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It has been my privilege to serve Tift Regional Health System for the past 28 years. When I first arrived in 1988, my title was Administrator of Tift General Hospital. Three years after I started, this organization marked its 50th anniversary. Now, it is 2016 and we are celebrating 75 years of service.

I think about how far we have come, and it is amazing. What started as Tift County Hospital in 1941, then Tift General Hospital in 1965 and Tift Regional Medical Center in 2001 is now Tift Regional Health System (TRHS).

The success and longevity of TRHS can be attributed to the skill and benevolence of our people, who each carry a proud heritage of serving the community. And, we are just getting started. Tift Regional continues to grow in order to provide you and your loved ones with exceptional medical services.

In our first 75 years, TRHS has only had three board chairmen, and I am honored to say that I have worked with each one of these distinguished individuals. This includes Mr. B.L. Southwell (Chairman: 1947-1993), Mr. John B. Prince, III (Chairman: 1993-2014) and Mr. Jimmy Allen (Chairman: 2014-present). These visionary leaders have each provided keen insight and steady guidance for our progressive institution.

Thanks for allowing us to be your health system of choice. Our tradition of quality care and compassion continues.

Sincerely,

William T. Richardson, FACHE
President/CEO
Dr. Virgil F. Dinsmore was one of the local physicians instrumental in organizing the first hospital in Tift County.

Coastal Plain Hospital was known as “the hospital in the heights.”

By the mid-1930s, a larger, public hospital was needed for Tift County to meet the growing demand for medical services. Operated by the Board of Commissioners of Roads and Revenues of Tift County, the new Tift County Hospital was built in 1940 and formally dedicated on February 7, 1941. With 35 beds and 13 physicians, Tift County Hospital was located in Tifton on the corner of Tift Avenue and 12th Street, facing Fulwood Park.

In 1919, the new Coastal Plain Hospital started operating in Tifton. It was located above Brooks Drug Store in a building on the corner of Love Avenue and Second Street. Dr. L.A. Baker and Dr. N. Peterson were the proprietors of the new hospital, and other physicians later became partners. The building was destroyed by a fire in 1924 and Coastal Plain Hospital moved to a large house on South Park Avenue. This hospital was often referred to as the “hospital in the heights.”

Tift County’s first hospital opened on May 14, 1915 in Tifton on North Central Avenue. Incorporated by a group of local doctors, the hospital was used mainly for surgery. This was a time when physicians still made house calls, so patients needing general medical care and bed rest were typically treated in their homes.
Tift County Hospital was built with a $50,000 bond and some of the equipment was purchased from the Coastal Plain Hospital. The first administrator of Tift County Hospital was superintendent Beulah Harrell. In 1952, the hospital was enlarged from a 35-bed to a 60-bed hospital. In March of 1960, an administrative wing, lobby and prayer room was completed.

In 1962, the Hospital Authority of Tift County was created to assume the responsibilities of the Hospital Board. Although its members have changed through the years, the Hospital Authority has always been comprised of community leaders who have volunteered their time. The first five members included chairman B.L. Southwell and fellow trustees John Sims, L.J. Linsdey, Everett Taylor and C.S. Pittman, Jr.
The Tifton Gazette announces the dedication exercises for the new Tift County Hospital in 1941.

Volunteers with the Tift County Medical Auxiliary visited patients on a regular basis.

Dr. Charles Zimmerman is shown here with triplets at Tift County Hospital.
By 1965, the county had outgrown Tift County Hospital and the Authority began development of a new medical facility on a 20-acre cornfield located in Tifton on 18th Street. Named in honor of Tifton’s founder, Henry Harding Tift, the 85-bed Tift General Hospital opened its doors in 1965. The new, modern medical facility was equipped to provide emergency, surgical, medical, pediatric, obstetrical and gynecological services.

Built at a cost of $1.8 million, financing for the new facility came from a $700,000 bond issue as well as federal Hill-Burton funds. Tift General Hospital was dedicated on October 17, 1965 and had a medical staff of 14 doctors. Patients from Tift County Hospital were transported to the new hospital the previous day. The vacant Tift County Hospital building later became the home of the Tift County Health Department.

From there, Tift General Hospital rapidly grew to meet the growing needs of Tift and 11 surrounding counties, recruiting a wide range of physicians and undergoing several renovations and additions over the years. The bed size was increased to 168 in 1975. In 1982, the B.L. Southwell tower was added and other significant facility expansions were completed in 1985 and 1986.

The Tift General Hospital Auxiliary was formed in 1970. The Auxiliary members, nicknamed “Pink Ladies” and “Redcoats,” opened and operated the first gift shop at Tift General Hospital in 1973. Proceeds from the gift shop continue to benefit the hospital system and Auxiliary members help in many areas by assisting visitors and performing a variety of important tasks.

The Tift General Hospital Foundation, now the Tift Regional Medical Center Foundation, was organized in 1985 by Dr. John H. Dorminy, III and Dr. Sammie D. Dixon. The foundation is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to enriching local health care through fundraising, medical equipment donations, building project assistance, patient experience enhancements, medical scholarships and more.
Tift General Hospital underwent numerous renovations and expansions over the years to keep pace with demand.
In 1993, John B. Prince, III became the second chairman of the Tift County Hospital Authority. Mr. Prince succeeded B.L. Southwell, who served as chairman for 46 years.

By the late 1990s, Tift General Hospital added a new intensive care unit, the Elene Dorminy Women’s Pavilion, a new emergency center and an expanded laboratory. A dialysis center and hospice service was also introduced. The hospital also established outreach clinics in Tifton, Ashburn, Sylvester and Nashville. In 1998, a new, freestanding oncology center opened to serve cancer patients.
As the new millennium approached, Tift General Hospital’s medical staff had more than 95 physicians with expertise in more than 30 specialties. Market share in surrounding counties continued to grow, and a new name was discussed to reflect the hospital’s regional status. In 2000, the Hospital Authority approved to change the name of Tift General Hospital to Tift Regional Medical Center (TRMC), to officially take effect in January 2001.

In 2003, TRMC completed its most extensive expansion project to date—a $35 million hospital addition on the 20th Street side which included a new heart and vascular center, surgery center and patient registration area. Expansion and renovations for medical imaging services were completed later that year. In 2004, the hospital opened an expansion of the oncology center.

In 2007, TRMC acquired the Affinity Health Group building (located in Tifton at the crossroads of U.S. 41 and Interstate 75) and its ancillary services and named the facility the TRMC West Campus. Affinity remained an independent practice and leased space from TRMC. Dr. Joseph Turner founded Affinity Health Group, originally named Tifton Medical Clinic, in 1964. Over the many years, Affinity Health Group had grown from a small primary care practice to the region’s largest multi-specialty group. A brand new, 37,500-square-foot Intensive Care Unit (ICU) with 20 beds opened at TRMC in June 2008.

Tift Regional purchased the Affinity Health Group building and its ancillary services in 2007 and acquired the physician practice in 2010. Today there is Affinity Clinic, Affinity Pediatrics and Affinity Physicians for Women.
In 2009, TRMC implemented a hospital medicine program. In 2010, TRMC formally acquired Affinity Health Group, employed its physicians, and the practice name was changed to Affinity Clinic. TRMC rapidly built a new infrastructure to provide billing, collection, credentialing and management support for a growing physician services division to be called Tift Regional Physician Group.

Between 2010 and 2015, TRMC opened or acquired more than 12 additional physician practices. Major acquisitions included South Georgia Surgical and Georgia Sports Medicine, important specialty practices that were instrumental in shaping the high level of care offered by the Tifton medical community. The strong partnership between Tift Regional and area physicians, both employed and independent doctors, was essential to the hospital’s success.
In 2012, TRMC purchased Memorial Hospital of Adel in Cook County from Sunlink Health Systems, Inc. and the name was changed to Cook Medical Center—A Campus of Tift Regional Medical Center. The acquisition included a 60-bed acute care hospital with a geriatric psychiatric unit as well as Cook Senior Living Center, a 95-bed nursing home.

TRMC and Central Georgia Health System of Macon (now called Navicent Health) became the founding members of Stratus Healthcare in 2012, forming the largest collaborative partnership of hospitals and physicians within the Southeast. Members of the Stratus Healthcare alliance work together to combine resources, develop coordinated information systems, reduce costs and manage the health of populations.

In 2013, TRMC initiated the South Georgia Primary Care Network, which aligns hospital-employed primary care physicians with independent counterparts throughout the region. The goal of the network is to enhance the health and wellness of the community by developing best practices and sharing clinical outcomes data. During this period, TRMC also renovated and expanded the Heart and Vascular Center.

Approximately 50 percent of Tift Regional Medical Center’s patients came from Tift County. The other 50 percent originated from 11 surrounding counties and more. As TRMC developed into a true healthcare network, the umbrella name Tift Regional Health System (TRHS) was adopted in 2013.
In a unique collaboration, TRHS acquired a building located on Carpenter Road in Tifton to serve as the new home of the Tiftarea YMCA. TRHS also provided the YMCA with a special grant for facility renovations. The newly refurbished building became operational in 2013. The Tiftarea YMCA offers a wide range of health, exercise and fitness services. TRHS also opened a community events center connected to the YMCA facility to use for public seminars, health screenings and other educational offerings.

In 2014, Jimmy Allen became the third board chairman in Tift Regional’s history. John B. Prince, III retired from the Hospital Authority of Tift County after nearly 40 years of volunteer service as a board trustee and 21 years as chairman.

In 2015, a new wound care and hyperbaric clinic was introduced. The oncology center also completed a second major expansion and renovation project. The facility was renamed the Anita Stewart Oncology Center thanks to a generous endowment from local resident and Auxiliary volunteer Mrs. Anita Stewart Stovall.

Three Tift Regional clinics also earned the highest level of recognition as a Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) from the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA). Care Alliance, an Accountable Care Organization (ACO) spearheaded by TRHS and local providers, became an approved Medicare Shared Savings Program (MSSP) in 2016.
With a coordinated network of care, Tift Regional Health System’s bond with patients remains strong in its 75th year of service to the community. This relationship will further as TRHS leads into the healthcare of tomorrow.

Tift Regional Medical Center, our flagship hospital, has 181 beds and offers signature services in surgery, oncology, cardiovascular care, women’s health, neurodiagnostics, radiology and more. With TRMC, the TRMC West Campus, Cook Medical Center, Cook Senior Living Center and Tift Regional Physician Group, TRHS has 2,231 employees and 165 medical staff physicians. In addition to providing topnotch medical services, TRHS continues to be an economic engine for the region.

The community has grown and evolved over the past 75 years, and so has Tift Regional Health System. The one thing that has remained constant is the dedication of Tift Regional employees, medical staff, volunteers and board members. Safe, benevolent and quality care will always be at the heart of everything we do.
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