Detroit, serving as chief resident in his final year.

Now practicing in north Alabama, Pearlman said the most rewarding part of the job comes from the long term relationships formed with patients.

“We’re with people through a really significant part of their lives,” he said. “Sometimes we’re curing the cancer, and sometimes we’re helping manage pain and symptoms. Either way, you see how much it matters.”

He said it is especially meaningful when former patients return years

later, no longer in treatment, simply to share updates about their lives.

“Getting to see them come back and talk about their kids or grandkids,” Pearlman said. “That’s what makes it worth it.”

At its core, Alliance Cancer Care Radiation Oncology remains focused on combining advanced medicine with community centered care.

Through experienced staff, modern technology and physicians like Pearlman, the clinic continues a long standing commitment to treating cancer close to home.



Physical Therapist Assistant Lucas Witt has his knee checked by Dr. Jeff Goodman at North Alabama Bone and Joint Clinic. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

# Clinic brings together bones, joints, community

By **Bernie Delinski**  
Staff Writer

North Alabama Bone and Joint Clinic has developed major ties to the area over its 30 years from University of North Alabama athletes to everyday Shoals residents. It has provided orthopedic and

musculoskeletal care since its creation in 1993 with Dr. Neal Garver Clement and Dr. John Murphy among its founders.

It continues to stay busy.

"I'd guess 200-plus patients come through here every day," Dr. Jeff Hovater said. Locations include 1751 Veterans

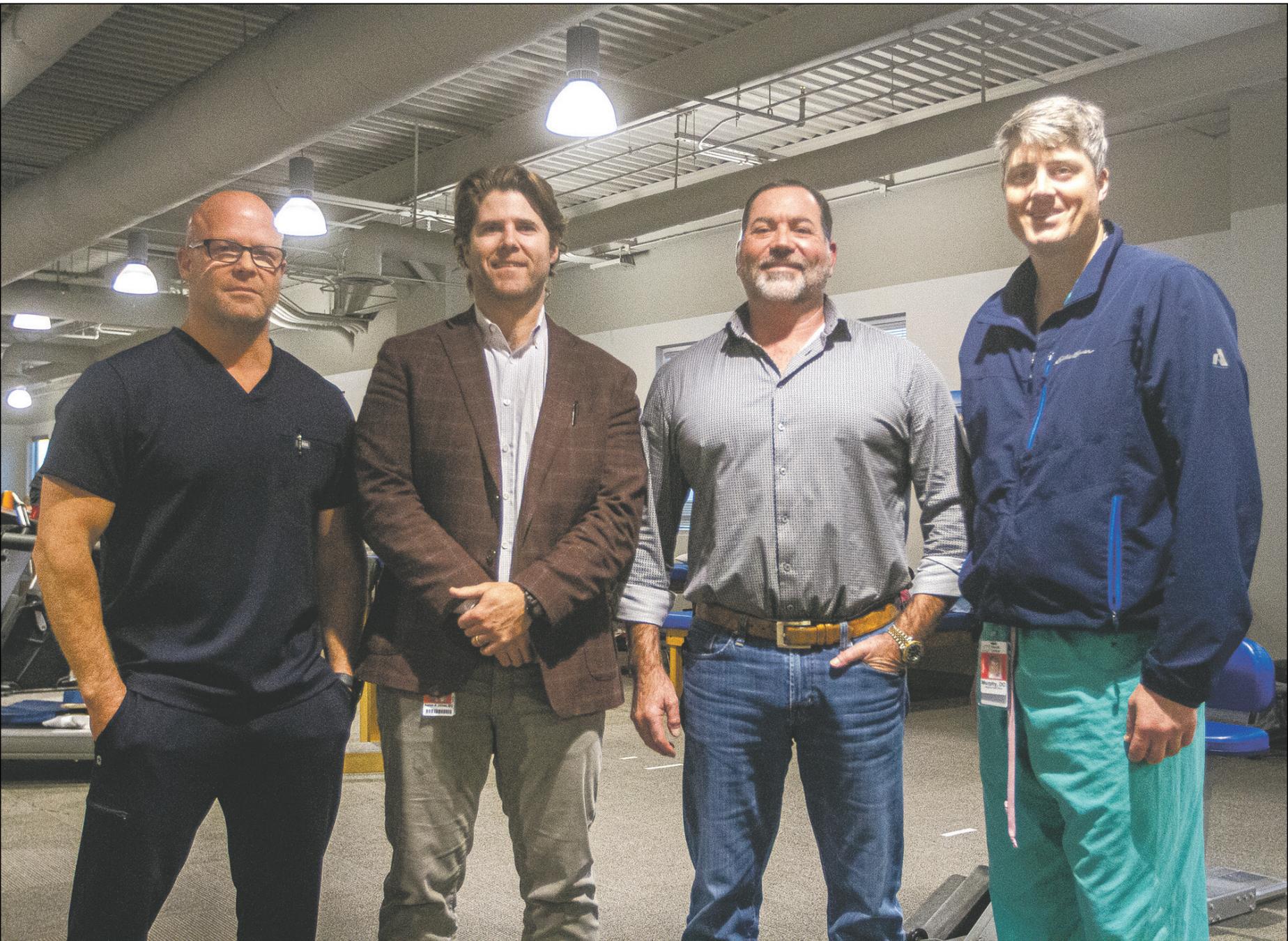
Drive, Suite 300 in Florence; 104 Physicians Drive in Muscle Shoals; and the MRI Center at 1910 Veterans Drive in Florence.

Dr. Jeff Goodman said they work hard to meet demand.

"Today, I did surgery all morning and switched to clinic in the afternoon," he said.

The clinic has established relationships with local hospitals and outpatient facilities throughout the years, which helps with treatment processes.

"We operate at North Alabama Medical Center, Helen Keller Hospital and



From left, Dr. Jeff Hovater, Dr. Aaron Joiner, Dr. Jeff Goodman and Dr. J.T. Murphy pose at North Alabama Bone and Joint Center. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

## BONE AND JOINT

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Shoals Outpatient Surgery Center," Goodman said.

The organization has grown over the years and has anywhere from 70 to 100 employees, including doctors, physician assistants, X-Ray technicians, office staff and others.

"And we're out of space," Goodman said. "We need more space."

He said that is a lot of employees but they are a close-knit group.

"We're like a big family," Goodman said. "They've got my back and I've got their back."

Hovater said many of those at North Alabama Bone and Joint have local ties and everyone enjoys being around each other, which makes a major difference in such a demanding field.

"A lot of us are from here," he said. "That's been a part of it. The whole group gets along."

Hovater said he is proud of the clinic's reputation and it is important to maintain that, because word of mouth

is a big influencer.

"In a small area, people know you're reputation," he said.

The clinic's website lists 10 physicians.

It also has a reputation of quality certified athletic trainers.

Dr. Aaron Joiner said part of that reputation comes from working with trainers and being on hand for high school athletic events, as well as UNA events.

Hovater said that also is important when it comes to being part of the community.

"We've always covered games," he said. "It's big for communities to see us at games."

Doctors at North Alabama Bone and Joint also are team physicians for UNA. In fact, the clinic's name will be in the tunnel coming from the locker room at Bank Independent Stadium when it opens in the fall.

"We have a good relationship with them and are honored to be part of the program," Hovater said.

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Dr. Hillary DelaRosa, owner of Complete Medical Care of the Shoals and Complete Aesthetics Care, prepares a syringe. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

# DelaRosa has a new outlook on medical care

By Alyssa Sutherland  
Staff Writer

Dr. Hillary DelaRosa credits her parents for her interest in the “beauty side of medicine.”

Growing up, she said watching her dad, who was a pharmacist, and her

mom, who was a hairstylist, care for their clients made her fall in love with each of their passions.

“I saw how good people felt, and how sometimes they were even better mothers, wives, husbands, when they felt good,” she said. “And people who feel good about their appearance

tend to take their medicine and have a better outlook on their health. Aesthetics pairs well with overall wellness.”

DelaRosa initially had her medical practice and aesthetics practice under one roof — Complete Medical Care of the Shoals.

However, she knew clients coming in for aesthetic treatments, like Botox, laser treatments and facials, were often sitting next coughing, sneezing patients in the waiting room.

“I wanted aesthetic patients to truly

SEE DELAROSA, S30



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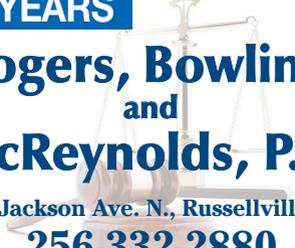
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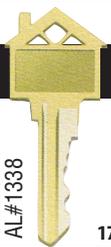
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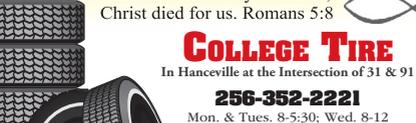
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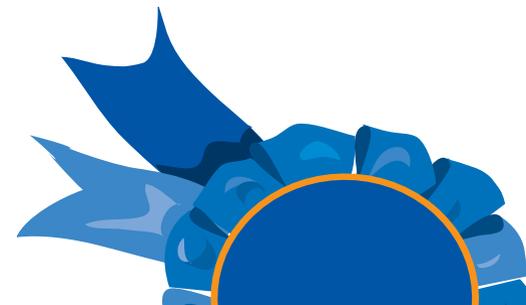
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# DELAROSA

From Page S25

feel a little more pampered and surrounded by beauty,” she said.

That’s when, at the end of 2019, a secondary location devoted solely to aesthetics care, went from dream to reality.

Now, in addition to her medical practice, which is located on Helton Drive and housed under the umbrella of North Alabama Medical Center, DelaRosa has Complete Aesthetics Care, a separate practice located on Mall Road which feels like a beauty retreat.

Guests enter into a lobby filled with natural light, a wall filled with skincare products and soft, plush pink decor.

The theme carries throughout the rest of the office where each space, from esthetician suite to exam room and beyond, includes pink touches and a pop of pretty wallpaper.

Despite the obviously feminine design, DelaRosa said she sees plenty of men in the practice, and they seem to enjoy the light, relaxed atmosphere, too.

She said only in the last few years have people become comfortable speaking openly about aesthetic care — a trend she hopes to see continue.

“There’s a lot of negativity around vanity,” DelaRosa said. “But most of us comb our hair every day. Putting on makeup is vanity, curling our hair is vanity — it took a while to educate the public that it’s OK to want to both feel and look good.”

DelaRosa said if one good thing came from COVID-19, it was a greater appreciation in people for wanting to take care of themselves from every angle.

“The hesitancy should be gone,” she said. “In my personal students, when you like what you see in the mirror, you’re more likely to be happier, kinder to others, experience less depression and anxiety, even start exercising, which is great for the entire body.”

At Complete Aesthetics Care, DelaRosa said they offer everything from various injectables like Botox — which can be used to relax wrinkles and also treat migraines and hyperhidrosis, or excessive sweating — and laser treatments for hair removal to microneedling, facials geared more toward relaxation than repair, lip pigmentation and more.



**Dr. Hillary DelaRosa, owner of Complete Medical Care of the Shoals and Complete Aesthetics Care, right, works together with staff.** [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

They even pierce ears in a safe, sterile environment, and the nurses at the practice offer free consults.

DelaRosa said while she loves the aesthetic side of her practice, she enjoys the medical side just as much.

Often, she noted patients who come to Complete Aesthetics Care will get to know her, then decide they would like to use her as their internal medicine physician, too.

At both practices, she noted it is the people — the patients — who make her love her work.

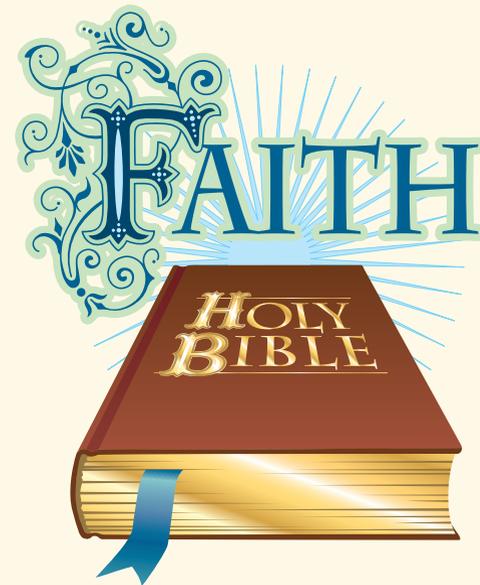
“I really enjoy what I do, and it’s so rewarding on so many different levels,” DelaRosa said. “It’s all tied together. The most moving part of my job in both locations is hearing patients’ personal stories and connecting with them in that kind of a relationship.

“It’s the hard times that often stand out for our patients, and I get to hug them when they are newly widowed or lost a child. But I also get to be excited when they find out they’re pregnant and can’t get Botox treatments for nine months, or when they are engaged and we get to be part of the glow up before the wedding.”



**Dr. Hillary DelaRosa, owner of Complete Medical Care of the Shoals and Complete Aesthetics Care, sits for a portrait.**

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# North Alabama Medical Center a symbol of growth

By Alyssa Sutherland  
Staff Writer

Dr. Bob Bailey has been a Shoals area general surgeon since July 1990.

Initially, he was employed at Florence Hospital, which was located at the now ECM East campus, where he was “the new guy doing the laparoscopy” for gallbladder removals.

“As ECM grew, they bought ... Florence Hospital, and my practice either had to go to Keller or stay there,” Bailey said. “I was already operating there and knew folks. It was an easy transition to stay on this side of the river.”

Bailey said while he was being recruited out of medical school, he was shown plans for a new hospital, which was to be located along Cox Creek Parkway, diagonally across from Deibert Park.

“That never came to fruition, but ECM turning into [North Alabama Medical Center] was huge for this area,” he said. “It provided things the area couldn’t provide earlier.”

Bailey said before NAMC, people considered ECM “nasty” because it was old.

While he noted old does not correlate to nasty, Bailey admitted that perception is reality, and as a result, being able to move to a brand-new hospital made a world of difference for providers, patients and communities in the Shoals and beyond.

“It’s good to be able to stay close to home to get most of your care,” he said. “It’s better for the family and convenient for the patients not having to travel so far.

“We’re sort of a referral center from smaller hospitals over in Mississippi, from southern Tennessee and any areas south of us in Alabama. Sometimes, even from east of us, believe it or not.”

Bailey said he can easily recall move-in day at NAMC, because there was so much excitement.

“Everyone was giddy,” he said. “It was like Christmas — and well, it was almost Christmas. I’d been waiting for it for over 25 years.”

While much has changed — both in the hospital where Bailey practices and the surgical field in general — over the course of his career, Bailey said many things remain the same, too.

“Everyone that I know of is trying to do the best they can to help with whatever problem a patient has,” he



North Alabama Medical Center general surgeon Dr. Robert Bailey said it was Christmas when the employees and staff moved into NAMC in December 6, 2018. “I’d been waiting for it for over 25 years.” [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

said. “The patient contact is the best part of the job. I like that if folks have a problem, I can fix it.”

Over the years, Bailey said his case load has lessened, but he has no

intention of retiring.

He is happy to let the “younger guys” perform procedures with the hospital’s newest robotic tools, however.

“These are the guys who are going to

take care of me and my family,” Bailey said. “I’m happy to let the younger guys have the newer technology. These folks are very good and accomplished at it.”

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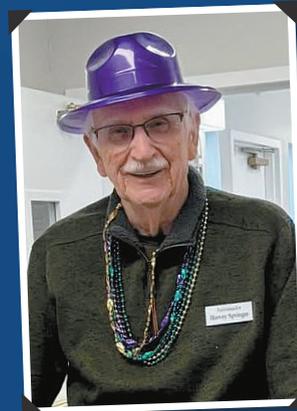
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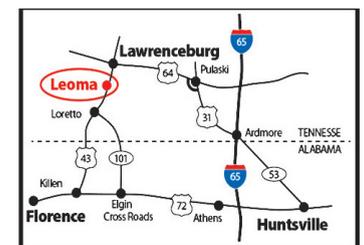
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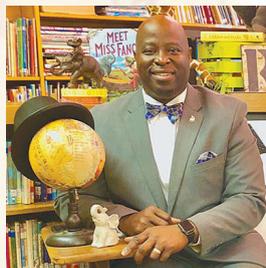
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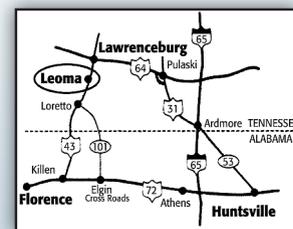


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