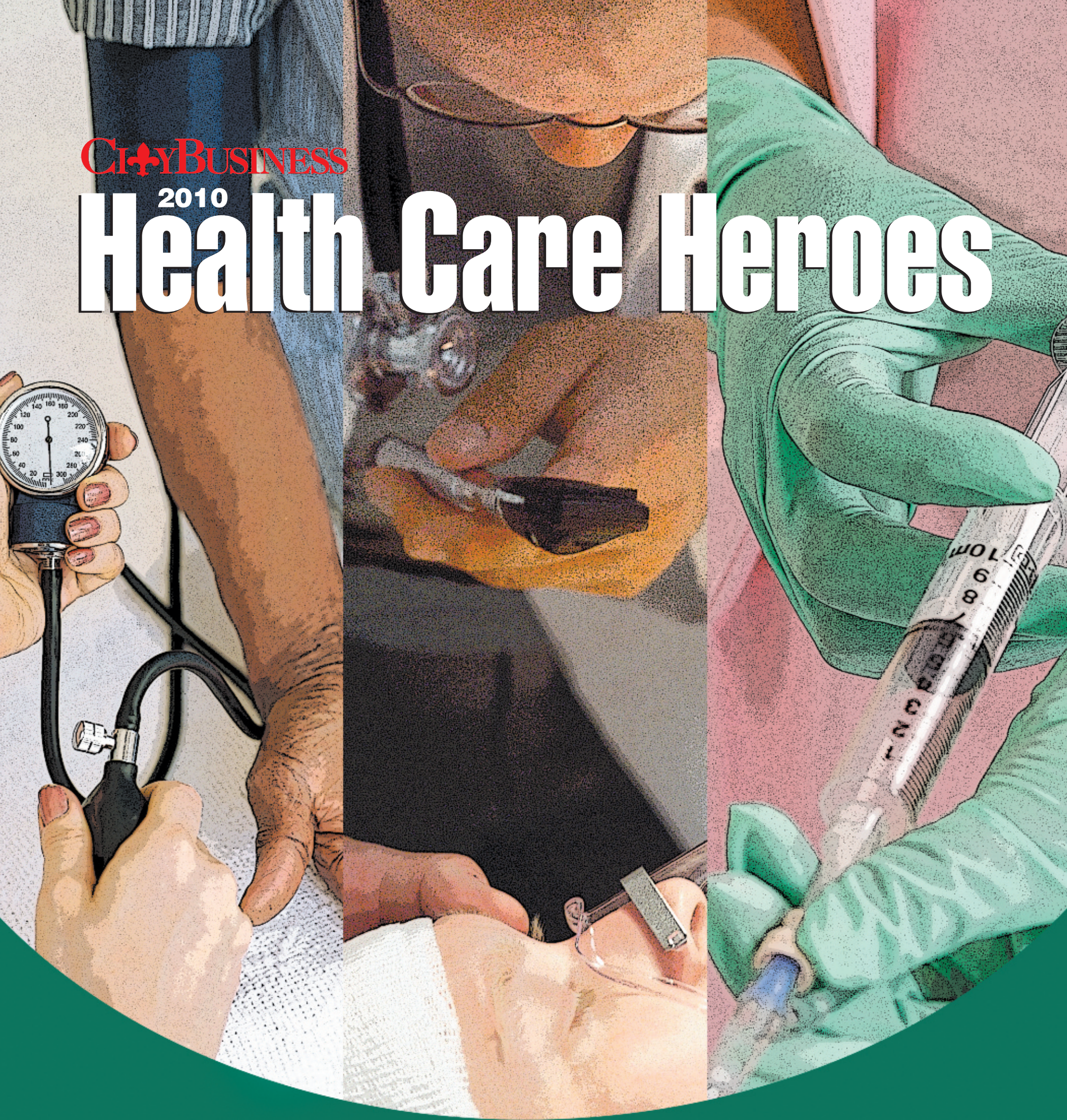


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**Health Care  
 Heroes**



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# Introduction



**Christian Moises**  
News Editor

Worker shortages, more severe health issues, insurance problems, increased patient loads and recruiting challenges make the health care industry tough these days, especially in the New Orleans area.

Mix in the often grueling and heartbreaking situations industry workers face on a daily basis, and one has to wonder how health care professionals stay motivated.

The simple answer is compassion and a desire to help for people.

The 50 honorees in the New Orleans CityBusiness Health Care Heroes Class of 2010 have proved their commitment to the region based on their professional accomplishments, contributions and perseverance.

Divided among six categories — animal care, first responders, nursing, physicians, professionals and volunteers — these honorees are the heartbeat of the region.

As always, choosing honorees poses a big challenge for the selection panel, as their accomplishments and contributions to the area's health care community make every nominee so deserving.

In the program's fourth year, honorees discuss their most challenging, memorable, difficult or rewarding experience, and the stories are powerful.

Many honorees pull from personal experience to relate with and help care for patients. Countless others reach out beyond their clinic, hospital or office walls to care for and educate the community.

This year's veterinarian heroes show their commitment to patients who cannot defend themselves or communicate when they need help, while the first responders represent the best of health care's front line.

Ten nurses are honored this year for providing bedside care while also serving as a comfort for patients in stressful times.

The 20 physicians selected offer the health care industry expertise through research, mentoring, education and daily patient treatment.

This year's 12 health care professional honorees are keeping the industry on the right track. Their contributions involve overseeing construction of new facilities, conducting expanded outreach, providing educational opportunities and establishing new practices and techniques.

And the four volunteers recognized as Health Care Heroes have devoted their time and specialized skills as unpaid aides to help patients and visitors alike.

CityBusiness thanks each of them for their tireless efforts and the difference they make throughout the region.

Congratulations to the Health Care Heroes Class of 2010. •

*News Editor Christian Moises can be reached at 293-9249 or by e-mail at christian.moises@nopg.com.*

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# Health Care Heroes Past honorees

## 2009

### ANIMAL CARE

Karen Miller Becnel  
 Chris Fabacher

### FIRST RESPONDERS

Dan Russo, Dax Russo,  
 Jason Russo  
 Linda Thompson

### NURSING

Diane Abbondante  
 Elizabeth Buras  
 Rosa Bustamante-Forest  
 Cheryl Carter  
 Darlene Gondrella  
 Donna Guzman

Kim Haley  
 Paula Harrelson  
 Dianna Lauve  
 Kathy Steiner  
 Mark Stockstill

**PHYSICIANS**  
 Glenn Casey  
 Pui Chun (Joan) Cheng  
 Michele Cooper  
 Frank DellaCroce and  
 Scott Sullivan  
 Joseph Epps  
 Sander Florman  
 Ana Hands  
 Timothy Harlan

Peter Hertzak  
 William Johnston  
 Leslie Levenson  
 Steve Levine  
 Sam Lucas, Dennis  
 Mello, Chris Snyder  
 Robert Post  
 Eric Richter  
 Carlos Rodriguez-Fierro  
 Hector Ventura

**PROFESSIONALS**  
 Stephen Baldwin  
 Matthew Curole  
 Richard Gaiennie  
 Robert Gardner

Thomas Grimstad  
 Geoffrey Nagle  
 Melba Perez-Berguno  
 Mackie Shilstone  
 Diane Sieta  
 Lillian Stiegler  
 Debra Thibodeaux  
 Steve Worley

**VOLUNTEERS**  
 Viola Cochran  
 Christine Dittmann  
 Betty Dugas  
 Joseph Heintz  
 Walter Melan  
 Mattie Schouet

## 2008

### ANIMAL CARE

Robin Beaulieu  
 Joe Dalgo  
 Kelly Kreider  
 Giselle Moises  
 Liz Saylor

### FIRST RESPONDERS

Briana Briscoe  
 Ryan Brown  
 Juliette Saussy  
 Cecile Tebo  
 Chris Wilt

### NURSING

Lillian Agnelly  
 Sheri Berger

Shane Brossette  
 Bryan Dean  
 Anthony DiGerolamo  
 Kerry Jeanice  
 Brian Mahl  
 Joan Rooney  
 Debbie Schmidt  
 Stella Wright

### PHYSICIANS

Milton Anderson  
 Nicolas Bazan  
 Lisa Bazzett  
 Daniel Bouchette  
 Bryan Bertucci  
 Michael Brothers  
 Charles Brown

Randall Brown  
 Jocelyn Tinsley Greely  
 Emile LaBranche  
 Gabriel Lasala  
 Robert Matheny  
 Norman McSwain  
 Thanh Nguyen  
 Eboni Price  
 Elmore Rigamer  
 Ken Roy  
 Alfred Robichaux  
 Milton Seiler  
 Jim Smith  
 Keith Van Meter  
 Mark Workman

### PROFESSIONALS

Bonnie Arton  
 Redfield Bryan  
 John Celments  
 James Doty  
 Bill Fox  
 Robert Hawley  
 John Lemoine  
 Barbara Moffett  
 Mark Peters  
 Dwayne Thomas

### VOLUNTEERS

Elsie Olivier  
 Philip Olivier  
 Theresa Trosclair  
 Jessie Williams

## 2007

### ANIMAL CARE

Andrew Gutter  
 James Riopelle

### FIRST RESPONDERS

Steven Brown  
 Michael Guillot

### NURSING

Patricia Berryhill  
 Lorris Bouzigard  
 Jan Hebert  
 Ann Kallauner  
 Alice Craft Kerney  
 Patrice Kimball  
 Anna Kokes  
 Mary MacGregor  
 Evelyn Randolph  
 Wayne Rau  
 Lena Riordan

Joan Rooney  
 Jennifer Steel  
 Sally Tusa  
 Nathalie Walker  
 Cynthia Warren  
 Ray Yakelis

**PHYSICIANS**  
 Stephen Bardot  
 Lionel Bourgeois  
 Roland Bourgeois  
 Jay Brooks  
 Gerald Cohen  
 Joseph Crapanzano Jr.  
 Frank Culicchia  
 Karen DeSalvo  
 Raja Dhurandhar  
 Sander Florman  
 Juan Gershanik  
 Joseph Guarisco

Vicky Hebert  
 Kevin Jordan  
 Ronald Liuzza  
 Kevin Martinez  
 Richard Meyer  
 Paul Nathan  
 Steven Ross  
 Swati Shah  
 Charles Thomas  
 Najeeb Thomas  
 Gerald Vocke

**PROFESSIONALS**  
 James Spencer  
 Campbell  
 Bruce Clement  
 D. Scott Crabtree  
 Virginia Davis  
 Les Hirsch  
 Lynn Hobbs-Green

Sarah Hoffpauir  
 Larry Hollier  
 Corey Marvel  
 William Pinsky  
 Patrick Quinlan  
 Warner Thomas  
 Basil Thoppil  
 Lynn Witherspoon  
 Richard Zuschlag

### VOLUNTEERS

Cheron Brylski  
 John DeCamp  
 David Diaz  
 Barbara Hyland  
 Curtis Jacob  
 Lester Johnson  
 Salvador Paz  
 Rudy Sampey  
 Shirley Tuero

# Thomas Pelle Jr.

**Position:** veterinarian, VCA Causeway Animal Hospital

**Age:** 65

**Family:** wife, Marie; sons, Michael, 37, Ryan, 35

**Education:** bachelor's degree in veterinary science, Texas A&M University; doctor of veterinary medicine, Texas A&M

Veterinarian Thomas Pelle Jr. never looked back after he told his parents when he was 6 that he wanted to be a “dog doctor.” With two veterinary degrees under his belt, he has spent the past four decades practicing general medicine, surgery and internal medicine on animals.

Dog and cat owners head to Pelle at VCA Causeway Animal Hospital in Metairie for his knowledge of reproductive physiology and his skills in urogenital surgery. He's often called upon to perform intricate surgical inseminations using a fiber-optic instrument passed through an animal's cervix.

Workweeks at the vet hospital are anything but routine.

“One day, a longtime client brought in her puppy, which she had named Dr. Pelle, after me,” he said. “In the examining room, the puppy jumped up on her, and the client began yelling ‘Dr. Pelle, Dr. Pelle, get off me. You're tearing my dress!’”

Pelle calmed the owner and dog down, and then went out to the waiting room to explain the incident to visitors sitting within earshot.

Pelle started out in small-animal practice in 1969 and joined Causeway Animal Hospital in 1972. He said many factors — the staff, animals and even the building — contribute to his job satisfaction.

“The excellent, hard-working staff at the hospital always makes me look good. Some of their work is behind the scenes and they don't always get the credit they deserve.”

A lifelong resident of the New Orleans area, Pelle landed one of nine spots set aside for Louisiana students the first time he applied to Texas A&M's vet school. The best thing about his years in Texas, he said, was meeting his wife, Marie.

On days off, Pelle likes to fish, garden and relax with his children and eight grandchildren. •

— Susan Buchanan



photo by Frank Aymami

# Greg Rich

**Position:** owner, West Esplanade Veterinary Clinic

**Age:** 55

**Family:** wife, Renee

**Education:** bachelor's degree in dairy science, Louisiana State University; bachelor's degree in medical technology, LSU Health Sciences Center; doctor of veterinary medicine, LSU School of Veterinary Medicine.

When he was a seventh grader, Dr. Greg Rich answered a questionnaire in which he was asked to rank his top five career choices. In the first, second and third slots, he listed “veterinarian.” He left four and five blank.

Rich grew up in a household that had lots of pets, but not the typical dog or cat. His parents taught him responsibility when he got a pet rabbit, requiring him to take care of it. Those experiences helped him form a connection with exotic pets that Rich feels is integral to his job.

“You can love animals, you can love birds, rabbits and ferrets, but there has to be a connection,” said Rich, who owns the West Esplanade Veterinary Clinic.

That connection helps Rich go the extra mile for his patients. When an African gray parrot was brought into his office with a bad leg, the owner was ready to have it euthanized. But Rich felt he could save the bird, so he adopted it and tended to it himself.

When one of Rich's regular clients came to the office and asked about the parrot, which has a 50- to 60-word vocabulary, Rich told her the story. The woman adopted the bird and still cares for it today.

“It's the love of her life,” he said.

Rich's love for his job leads him to work extra hours. There is no 24-hour care facility for exotic pets in the New Orleans area, so if a patient has urgent care needs, Rich will care for the animal at his home, even at night or on weekends.

And despite having done that for many years, Rich has no plans to stop.

Recently, he and a couple of colleagues were discussing what they would do if they won the lottery. While conventional answers such as moving to tropical islands were thrown around, Rich said the only thing he would do differently is take one more day off a week.

“I love what I do,” Rich said. •

— Fritz Esker



photo by Frank Aymami

# Benjamin Glaudi

**Position:** director, New Orleans Police Department Crisis Unit

**Family:** children, Brad, 45, Bruce, 43, Christine, 41, Ben, 41

**Education:** associate's degree in criminal justice, Delgado Community College

A man in his 30s who had decided he would take his own life by drowning left Woldenberg Park and walked into the Mississippi River. By the time New Orleans Police Sgt. Benjamin Glaudi and his team arrived on the scene, the man was bobbing up and down in the swirling current.

"I've lost everything, man. I don't have a thing in the world," Glaudi recalled the man saying.

That's when Glaudi and his NOPD Crisis Unit volunteers stepped in, took the man into protective custody and rushed him to a hospital.

"No matter how acute the situation is, I'll notice a difference in behavior once we get them into the crisis van," Glaudi said. "They feel better when we've gotten them away from their environment. They quiet down."

Glaudi helped organize the unit in 1982 when he heard that callers to the city's suicide hotline were skittish about police coming to help. The specialized state-funded unit uses trained, unarmed volunteers to help save mentally ill people from hurting themselves or others.

Many of Glaudi's cases involve schizophrenics who haven't taken their medication. Once under medical supervision, they're stabilized with medication and social workers provide follow-up care.

Glaudi began his career as a field officer and eventually joined the NOPD's bomb squad, earning the Medal of Merit in 1973 for disarming a time bomb.

That training serves him well now.

Glaudi manages 45 volunteers who go through 13 weeks of training and must be prepared for violence.

"Increasingly, the NOPD Crisis Unit is called to schools to take into custody 10 year olds who threaten teachers, overturn desks and terrorize the classroom," Glaudi said.

But among older people, Glaudi sees deep depression, which he blames partly on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

"One of the most rewarding things is that we're called to help sad, hopeless, helpless individuals," Glaudi said. "They're really suffering."•

— Anne Berry



photo by Frank Aymami

# Paula Kensler

**Position:** vice president of nursing for specialty care services, East Jefferson General Hospital

**Age:** 51

**Family:** single

**Education:** nursing diploma, Charity School of Nursing; bachelor's and master's degrees in nursing, Loyola University; master's degree in business administration, University of New Orleans

Paula Kensler is the daughter of a nurse. With three sisters and a brother who are also in the profession, it's likely she was born with nursing in her blood.

After graduating from Charity School of Nursing, she went to work for East Jefferson General Hospital and moved throughout the intensive care unit as a staff nurse, charge nurse and supervisor before becoming director of ICU and critical care services. While she is no longer in direct contact with patients, Kensler said serving them is still her primary motivation.

"I see my job as how I can serve those who are providing the direct patient care," said Kensler, vice president of nursing for specialty care services at EJGH. "I want to make sure they have the things they need to give that best care, to share the successes of it and work with them to improve it."

Kensler has had a number of memorable moments during her career, but one in particular helped her realize the impact a nurse can have.

She was taking care of a man in his 30s who

was struggling with colon cancer. Kensler developed a bond with the patient, but during the course of his decline, she realized how much nursing was about the patient's family as well.

"They are all in it together, and I saw it was about supporting all of them. Nursing is a privilege because it allows you to be in people's lives at difficult times and to make a real difference," she said.

Kensler also has been recognized for her impact on training and educating first responders and providing them with the latest lifesaving technology.

She has worked to ensure that every EJGH ambulance is equipped with the latest 12-lead EKG technology and has been instrumental in forging a relationship with Delgado Community College, which offers emergency medical technician and paramedic programs at the hospital.

The East Jefferson EMS program has graduated 25 students in the past two years. •

— Craig Guillot



photo by Frank Aymami



# Karen Anthony

**Position:** licensed practical nurse, Lambeth House

**Age:** 68

**Family:** husband, Paul; daughter, Gretchen, 46

**Education:** licensed practical nurse, Charity Hospital; bachelor's degree in nursing, Holy Cross College

As a nurse at Lambeth House, a nonprofit continuing care community in New Orleans, Karen Anthony says it seems fitting that she has landed where she is now.

"I'm a senior citizen myself, so I now take care of people who are just a wee bit older than me," said Anthony, who is 68. "It's been an interesting career path."

Before moving to Lambeth in 2006, Anthony spent 12 years at a long-term care facility working with patients who had sustained traumatic brain injuries. That was after she had spent a dozen years at a psychiatric facility helping patients cope with rape, incest and substance abuse. Earlier, she was a medical/surgical nurse.

Today, Anthony said she considers Lambeth residents, who know her as "Nurse Karen," to be her own caregivers and nurturers.

"I find the life experiences of people in this particular population to be absolutely invaluable to my own growth and development as an older citizen," Anthony said.

She plans activities for the resident day-care dementia program at Lambeth called the Broadway Club, where she draws upon her talents in the visual and performing arts. In past years, she worked in children's theater.

"I come from a generation that was not televised," said



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

Lambeth House nurses Karen Anthony, left, and Keanelias Heyward play Scrabble with a patient.

Anthony, who also is a published poet. "So for the first decade of my life, I didn't have television. We had to act out and make up our own games."

Anthony organizes activities for the Broadway Club that combine drama and storytelling, the latter talent being a relatively recent addition to her repertoire.

"When I was in my 50s, I just decided, 'OK, I'm going to become a storyteller,'" she said.

Anthony said activities involving whole-body movement help

patients because they stimulate the brain's neurological pathways.

"When you're working with people who have Alzheimer's or different kinds of dementia — or they've just gotten older — what's fun to do is to bring in masks and all sorts of things and be very animated," said Anthony, who is working on a master's degree in psychology at Our Lady of Holy Cross College. "If you've forgotten words, you still might be able to rattle a tambourine and tell me how you're feeling that day."•

— Sonya Stinson

photo by Frank Aymami



# Becky Charneco

**Position:** project development coordinator for women and child services, East Jefferson General Hospital

**Age:** 42

**Family:** husband, Frank; children, Zachary, 9, Mackenzie, 5

**Education:** bachelor's degree in nursing, William Carey College

With nearly 15 years of women and child-care services experience, Becky Charneco has emerged as an advocate of letting women determine their own birthing experiences, supported by an abundance of information.

That's why she sees her job as an ongoing battle against misinformation.

"We work to make sure that our classes are evidence-based and not based on something that someone in authority said or because we have been doing something a certain way for 20 years or more," said Charneco, project coordinator of women and child services at East Jefferson General Hospital. "It's a sort of challenging of myths."

Many women come in and think that formula feeding is safe or that it is a good thing that their friend had a Caesarian-section for no reason, Charneco said.

"Their opinions are based on things they have heard or been told, but not on evidence-based research," said Charneco, "all of which is why education is so important."

Charneco works with mothers from their teens to their 40s, teaching informed consent, which is a set of questions allowing mothers to speak with their physician, opening the door to communication so they feel free to ask questions.

"Sometimes they look at the physician as one who knows everything, and that may not be the case. It may be that a doctor is doing something because that is what the majority of his patients have wanted or a nurse in labor and delivery just does out of habit."

One of the myths Charneco faces is the idea that breast-feeding is a bad thing.

"Actually evidence-based research shows just the opposite," said Charneco, who is also the president of the Greater New Orleans Breastfeeding Awareness Coalition.

With more than 200 people attending EJGH's pre-natal classes annually, Charneco said her job is always rewarding.

"We are helping the parents find the answers to the questions they ask."•

— Garry Boulard

# Debbie Godsey

**Position:** director of nursing, St. Anna's Residence

**Age:** 57

**Family:** husband, Eugene Woltering; children, Nathaniel Woltering, 28, Regina Godsey, 26, Catherine Woltering, 26

**Education:** associate's degree in nursing, Austin Peay State University

At St. Anna's Residence in the Lower Garden District, director of nursing Debbie Godsey oversees a staff of 50 and says she benefits as much from the facility's elderly clientele as they do from her.

"You can learn a lot from a 90-year-old who wants to share their experiences," she said. "As a retired Army nurse, I particularly like hearing residents' World War II stories. I've heard so much history from them, lessons you wouldn't get from people in their 30s."

St. Anna's is a nondenominational, non-profit nursing home on Prytania Street that provides long-term and Alzheimer's care. Godsey said she's also soaked up some local history at St. Anna's, which began in 1850 as an asylum for women and children during the city's yellow fever epidemic.

Today, the home serves older residents needing licensed nurses and therapists on a frequent basis and differs from an assisted-living facility by providing more medical attention.

In working with her staff, Godsey empha-

sizes the importance of effective communication with clients.

"In long-term care, the challenge is to meld medical treatment with the emotional needs of the resident and their loved ones," she said. "After a resident is admitted, factors for their well-being, including family needs, have to be considered to ensure trust."

A U.S. Army nurse for 24 years, Godsey was activated to the Middle East for Operation Desert Storm. In the military, she saw plenty of trauma but less illness than she sees at St. Anna's.

Godsey volunteers with the Carcinoid Cancer Awareness Network to educate patients about the disease. She attends and speaks at conferences about carcinoid cancer, which develops between the hormonal and nervous systems.

At home, Godsey likes to cook, and though she's not always keen on sharing her recipes, she enjoys feeding family members and friends. •

— Susan Buchanan



Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

# Jacqueline Havnen

**Position:** brain injury rehabilitation unit staff nurse, Touro Infirmary

**Age:** 32

**Family:** husband, Jon

**Education:** associate's degree in nursing, Charity School of Nursing; bachelor's degree in rehabilitation sciences, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center; master's degree in health sciences, LSUHSC

The road to recovery can be a long one for patients who survive a serious accident. After the struggle for survival is over, they are often left with debilitating injuries that can affect them for the rest of their lives.

That's where Jacqueline Havnen enters the picture. As a staff nurse in the brain injury rehabilitation unit at Touro Infirmary, it's her job to help patients put the pieces of their life back together.

"After the life and death issues have been resolved, patients must adjust to what their new lives will be," Havnen said. "We help patients and their families adjust."

Havnen started her health care career in 2001 as a case manager for trauma patients at Touro, where she served as a liaison between the families and the medical team. And while she enjoyed the work, she wanted to do more to help the patients.

"I wanted to have more hands-on contact with the patients and families," Havnen said.

In 2007, she became a staff nurse in the hospital's brain injury unit. The mental and emotional aspects of helping people try to get their lives back on track, in addition to the physical obstacles, can be challenging.

But the plus side is that when patients are able to get their lives back, it can be very rewarding, Havnen said.

She remembers a patient who suffered a severe spinal cord injury and had no insurance. Once he recovered, he took pictures for the hospital as a way of paying them back.

"I've had comatose patients unable to eat or verbalize their thoughts and leave us able to walk, eat regular foods and express their needs," Havnen said. "I feel like we're truly making a difference in someone's life." •

—Fritz Esker



photo by Frank Aymami

# Denise Johnson

**Position:** nurse practitioner and clinical director, Louisiana Breast and Cervical Cancer Program New Orleans  
**Age:** 52  
**Family:** husband, Ronald; children, Rhonda, 32, Rochelle, 30, Renee, 28, Ronald Jr., 21  
**Education:** bachelor's degree in nursing, Loyola University; master's degree in nurse practitioner, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center

Denise Johnson is no stranger to being the bearer of bad news.

"I have to tell someone every week they have breast cancer," said Johnson, a nurse practitioner and clinical director of the Louisiana Breast and Cervical Cancer Program New Orleans, which provides full Medicaid benefits to eligible women who have been diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer.

Johnson said with every diagnosis she must give a patient, she then offers to pray with them.

"I've never had anyone turn down the offer to pray with them," she said. "The spiritual connection is important. I pray with them, and I pray for them."

But Johnson ministers to her patients in more ways than prayer; she provides them with someone on whom they can count.

Johnson said many of her patients do not have family or local support. That's why she said she's committed to go the extra mile, sometimes quite literally.

Johnson often picks her patients up from their homes and brings them to their physician appointments and treatments. She also brings them to church.

"If you don't have a support system, it is really difficult," Johnson said. "So I give my time as I can."

Once Johnson provides her patients with their treatment options and refers them to a surgeon, her clinic meetings with them cease. But she continues to keep in touch.

"I let them know they are not alone in this fight," Johnson said.

Johnson said many of her patients appreciate the close, personal manner she brings to their illness.

"It means a lot to have a patient come back and say, 'Thank you for all you do,'" Johnson said.

When she is not working, Johnson volunteers her time at weekend health fairs, making women age 40 to 64 aware of free mammograms that are available. •

— Whitney Pierce Santora



photo by Frank Aymami

# Mary Kelly

**Position:** assistant nursing administrator, Louisiana State University Interim Public Hospital  
**Age:** 43  
**Family:** single  
**Education:** nursing degree, Charity School of Nursing; bachelor's and master's degrees in nursing, master's degree in health administration, University of Phoenix

Mary Kelly's desire to become a nurse dates back to her childhood when she saw nursing as a profession that helped people. Working at a hospital with a family culture that served people in her own community was even more rewarding.

"Charity (Hospital) was always a community, and you always knew someone that went there," said Kelly, assistant nursing administrator at Louisiana State University Interim Public Hospital.

"I was born at Charity, and I went there as a kid," she said. "What keeps me going is that at the end of the day, I know I'm making a positive impact on health care in my community."

Kelly has almost 20 years of experience in the nursing field. Starting her career in 1991 at the Charity Hospital medical-surgical unit, she has moved throughout the hospital, gaining experience in varied aspects of patient care.

"I wanted the challenge and think it made

an impact on everything I did from that point forward," she said.

Kelly encountered a number of challenging moments at Charity during her career but said they all contributed to her knowledge and experience. When she graduated nursing school, she worked on the fifth floor medicine unit, which had a 9-to-1 patient-nurse ratio.

She is a graduate of the McFarland Congregational Wellness Faith Community Nursing Program and puts her nursing skills to work at the Bible Way Missionary Baptist Church, where she provides the congregation with information on preventative medicine. She also coordinates speakers who address topics as such as breast and prostate cancer.

"I want to empower people with preventative medicine. It's just about looking at prevention versus reacting to health care later on," Kelly said. •

— Craig Guillot



photo by Frank Aymami

# Vera King

**Position:** psychiatric nurse, Louisiana State University Medical Center Clinics

**Age:** 55

**Family:** son, Jansen LeRay King Sherman, 19

**Education:** bachelor's degree in nursing, Dillard University; master's degree in nursing, University of Southern Mississippi

When Vera King was working in Charity Hospital's nephrology unit at the beginning of her career, she became fascinated with the psychology related to the care of her kidney patients.

"What I observed as a new nurse was that there were some patients who were unsettled, unsure about their treatment plans — just a little basic fright and anxiety about being attached to a dialysis machine," King said.

Her interest in mental health eventually led her nursing specialty and pursuit of graduate studies in the field with a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health.

Whether in mental or physical health care, King said patient-centered communication is essential to achieving good outcomes. It's also important that health care professionals realize patients react differently based on a host of experiences and emotional needs.

King says a more individualized approach produces impressive results. She cites one particular case that showed the importance of creating a flexible hospital release plan that

took into account the patient's special needs.

A patient in the LSU Medical Center's geriatric psychiatric unit had been diagnosed with major depression. While she demonstrated a high level of perception, her physical ability was very low.

"She was wheelchair-bound and not performing (to meet) any of her basic needs," King says. "Her self-care deficit was severe, and she would not respond verbally when addressed. Her husband was providing all aspects of her care."

Initially, King didn't think the patient was an appropriate candidate for outpatient treatment, but she led a team in developing a tailored treatment plan that could be adapted to address new issues that arose along the way. They were amazed when the patient began speaking again, walking without a cane and even entertaining at her home.

"I can still recall the image of her dancing at the party (celebrating) her discharge from the program," King said. •

— Sonya Stinson



photo by Frank Aymami

# Keith Norman

**Position:** emergency department nurse supervisor, Interim Louisiana State University Public Hospital

**Age:** 43

**Family:** wife, Donna; children, Troy, 23, Lance, 21, Sa'Rah, 19

**Education:** bachelor's degree in nursing, Grambling State University

Keith Norman remembers his first impressions of the chaotically busy emergency room at the old Charity Hospital.

"Charity was different at that time, with patients in the hallway everywhere waiting for treatment," said Norman, who remembers being there fresh from Opelousas in a three-piece suit receiving a tour from the manager.

"I felt overwhelmed. I had never been in a trauma center before and was in awe seeing all of the things that were going on."

That initial impression may have been the last time Norman felt overwhelmed. For the past 17 years, he has been the nurse supervisor for what is now the Interim Louisiana State University Public Hospital, where he regularly brings to his work a steadiness of purpose that tends to calm his staff.

"The toughest part about my job is that we obviously see a lot of gunshot wounds," he said. "And in these kinds of emergency situations, you have a lot of people who are pumped up and the adrenaline is rushing."

As a supervisor, Norman said he mentors

younger nurses no matter what is going on.

"So that makes it even more important that I stay calm and focused," he said. "If my staff sees me that way, they become more calm, too, and can focus on the task at hand and do a better job."

Norman became interested in working in the health care industry during high school when his sister, Iris Malone, was training at the Charity School of Nursing.

"I was intrigued by the things she told me and decided that one day I wanted to work in that particular hospital," he said.

Throughout the years, Norman has watched as the American College of Surgeons declared the Interim LSU Public Hospital a Level 1 Trauma Center, meaning it has enough surgical specialists, beds and equipment to deal with any emergency.

That designation means the emergency department will remain as busy as ever, and that's a prospect that fails to daunt Norman.

"It's not for everybody. It has to be a part of your calling." •

— Garry Boulard



photo by Frank Aymami

# Laurie Norman

**Position:** orthopedic service line director and clinical nurse specialist, East Jefferson General Hospital

**Age:** 34

**Family:** daughters, Tori, 16, Raleigh, 10

**Education:** associate's degree in nursing, Charity School of Nursing; bachelor's degree in nursing, Loyola University; master's degree in nursing, University of South Alabama

The seeds for Laurie Norman's interest in health care were planted when she was young. Inspired in part by the example of a neighbor who was a nurse in the newborn nursery at East Jefferson General Hospital, she set her sights on nursing school while she was still in high school.

"I always thought I would like a career where I would have the opportunity to help others," Norman said.

Early in her training, Norman aspired to work with babies in the intensive care unit. Today, she works primarily with orthopedic patients, one of only 39 nurses in the state certified in the specialty.

Her focus is the product of a requirement at the time that she finished her associate's degree that all new nurses perform a rotation on the surgical floor before selecting a specialty. Norman figured she would do her orthopedics rotation and move on, "but I loved it," she said.

Patients "came in with an issue, you fixed them, they got better." The work, she said, represents "the positive side of nursing."

Norman has worked for the past 11 years at EJGH, where she has developed the Total Joint Program, an educational and exercise program for patients undergoing joint replacement surgery. Starting in June, she'll help manage the hospital's new sports medicine program.

Her professional accomplishments aside, Norman continues to focus on her academic pursuits. Since starting in the field, Norman has obtained three additional nursing degrees while working full time.

"I had a book in my face" pretty consistently for a time, said Norman, who at one point was working, going to school and raising two daughters on her own. "My poor children were used to me studying and writing papers."

And she isn't sure she's finished with school.

"After Charity, I said I'd never go back," she said. "That didn't last. Maybe in a couple years I'll go back and get my MBA."•

— *Emilie Bahr*



photo by Frank Aymami

# Mikeal Swift

**Position:** charge nurse, St. Charles Surgical Hospital

**Age:** 38

**Family:** husband Jeffrey; sons, Jeffrey-David, 11, Jaxon, 6

**Education:** licensed professional nurse, Louisiana Technical College-Jefferson; registered nurse, Charity School of Nursing

Mikeal Swift has been a caretaker since her childhood when she worked as a candy striper. She also was influenced by her mother and grandmother, both nurses. And while she planned to be a journalist, she found her way back to nursing.

Swift worked as a licensed practical nurse before becoming a registered nurse in 2002 and now cares for breast surgery patients as a charge nurse at St. Charles Surgical Hospital. She said she enjoys the small patient-to-nurse ratio and the emotional support she's able to provide.

"This is an ideal setting for a nurse. You can spend time with your patient," she said. "It's really about the total health of the patient. I feel like I've gone to nurse heaven."

St. Charles Surgical offers breast reconstruction to mastectomy patients using their own body tissue, which is often taken from the abdomen. Doctors pay particular attention to the cosmetics of the procedure.

"They leave with a whole new attitude," Swift said. "It's just a joy to see women who've

been through so much get their lives back."

Swift recalled a particular patient who, while at the center, received news that her cancer had spread and her prognosis was bleak.

"Just to be with her in that moment, I will never forget that," she said. "I know she is in a fight for her life even now."

The particular patient was a pathologist and fully understood her diagnosis. Swift enjoyed being able to provide comfort when those closest to the patient were grieving.

"It was nothing you could say," Swift said. "She didn't have to worry about our feelings or our emotions. She could just cry."

Swift strives to be a good patient advocate and continue learning, offering patients the best care available.

Her compassion extends to St. Matthew United Methodist Church, where she is a member-at-large on the administrative council, vice president of the youth scholarship committee and an usher. •

— *Diana Chandler*



photo by Frank Aymami

# Alfred Abaunza

**Position:** chief regulatory officer, West Jefferson Medical Center

**Age:** 66

**Family:** daughter, Carolyn, 34

**Education:** attended Vanderbilt University; doctor of medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine

As chief regulatory officer at West Jefferson Medical Center in Marrero, Alfred Abaunza makes sure the 450-bed nonprofit hospital complies with state and federal laws.

Abaunza, a former medical director and a 10-year veteran at the center, said he doesn't mind tackling piles of intimidating paperwork. While changing health care laws create uncertainty for the medical community, he welcomes the new challenges.

Abaunza developed training programs at WJMC that, he said, turned out to be an effective way to recruit out-of-state doctors. Through his initiative and the help of others, the hospital partnered in 2006 with medical schools at Louisiana State and Tulane universities to train residents after Charity Hospital and the Veterans Affairs Medical Center were flooded.

The city's two major medical schools make New Orleans a unique, regional hub for health care, said Abaunza, whose training at Ochsner included working as an internist and focusing on pulmonary disease.

Angela Greener, chief administrative offi-

cer at West Jefferson Medical Center, said Abaunza is devoted to the hospital and will do almost anything to help a worthy cause there.

At an event to raise money for the American Heart Association, "Employees put money in glass jars labeled with the names of hospital executives they most wanted to see dressed up in a costume," Greener said. "Dr. Abaunza's jar was the fullest, and he was asked to wear a Raggedy Ann outfit with a cap and long red braids for several hours a day. He didn't mind doing it at all."

A New Orleans native who lived in Utah during his residency, Abaunza said he attended medical school because he wanted to help people and hoped to do good.

Colleagues consider him an unsung hero, who after Katrina secured a mobile pharmacy for West Jefferson, installed power, rounded up seven pharmacists and convinced the National Guard to provide security. Medicine was dispensed on the spot, preventing illnesses and saving lives on the West Bank. •

— Susan Buchanan

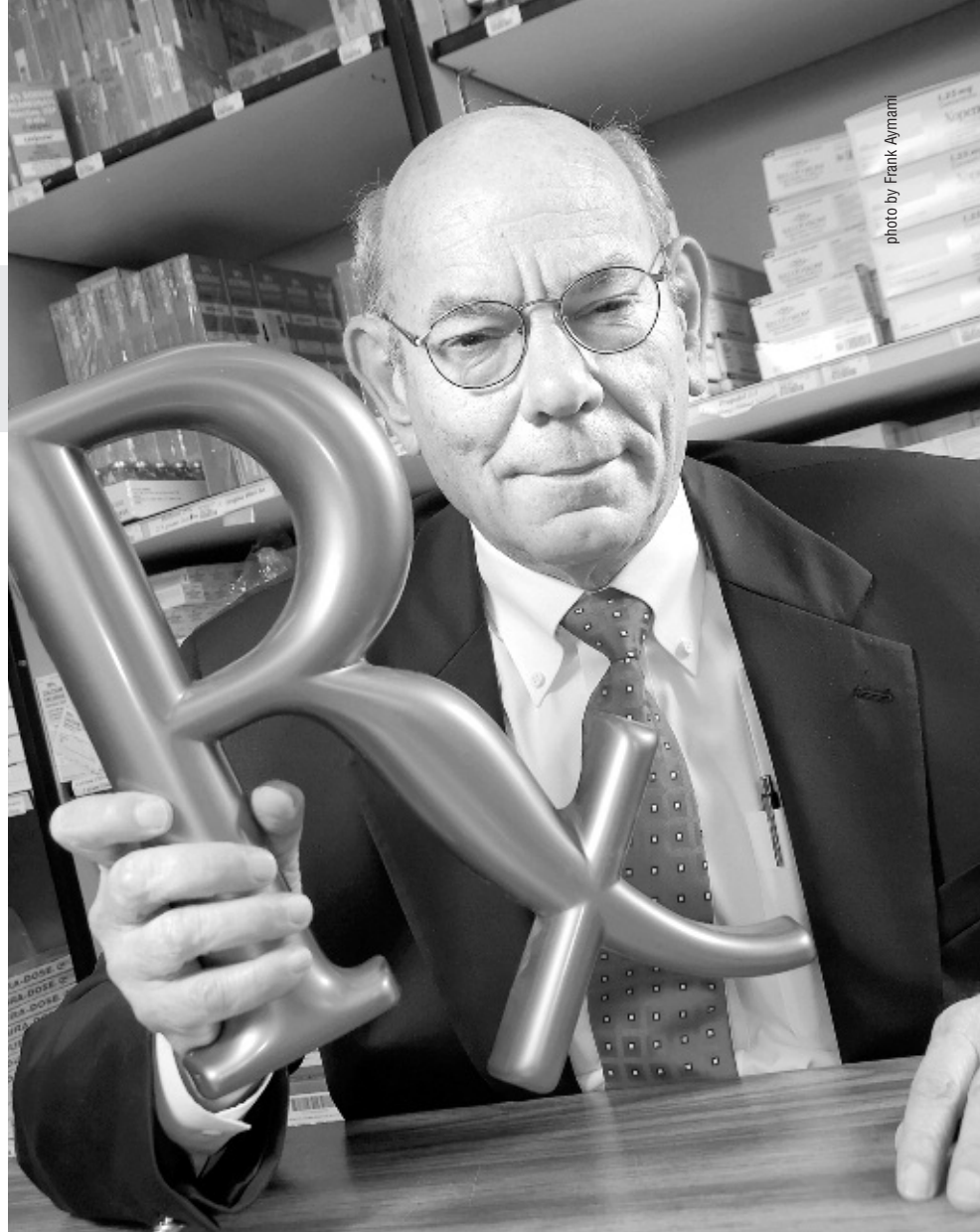


photo by Frank Aymami



# Adrienne Atzemis

**Position:** medical director, Audrey Hepburn Children at Risk Evaluation Center, Children's Hospital; program director, child abuse pediatric fellowship program, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center; assistant professor of clinical pediatrics, LSUHSC

**Age:** 35

**Family:** husband, P.J.; children, Max, 10, Emmelyne, 6

**Education:** bachelor's degree in biology, John Carroll University; doctor of medicine, Creighton University

Determining whether a child has been abused is not easy. For Dr. Adrienne Atzemis, the work is rewarding on many different levels.

"It combines everything I love about medicine," Atzemis said.

She describes her cases as complex and challenging on an intellectual level, but never monotonous. They allow her to meet and develop relationships with professionals in other fields, such as lawyers, police, social workers and psychologists.

And she loves working with children.

"These children are just beautiful children who have had to overcome so much," Atzemis said. "People think the kids will be sad, melancholy and depressed, but it's the opposite."

Aside from determining whether physical or sexual abuse has occurred, part of Atzemis' work is creating an atmosphere where children feel safe. Part of that feeling of security comes

from knowing they can talk to an adult who will not judge them or overreact to anything they say.

"As soon as they realize it's a safe place where they can talk, they tell us everything," Atzemis said.

One patient who stands out in Atzemis' memory is a girl who was sexually assaulted by a family member when they evacuated to Cleveland after Hurricane Katrina. A year after initially examining the child, Atzemis was called to testify in court. In the anteroom, Atzemis sat with the girl and her mother. The girl didn't recognize Atzemis at first, but once they began talking, she remembered her and said, "You're the lady with the nice voice."

While Atzemis said she understands that children won't always remember their visit with her, she takes great pride in being remembered for her compassion. •

— Fritz Esker

PHYSICIANS

# John Breaux

**Position:** cardiothoracic surgeon, Louisiana Medical Center and Heart Hospital

**Age:** 50

**Family:** wife, Betina; children, Jason, 21, Eric, 21, Elise, 18

**Education:** bachelor's degree in zoology, Louisiana State University; doctor of medicine, LSU School of Medicine

Dr. John Breaux, a cardiothoracic surgeon at Louisiana Medical Center and Heart Hospital in Lacombe, has earned the respect of his peers by having performed about 8,000 heart operations with a 1 percent mortality rate.

That respect has grown since he introduced the Mini-Maze procedure locally.

The Mini-Maze is a minimally invasive procedure in which small incisions, made on either side of the chest, block the electrical impulses that cause the fibrillation by using an energy source to make precise scars on the heart.

Breaux said throughout his medical career, cardiologists and electro-physiologists were always encouraging use of the procedure, as it was used in other major organ systems for the past two to three decades. With further development, the Mini-Maze was introduced into atrial fibrillation treatments.

"It being minimally invasive made it

very exciting," Breaux said.

The procedure does not make use of the heart/lung machine, and patients experience a much shorter recovery time. It's called a maze because of the route it takes to get to the heart.

Breaux said there is skepticism of the new surgery option but because many people are frustrated with most existing forms of atrial fibrillation treatment, "It's not a hard sell. (Patients) eagerly seek an alternative."

After several sessions of training in Las Vegas and Killeen, Texas, in monitored and supervised environments, Breaux performed his first Mini-Maze about two years ago. Since that time, he has performed about 25 of the procedures with a success rate of about 75 percent.

"We've had some patients come in four or five weeks post-op saying how amazing they feel," Breaux said. •

— Whitney Pierce Santora



photo by Shannon Diecidue



photo by Frank Bymann

PHYSICIANS

# Wesley Bryan

**Position:** urologist, West Jefferson Medical Center

**Age:** 39

**Family:** wife, Frances; sons, William, 11, David 7

**Education:** bachelor's degree in biology, Tulane University; doctor of medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine

As a champion for patients and families who are diagnosed with prostate cancer, Wesley Bryan is a popular urologist at West Jefferson Medical Center.

He knows that surviving prostate cancer starts with diagnosing and understanding the disease and its effects. To that end, Wesley established the Man to Man Prostate Cancer Support Group in partnership with the American Cancer Society. Its goal is to help men understand the disease through monthly meetings where patients can support one another and listen to speakers who discuss everything from erectile dysfunction to healthy eating.

"It's just a place where these men and their families can come on the West Bank to talk and find support. Awareness and support is critical," Bryan said.

Bryan spent six years in residency at Tulane University Hospital and practiced on the Mississippi Gulf Coast before returning to New Orleans to open his practice in 2005.

The 39-year-old said he knew he was going to

go into medicine from an early age, but he was drawn to urology because he could combine surgery and medicine. His practice allows him to follow a patient through diagnosis to completely curing them or resolving the issue through surgery.

Bryan also said urology allows him to use some of the latest technology and scopes.

"It's a great mix of procedures and patient care. I really like helping people, and I'm not yet jaded enough to have lost that. And I like surgery because it often allows you to fix the problem," he said.

Bryan has encountered a number of challenging cases during his career. One of the most memorable was an elderly woman with bladder cancer. Turning 78 at the time of her surgery, he led her through a radical cystectomy and urinary diversion.

"It was a memorable patient because we were able to completely cure her. Being able to do that is really what drew me into this career," Bryan said. •

— Craig Guillot

# John Couk

**Position:** emergency department associate director, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center  
**Age:** 46  
**Family:** single  
**Education:** bachelor's degree and doctor of medicine, Michigan State University

John Couk said he knew from an early age that he wanted to work in the emergency room.

"I took a first aid class when I was in high school so that I could get into the county fair for free," the Michigan native said. "I liked it, so I took a basic (emergency medical technician) class and worked on an ambulance. I actually had my EMT license before I had my driver's license."

Today, Couk is the clinical lead on a project of the Louisiana State University Health Care Services Division called QualED, which focuses on improving emergency health care at all seven LSU hospitals, including the LSU Health Sciences Center in New Orleans, where he is associate director.

Several pilot programs at LSU emergency rooms allowed Couk's team to study how many and what kinds of patients are admitted, how long it takes patients to receive care and how well the hospitals address the needs of special patient populations.

"We've (implemented) things such as the Rapid Treatment Area, where a patient

comes in and can see a doctor as soon as possible," Couk said.

"In New Orleans, we have 29 beds in our emergency department, so when the 30th person showed up, they would have to wait. We devised a way for those people to be able to see a doctor even if the emergency department is full."

Another major initiative was to create a designated area in the ER for patients with behavioral health problems.

Developed in cooperation with the New Orleans Police Department's Crisis Unit, LSU's behavioral health intake program was a first for a local hospital.

The QualED project also led to improved coordination among hospitals to admit patients and get them out of the emergency department faster, new programs to help first responders evaluate heart attacks and strokes in the field and a new telepsychiatry program that lets patients in remote areas have video consultations with mental health professionals. •

— Sonya Stinson



photo by Frank Aymami

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PHYSICIANS

# Raymond DeCorte

**Position:** medical director, East Jefferson General Hospital

**Age:** 50

**Family:** wife, Susan; children, Rachel, 23, Ben, 20, Joey, 13

**Education:** bachelor's degree in biology, University of New Orleans; doctor of medicine, Louisiana State University School of Medicine



photo by Frank Aymami

Despite his 20 years as a practicing surgeon, Dr. Raymond DeCorte maintains that perhaps his greatest professional challenge has been an ongoing effort to make all patient records at East Jefferson General Hospital electronic.

"It's been an exceedingly big project for us," said DeCorte, who joined EJGH in 1990, was named medical director in 2006 and became chief of staff in 2007.

"We started all of this four years ago," DeCorte said. "I was one of those trying to lead the medical staff, trying to get them to embrace the idea of going electronic."

While DeCorte was focused on showing the transfer would save time and make employees more productive, the buy-in was not automatic as the hospital had always been paper-based. With about 19,000 admissions a year, the idea of processing information in a different way seemed revolutionary.

But the idea ultimately was embraced, DeCorte said, not because it has proven to be more convenient for the hospital's staff but

because it has enhanced patient care.

"Obviously, this kind of a system is better for the patient because the data can be so readily available to make a decision in a timely fashion, rather than having to depend on information being delivered to the paper chart," DeCorte said. "They can call up radiology studies, their own reports, past records of patients in the hospital, anything, instead of having to go to the medical records office and pull out some dusty old chart."

With a staff that fluctuates between 655 and 670, DeCorte also works with what he describes as a "large allied health staff of advanced practice nurses that we have credentialed, which brings our total up to well over 700."

His goal for the future, he said, is to help EJGH remain on the cutting edge of care, using the latest technology to help patients and outcomes.

"The edge keeps moving forward and we need to keep up with that edge, or even push the edge," DeCorte said. •

— Garry Boulard



**Aubrie Augustus, RN**  
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*Strong patient advocate for our tiniest patients.*



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East Jefferson General Hospital

# Corey Hebert

**Position:** pediatrician, Tulane University Medical Center; chief medical editor, WDSU  
**Age:** 40  
**Family:** son, Corey Jr., 12  
**Education:** bachelor's degree in biology, Morehouse College; doctor of medicine, Meharry Medical College

Dr. Corey Hebert is familiar to many as the bow tie-wearing medical editor for WDSU. But he's also a busy pediatrician managing a variety of other professional endeavors while tending to the needs of his 12-year-old son, Corey Jr.

Hebert pins his first interest in medicine to a medical scare confronted when he was 5.

"I was bitten by a dog in the face," he said. "After many stitches and procedures, I said, 'I wanna do what those guys do.'"

As he advanced through school, Hebert's interest in medicine grew along with a desire to make a difference on a grand scale. Those interests ultimately led him to build a name for himself outside of the traditional medical setting. Hebert figures his media presence enables him to help "thousands of people at the same time."

In addition to his TV appearances, Hebert hosts a medical radio show and lectures on various topics at corporate gatherings and other events. He is also chief medical officer for the Recovery School District and operates Hebert Medical Consulting.

On a typical day, Hebert said he fields

about 50 phone calls, 100 e-mails and reports to three different jobs.

"I have so many people pulling at me all at the same time," he said, "but it's a lot easier than residency."

Hebert initially came to New Orleans for his residency. He stayed, he said, because he found the city a place where a big difference could be made.

"It was the murder capital of the world (with a) very depressed inner city and I wanted to help."

He said he opted to pursue pediatrics because children's medical problems are very rarely "self-inflicted." But it's a specialty that requires special skills.

"It's like being a vet," he said. "Half of your patients can't talk. You have to be very intuitive."

Then, there are the often-frantic parents to deal with.

"Communication and caring are the two most important aspects of treating patients and their parents," he said. "If they know you truly care, then they don't give you a hard time."•

— *Emilie Bahr*



photo by Frank Aymami



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photo by Frank Aymami



**PHYSICIANS**

# Stephen Heinrich

**Position:** orthopedic surgery department chairman and residency education director, Children's Hospital; orthopedic surgery department clinical professor, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center

**Age:** 54

**Family:** children, Laurie, 28, Stephen, 24, Ryan, 18, Emily, 12

**Education:** bachelor's degree in biology, Virginia Military Institute; master's degree in genetics, University of Arizona; doctor of medicine, University of Arizona College of Medicine

Dr. Stephen Heinrich learned the difference a celebrity's autograph on a hat could make to a sick child by chance.

Years ago, when he noticed a terminally ill teenage bone cancer patient sporting an Auburn hat, he arranged for the patient to receive a hat autographed by then-Auburn head football coach Terry Bowden and his father, Bobby Bowden, the legendary coach at Florida State University.

"It was like this light permeated his entire being," Heinrich said, recalling the teen's response to the autographed gift. "It was an epiphany. I realized this was very good and it needed to be made available to other patients."

Since that day in 1993, more than 25,000 children and young adults have received hats autographed by their favorite celebrities through some 100 Caps for Kids chapters in the United States and four in Canada. Heinrich is the group's founder and president emeritus, and maintains the group's headquarters at Children's Hospital.

"We've had a lot of kids who've been buried with their hats," Heinrich said. "It's

a connection to someone who's very significant in their lives."

Heinrich, who designs custom-made prostheses for children, said the hardest part of his job is telling children and their families of tumor-related diagnoses. With medical advances in the field, such diagnoses are not always terminal, but the requisite orthopedic surgery to remove and artificially replace bone creates new challenges for children and their families.

"The most difficulty I have all occurs when the diagnosis is actually made," he said, which requires trying to get the family to accept the diagnoses and commit to surgery in a couple of days. "There's a lot of dust in the air, a lot of anger trying to deal with what has happened. That probably for me is the most difficult thing I do."

Caps for Kids is the center of his community outreach. Keeping the busy pace of his practice and fulfilling educational and administrative duties at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center consume his time. He's a prolific author of books and articles. •

— Diana Chandler

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PHYSICIANS

# Dan Jacob

**Position:** chairman of the board and president, New Orleans Medical Mission Services Foundation

**Age:** 61

**Family:** wife, Suzanne LeBlanc; children, Charlotte, 34, Anne-Marie, 31, Christian, 26; three grandchildren

**Education:** doctor of medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine

El Salvador is green and lush, with beautiful white herons nesting in the trees and volcanoes with lakes that form inside the craters. It is also a country of abject poverty, where people with medical ailments wait for months or years to get treated.

“People living in the mountains do not have telephones, but somehow word got out that we were coming,” said Dr. Dan Jacob of the New Orleans Medical Mission Services. “A petite girl of 10 had brought her brother, who had a tumor in his neck, to see me. The boy had cerebral palsy and was unable to walk. His sister carried him down the mountains on her back, which was a two-day trek from her village to our mission site.”

The boy is one of several thousand patients Jacob and his team of more than 400 volunteers have treated. To date, New Orleans Medical Mission Services has been on 12 missions, performed 862 surgeries, performed 12,615 eye exams and dispensed 17,057 pairs of eyeglasses, Jacob said. The group maintains a 9,000-square-foot warehouse for medical supplies and equipment that is sent all over the world.

Jacob began the New Orleans Medical Mission Services



photo by Frank Aymami

in 2001 after returning from a “frustrating” trip to Mexico.

“A longtime friend and patient, Fred Mikill, came in and we started discussing my medical mission experiences,” he said. “Fred had recently retired from a large company that did business in Latin America and suggested that we start our own organization.”

Jacob routinely performs facial reconstructions on accident victims whose faces are grossly malformed.

“Manufacturers in the U.S. donate plates of varying sizes,

and we have just the right medical hardware for the cases that present themselves, with none to spare,” he said. “It is so astounding that I can only attribute this to divine providence.”

Jacob grew up in Cape Girardeau, Mo., and went to medical school at Tulane University.

“My father, who died in an ambulance accident when I was quite young, was a doctor,” he said. “I guess I wanted to follow in his footsteps.”•

— Lisa Bacques

photo by Frank Aymami



PHYSICIANS

# Indira Kailas

**Position:** medical director of behavioral health, Jefferson Parish Human Services

**Age:** 58

**Family:** husband, Mohan Kailas; sons, Praveen, 26, Naveen, 24

**Education:** bachelor degrees in biology and English, St. Joseph's College, India; doctor of medicine, Andhra Medical College, India

Dr. Indira Kailas measures success by the ability of her patients to return to society.

“In my 25 years as a psychiatrist, I’ve tried to provide relief and therapy for my patients,” said Kailas, an addiction specialist at Jefferson Parish Human Services in Marrero. “It feels good to see them become less depressed. Many of them get well and are fully involved in life again.”

She sees clients individually for drug and alcohol treatment using techniques she has developed since her residency at Louisiana State University Medical Center in psychiatry in the early 1980s.

Jefferson Parish Human Services Authority is one of five districts the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals supports to address mental health issues, addiction and developmental disabilities. JPHSA has treated more than 2,000 patients for mental health concerns in the past year.

Kailas said the need for addiction services and treatment has grown in tough economic times.

“People are losing jobs and have financial

stress, so we’re seeing more patients with depression,” she said. “And we have to provide treatment with less resources in the clinic and in the community” because of funding cuts.

In 1985, Kailas was one of the volunteers who helped start Grace House, a long-term residential program for chemically dependent women. For more than 10 years, she was on the board of Grace House, which recently merged with Bridge House for men. She has been a board member and held other advisory roles at the Metropolitan Center for Women and Children, offering assistance to battered women and sexual assault victims in Jefferson.

Kailas arrived in Pensacola, Fla., at age 27 from her native India, where she had worked as an obstetrician-gynecologist. Louisiana became home when her husband, Mohan, a Metairie real estate developer, started his business here.

Kailas is a board member of the India Association of New Orleans, a cultural and charitable organization. •

— Susan Buchanan



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PHYSICIANS

# Ravi Kanagala

**Position:** cardiac electrophysiologist and partner, Tchefuncte Cardiovascular Associates  
**Age:** 40  
**Family:** wife, Anita; children, Abhishek, 10, Nikhita, 5  
**Education:** bachelor's degree in biology, Earlham College; doctor of medicine, Indiana University School of Medicine

While Dr. Ravi Kanagala was completing a fellowship at the Mayo Clinic, he often saw scared patients clutching notebooks from visits to their hometown doctors.

"I learned that you need to spend quality time with patients," said Kanagala, who often will spend 40 minutes consulting with a new patient. "I'll sit with them and draw diagrams. The more they know, the more comfortable they'll feel."

Recently, he saw a woman in her mid-20s, pregnant for the first time and newly diagnosed with heart arrhythmia. Kanagala prescribed nontoxic drugs and saw the woman every few weeks, monitoring her vital signs and the growth of her fetus. He was also there for the birth of her healthy daughter.

A month later, Kanagala treated the new mom's arrhythmia with a procedure called electrophysiology study and ablation. It uses tiny radiofrequency burns to break the heart's electrical current and rid the patient of the problem for good.

While he's performing electrophysiology

study and ablation more often because of increased doctor and patient awareness, Kanagala said he wishes he saw more referrals for his other specialty: cardiac magnetic resonance imaging, which spots scarred areas in the heart.

Kanagala travels to India, his parents' homeland, every few years and spent three weeks in Bangalore in December working with an international medical team, treating patients free of charge and giving electrophysiology lectures to cardiology residents.

"It was an honor to be part of something so special and bigger than any one of us," Kanagala said. "It helped reaffirm my faith in others."

Back home, he regularly turns in 13-hour workdays.

"Evenings are when I make the rounds in hospitals because that's when family members are there, and they like having five minutes to talk to you," Kanagala said. "I want to make sure my patients are OK for the night."•

— Anne Berry



photo by Shannon Diecidue



photo by Frank Ajmam

PHYSICIANS

# Sandra Kemmerly

**Position:** medical director for clinical practice improvement, Ochsner Health System  
**Age:** 53  
**Family:** husband, McNeil; children, Katherine, 20, John, 12  
**Education:** bachelor's degree in medical technology, Louisiana State University; doctor of medicine, LSU School of Medicine

As medical director for Ochsner Health System's clinical practice improvement, it is Dr. Sandra Kemmerly's job to oversee the quality of care, evaluate the system's programs, measuring its outcomes and change procedures and processes to improve overall conditions.

In early 2005, Kemmerly initiated a consultative partnership with independent health care ratings organization HealthGrades to help develop the analytical skills needed to perform data analysis. Doing so would improve Ochsner's patient outcomes, lower complication rates and decrease mortality rates in cardiovascular diseases, pulmonary disorders, sepsis, stroke and orthopedics.

Partnering with HealthGrades, Kemmerly said, was one prong to an overall approach to improving quality.

"We knew transparency in health care was coming," Kemmerly said. "We'd be measured and held accountable."

Kemmerly said she is seeing improvements in care and patient health.

"We changed processes of counting beans

to really analyzing data," Kemmerly said.

But Ochsner isn't the only one noticing improvements in patient outcomes. The improvements helped the OHS rank among the top 5 percent in the nation for exceptional care, as ranked by HealthGrades during its 2006-08 survey.

Kemmerly, who still works at the clinic with her infectious disease practice, credits that recognition to her colleagues for participating in the analysis.

"We measure our performances both good and bad," Kemmerly said. "And we celebrate our successes."

As the project lead involved in the decision-making administrative support that has kept such improvements going, Kemmerly's now involved in implementing those processes at other Ochsner facilities.

She added that the processes will develop "from one hospital to a number that work together in conjunction (with one another) and not in tandem."•

— Whitney Pierce Santora

# Yvens Laborde

**Position:** regional medical director, Ochsner Medical Center — West Bank

**Age:** 46

**Family:** wife, Margaret; sons, Yvens, 16, Julien, 14

**Education:** bachelor's degree in biology, University of New Orleans; doctor of medicine, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center at Shreveport

Born and raised in the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, Yvens Laborde has spent much of his life around people in need.

As the son of an entrepreneur, he grew up in relative comfort in Haiti but always felt it was his calling to help the less fortunate. As a child, he knew he was destined to be a doctor after he helped his uncle work on a malaria outreach project.

"It just always gave me a sense of wanting to help others, and it just really got my attention. Since I was young, all I wanted to do was put myself in a position where I could help others," he said.

Laborde received his primary education in Haiti and immigrated to the United States in 1982. With strong historical and cultural ties to the Caribbean island nation, the Crescent City was the perfect place to settle.

After earning his medical degree at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center at Shreveport, he went to work at Ochsner Health System where he climbed the ranks to become the regional medical director

of Ochsner's West Bank campus. In that role, he is responsible for developing the physician and hospital practice on the West Bank.

Laborde also is a member of the Ochsner Health System board and president of the Greater New Orleans Academy of Internal Medicine.

He has led medical missions to Haiti over the years, including a trip in 2008 after the country was ravaged by three hurricanes, and was especially inspired to act after the recent earthquake.

He traveled to Haiti from the Dominican Republic only five days after the event and embarked on a grass-roots medical effort to assist anyone he encountered. Laborde also loaned his expertise at three orphanages and one hospital, where he treated more than 100 patients per day. Coordinating the delivery of supplies from Ochsner Health System and MedAssets, a health care supply chain management system, Laborde said he has seen a lifelong dream come full circle. •

—Craig Guillot

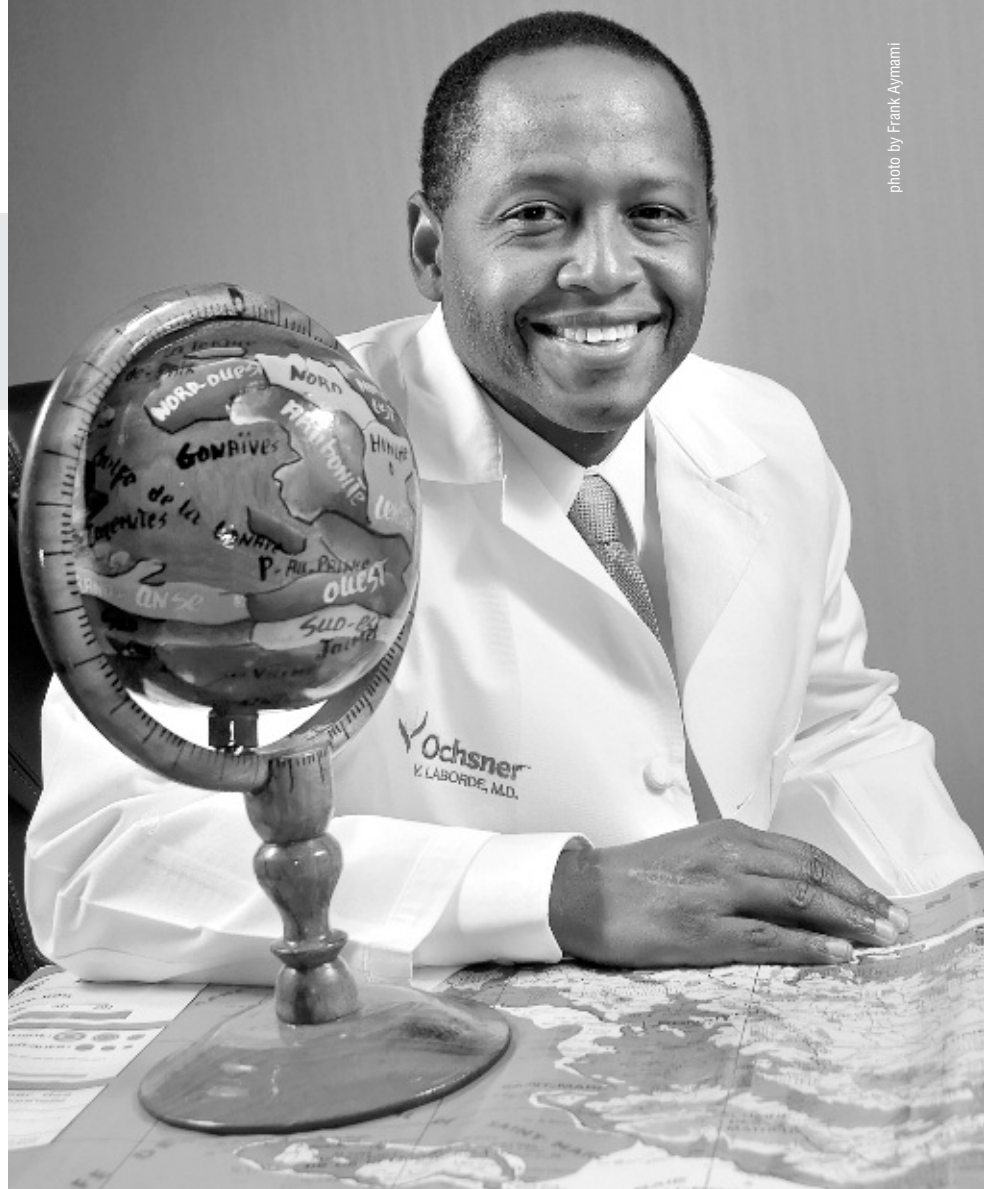
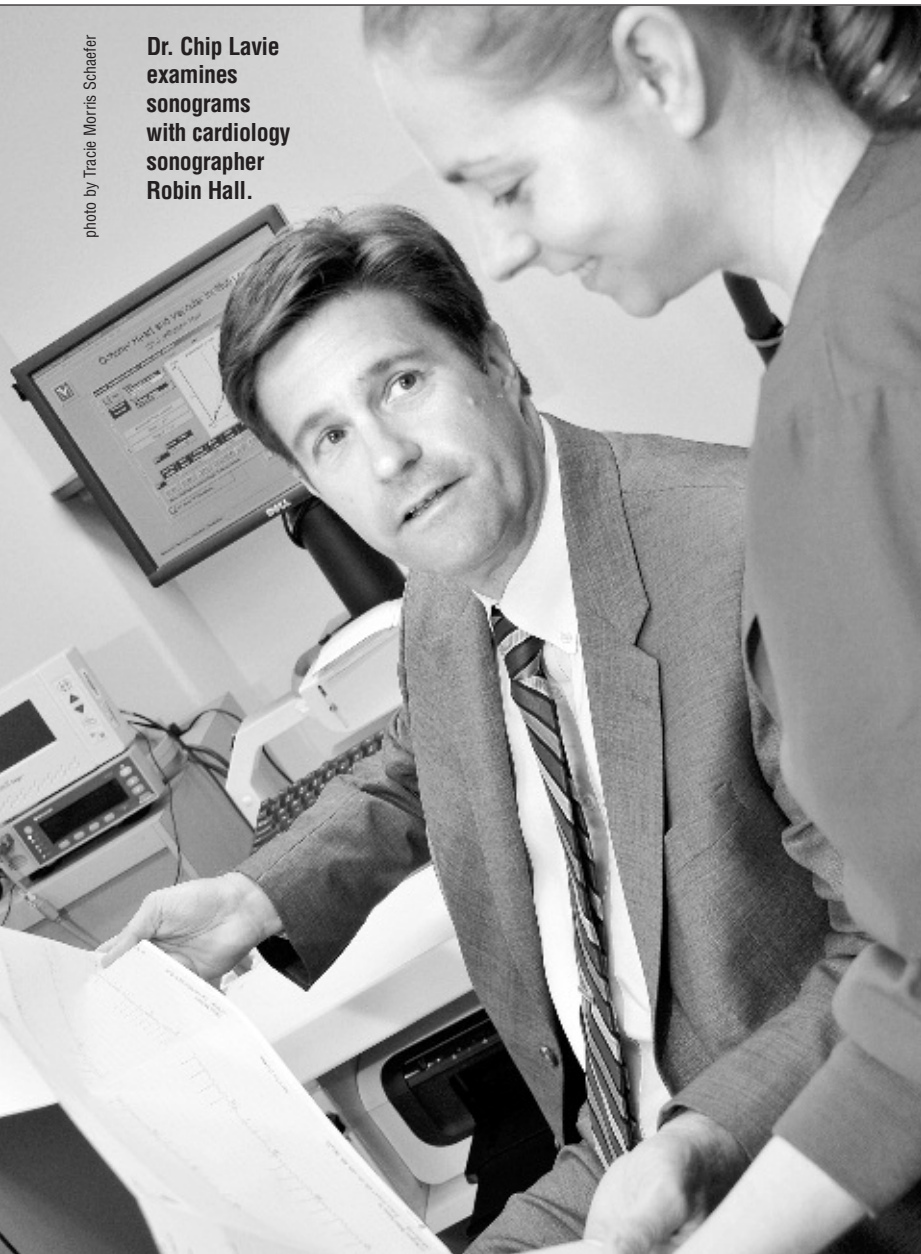


photo by Frank Aynami

photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

**Dr. Chip Lavie examines sonograms with cardiology sonographer Robin Hall.**



# Carl "Chip" Lavie

**Position:** cardiac rehabilitation and prevention medical director, Ochsner Health System

**Age:** 51

**Family:** wife, Bonnie; children, Jayson, 23, Jenny, 21, Scott, 20, Annie, 18

**Education:** bachelor's degree in zoology, Louisiana State University; doctor of medicine, LSU School of Medicine

Dr. Chip Lavie has made major contributions to the field of cardiology, not only in clinical and laboratory settings but while sitting at his desk.

"I probably reviewed 200 papers in 2009 for over 50 different journals," said Lavie, who estimates that he reviewed more than 60 papers for Mayo Clinic Proceedings alone, for which he serves as associate editor.

The Journal of the American College of Cardiology presented Lavie its 2010 Simon Dack Award — one of only 14 worldwide — and 2009 Elite Reviewer Award in recognition of the high number and quality of his critiques. Lavie said that because the JACC accepts less than 10 percent of its submissions, its reviewers must be very thorough.

As a member of the editorial board for 17 medical journals, he understands how difficult it is to find volunteers to take that kind of time. But as a medical professional who also relies on reviewers to advance his own research efforts, he said he's willing to contribute to the process.

"The whole field of medical research and publication isn't going to go anywhere unless there are people that are reviewing," Lavie said.

One of Lavie's top research interests is the role of Omega-3 fatty acids in the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease. One of his recent studies showed that eating fish or taking supplements containing Omega-3s may help reduce the risk for heart attack survivors to have another attack by as much as 30 percent.

Lavie said that even after following the subject for nearly 20 years in the literature, he was surprised at how strong the evidence was supporting the benefits of Omega-3s.

When he's not running the cardiac rehabilitation and prevention department at Ochsner, you might find Lavie just running.

"I've been racing for 30 years," said Lavie, who runs six to 10 races a year and has participated in all of the Crescent City Classics, usually finishing in the top 500. •

—Sonya Stinson

PHYSICIANS

# Joseph Nadell

**Position:** pediatric neurosurgery, Children's Hospital

**Age:** 67

**Family:** wife, Susan; children, David, 34, Kimberly, 31

**Education:** bachelor's degree in history, Tulane University; doctor of medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine

Thirty-five years into his career, Dr. Joseph Nadell, a pediatric neurosurgeon at Children's Hospital, has lost track of the number of patients he's treated for congenital and trauma-induced nervous system and brain disorders.

He is one of only a handful of pediatric neurosurgeons operating in the region and one of about 200 nationwide.

The New York native initially moved to New Orleans for college but fell in love with the city and stuck around for medical school. Apart from a stint in the military, he has never been away for a significant amount of time.

Nadell first became interested in neurosurgery while working on a master's degree in neurophysiology during medical school.

"The nervous system just fascinated me," he said, adding that the idea of treating nervous system problems in children was especially appealing. "Children are not little people" in a biological sense, he said.

Nadell learned of the dearth of pediatric neurosurgeons during his residency at Charity Hospital. When he went out on his

own, he worked primarily with adult patients. But as his practice developed, he began focusing more on pediatric cases and has worked exclusively with children for years.

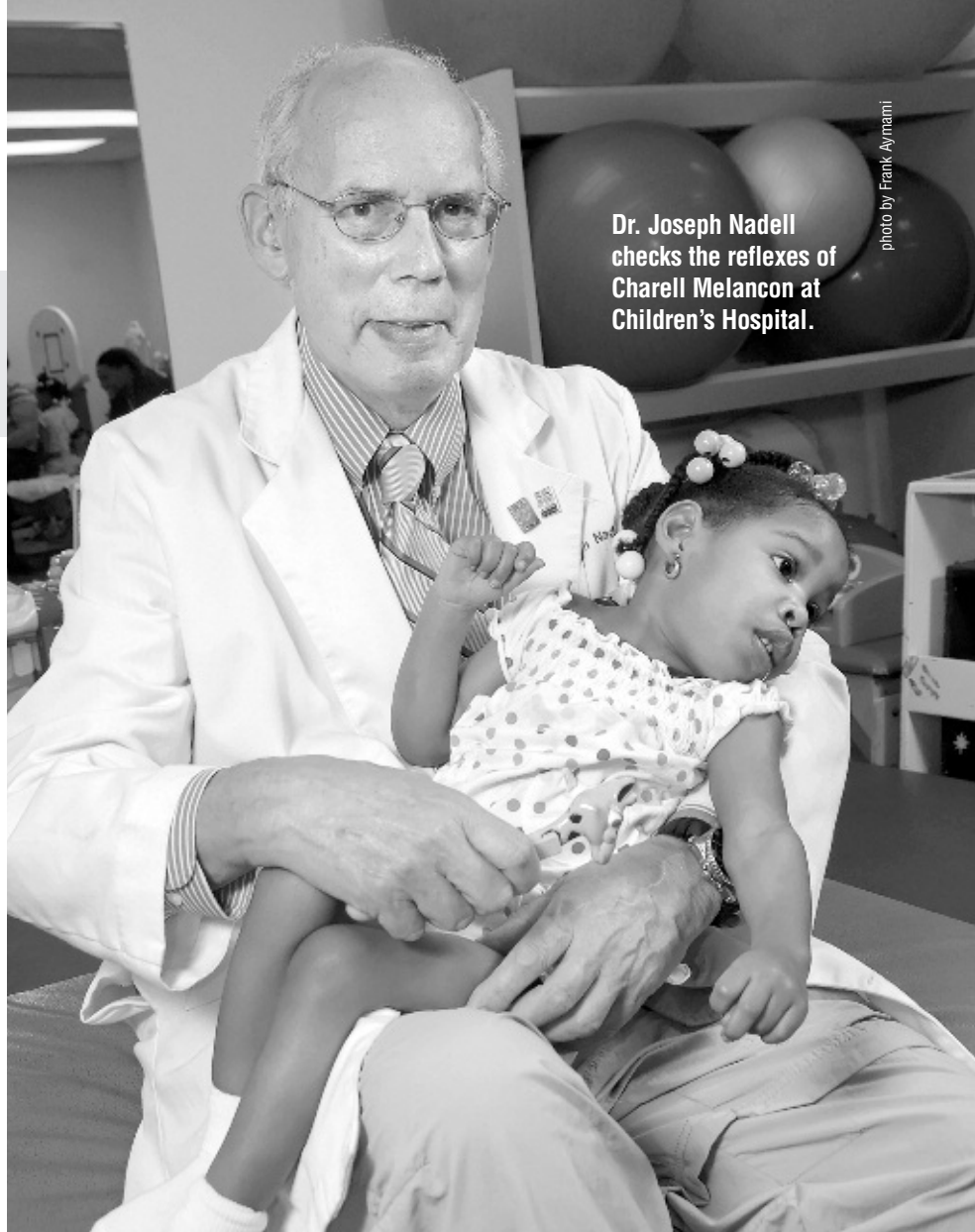
"Children are amazing creatures," he said. "They have a plasticity to injury that allows them to recover from injuries that would in adults be lethal or require significant therapy."

Nadell is especially proud of the number of children he and therapists working alongside him have been able to help recover after head injuries.

At 67, Nadell intends to cut back on the number of surgeries he performs but said abandoning his practice entirely is out of the question in the short-term. The regional health care system is still too hampered following Hurricane Katrina, he said.

"I am adamant that we are going to recover, and I'm in it for the long haul in terms of helping as much as I can to re-establish and develop even further health care and pediatric neurosurgery in particular," Nadell said. "So that puts retirement on hold."•

— *Emilie Bahr*



Dr. Joseph Nadell checks the reflexes of Charell Melancon at Children's Hospital.

photo by Frank Aymami



photo by Frank Aymami

PHYSICIANS

# Rebecca Nguyen

**Position:** internist, West Jefferson Medical Center

**Age:** 34

**Family:** husband, Chung Pham; children, Jacob Pham, 4, Christian Pham, 2

**Education:** doctor of medicine, Louisiana State University School of Medicine

Family and community are major influences in Dr. Rebecca Nguyen's life.

Her parents, Chi Nguyen and Sylvia Pham, instilled in her an appreciation for the medical profession, she said, and included her in activities at St. Joseph's Mission Church in Algiers.

"The Vietnamese community is a big part of my growth," said Nguyen, an internist at West Jefferson Medical Center. "A very big motivation for me was my parents. They thought being a doctor would be a great thing for me, and they were right."

Nguyen helps the hospital with targeted health education outreach to the community, offering screenings and counseling at health fairs and seminars.

A recent outreach she participated in at the Buddhist Fellowship of Louisiana in Belle Chasse included screenings for diabetes and blood pressure checks.

"It's gratifying to me to be able to give back. Just part of my profession is being able to connect with other people. I'm able to speak the

language and communicate at different levels with the patient," Nguyen said. "It's part of why I became a physician in the first place."

Nguyen recalls a patient she treated who died of severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer. As her primary care physician, Nguyen coordinated the patient's treatment and referrals.

"Just being a witness to the things that she had to endure, to sympathize and being able to offer as much assistance as I can," was important, Nguyen said, making her feel like a part of the patient's family.

She cites prayer and communication as giving her the strength to cope with loss and provide comfort to others.

"Part of it is the religion that I have, prayers," she said. "(Dying) is just part of the cycle of life."

Nguyen said she appreciates community service but has had to slow down a bit in recent months as she's expecting her third child in August. •

— *Diana Chandler*



PHYSICIANS

# Oliver Sartor

**Position:** Piltz Professor of Cancer Research in the Departments of Medicine and Urology, Tulane University School of Medicine

**Age:** 54

**Family:** wife, Sissy; children, Abby, 19, Alton, 25

**Education:** bachelor's degree in psychology, Colorado College; doctor of medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine

For Dr. Oliver Sartor, the ability to balance the daily demands of life as a clinical cancer researcher and medical oncologist goes back to his first ambitions to join the field.

"The ideas of interacting with people and working to help them get better were motivating factors for me from the beginning," Sartor said.

With a busy schedule that often takes him outside Louisiana to see patients in New Mexico, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina or Florida, Sartor views his clinical research as an important part of his patient care.

"I was fortunate to be able to lead a large international clinical trial that will have a positive effect on prostate cancer patients," Sartor said.

One of the only medical oncologists in the state, Sartor has developed a specialized practice that focuses on the treatment of prostate cancer. After learning the methodology of clinical trials through 20 years of experience, Sartor's career highlights include some of his most recent studies.

"The high points of my career were being involved in the formulation of two drugs that have gone on to meet FDA standards," he said.



photo by Frank Aymami

In Sartor's most recent study, which was made public in March 2009, he led the development of an experimental drug called cabazitaxel, which when compared with standard chemotherapy treatment reduces the risk of death by 30 percent in men with hormone-resistant prostate cancer.

Sartor also serves as chairman-elect of the Department of Defense's Integration Panel for prostate cancer research, which directs more than \$80 million in federal funding. He is also the medical oncology chairman of the Radiation Oncology Treatment Group Genitourinary Cancer

Committee and recently co-authored the prostate cancer chapter in the eighth edition of "Cancer: Principles and Practice of Oncology."

With so many different facets to his growing professional life, Sartor has little time for external community service, so he applies the same values to his practice.

"My community service is directed toward my patients," he said. "Fortunately, my profession affords me the capacity to benefit the community."•

— Thomas Leggett



photo by Frank Aymami

PHYSICIANS

# Donna Waters

**Position:** doctor of obstetrics and gynecology, Touro Infirmiry

**Age:** 51

**Family:** husband, Parker; children, Lauren, 20, Ashleigh, 18, Jonathan, 16

**Education:** bachelor's degree in biology, Tulane University; doctor of medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine

Dr. Donna Waters delivers babies — thousands of them.

In her 25-plus years as an obstetrician and gynecologist with Touro Infirmiry's Crescent City Physician group, Waters has become a go-to OB/GYN, being known for being able to make it to the hospital about four minutes after her pager goes off.

She's also not afraid to take on patients who considered high-risk, including multiple births.

"There is a greater risk of prematurity," Waters said. "You have to follow the patient all through the pregnancy."

She considers her most challenging case a woman who developed amniotic fluid embolus, a rare obstetric emergency. Little is known about how the condition develops, but the theory is that amniotic fluid, fetal cells and other fetal matter get into the mother's circulatory system, causing a reaction in the mother which

is typically fatal for her and the child.

"We did an emergency C-section, and the baby and mom were both dead," Waters said. "We did CPR for three hours and gave the mom 28 units of blood. They both survived and are doing fine today."

Waters grew up in a military family and moved every couple of years during her childhood.

"I think it made me adapt readily to new situations," she said. "I'm not rigid. I go with the flow."

Waters enjoys her three children and husband, Parker, a sports photographer.

"We've been married 29 years," she said. "I'm very proud of that, too."

And she's passed that love for health care on to her oldest daughter, who is pursuing a medical degree and plans to become an OB/GYN or a pediatrician. •

— Lisa Bacques

**Touro Infirmiry obstetrician and gynecologist Donna Waters shows nurse Michelle Livermore how to read an ultrasound.**

PHYSICIANS

# Thomas Weatherall

**Position:** medical director of radiation oncology, Slidell Memorial Hospital  
**Age:** 81

**Family:** wife, Jennifer; daughters, Wendy, 34, Rebecca, 31

**Education:** bachelor's degree in journalism, University of Alabama; doctor of medicine, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine

As medical director of Slidell Memorial Hospital's radiation center, Dr. Thomas Weatherall has been key to bringing in new technology and treatment options to help patients fight cancer.

At SMH, Weatherall oversees the radiation center's therapists, nurse and radiation physicists. The hospital recently installed a high-dose-rate, brachytherapy system, delivering radiation through a small catheter into the tumor site. Brachytherapy is a form of therapy implanting radiation-emitting pellets to kill cancerous tissue.

For newly referred patients diagnosed with cancer, Weatherall reviews their clinical data to determine if radiation treatments are needed. When it is required, he and the staff design multi-dimensional images of the cancer and the patient's normal anatomy to determine the best approach to treatment.

Weatherall points to other advanced techniques SMH has adopted that have helped save patients' lives, including a system called varian image guided radiation therapy used in sur-



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

**Dr. Thomas Weatherall reviews X-rays with radiation therapist Tara Pike at Slidell Memorial Hospital.**

gery and treatment to target tumors more precisely.

Additionally, Slidell Memorial is one of 70 hospitals in the world to adopt a technology known as RapidArc Radiotherapy, using a linear accelerator that rotates around the patient to deliver treatments from almost any angle. With that system, radiation delivery occurs six to eight times faster than the rate for traditional, intensity-modulated radiation therapy.

Weatherall also has been involved in plans for Slidell

Memorial Hospital's Regional Cancer Center, a full-service facility that construction started on last summer and is scheduled for completion later this year.

Outside of the hospital, Weatherall has been active in the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, along with his wife, Jennifer, who is a past organizer of the Back to the Beach Festival, which raises money for lake protection. •

— Susan Buchanan

PHYSICIANS

# Denise Woodall-Ruff

**Position:** general pediatrician, Daughters of Charity Services  
**Age:** 38

**Family:** husband, Scott Ruff; children, Sakiel, 6, Solomon, 3

**Education:** bachelor's degree in human development and family studies, Cornell University; doctor of medicine, State University of New York at Buffalo

Dr. Denise Woodall-Ruff can spot a risk for obesity from birth.

"You see behaviors in moms that promote weight gain in (their) infants," Woodall-Ruff said.

Before coming to New Orleans, Woodall-Ruff, in addition to teaching pediatrics and seeing patients, ran a children's weight management program at Upstate Medical University-State University of New York. The six-week program included family group sessions on healthy lifestyle changes and follow-up visits to monitor progress.

"The goal is to make long-term changes and have the child reach for water instead of juice," Woodall-Ruff said.

Her patients in the weight management program included an obese 11-year-old girl confined to a wheelchair with spina bifida.

"The thing that helped her most was behavioral changes," she said. "I advised her parents not to reward her with going to fast food restaurants, but instead to take her swimming or bowling."



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

**Dr. Denise Woodall-Ruff examines, Kevin Vargas, 4 months, at the Daughters of Charity Services clinic.**

Woodall-Ruff said she would like to start a similar weight management program in New Orleans, though funding is hard to obtain.

"Insurance companies would have to recognize that this condition needs to be covered, so a physician is more likely to assess for it and have resources for child counseling," Woodall-Ruff said. "That's not easy to do in a quick primary care setting."

She also hopes to increase the number of children who are up to date on their immunizations.

"In New Orleans, not all schools have the resources — nurs-

es and case managers — to be the gatekeeper on immunizations," she said. "And lots of kids lost their shot records after Katrina. The state mandates shots, but it's hard to enforce."

In her practice, Woodall-Ruff and her staff update immunizations records for any child they see.

"There's definitely a need here to take childcare health issues to a level where everyone benefits the most," said Woodall-Ruff, the mother of two young sons. "Hopefully, we can make changes, and I can be a part of that process." •

— Anne Berry

# Aubrie Augustus

**Position:** vice president of clinical excellence and outcomes management, East Jefferson General Hospital  
**Age:** 54  
**Family:** husband, Joseph Augustus Jr.; daughter, Andréa, 30  
**Education:** bachelor's degree in nursing, McNeese State University; master's degree in health care administration, Trinity University

Aubrie Augustus is passionate. She's also a perfectionist.

It's that combination that has made her a leader in her role as vice president of clinical excellence and outcomes management at East Jefferson General Hospital. Leading departments such as clinical effectiveness, care management, organizational improvement and quality management, Augustus is involved in all areas of patient care.

"My passion has always been to help patients return to their maximum state of health," said Augustus, who said she loves being at a patient's bedside.

But now that her current role no longer allows that interaction, she said she hopes to transfer some of that passion to her employees.

"As my role has transitioned to an administrative one, my goals are directed at supporting bedside caregivers in creating the safest conditions for patients so that each patient receives the best possible care," Augustus said.

To achieve that goal, Augustus must rely on others. Her primary responsibility is to

supervise programs related to regulatory and accreditation readiness.

"Our emphasis is patient safety," Augustus said. "We support our organization in monitoring, measuring and improving the work processes; this assures our outcomes are positive outcomes."

She said she works with everyone in the hospital "from housekeeping to the CEO" to create effective work processes that produce the best possible patient results.

Augustus' leadership and passion benefited EJGH in December when the hospital scored its highest score yet in the Joint Commission Survey, a nonprofit that accredits and certifies health care organizations in the United States.

But she gives credit to her team and those above her.

"I'm a coach and the team won the game," August said. "I'm in the right place. I'm leading the right team, and I'm being led by the best."•

— Whitney Pierce Santora



photo by Frank Aymami



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

# Vicki Banner

**Position:** certified pharmacy technician, Slidell Memorial Hospital  
**Age:** 39  
**Family:** husband, Louis; sons, Jonathon, 17, Quin, 13  
**Education:** graduate, Andrew Jackson High School

When Vicki Banner landed a job as a cashier at Eckerd Drugs in 1988, she was just out of high school and trying to figure out what she wanted to do for a living.

At a time when pharmacy technicians weren't officially recognized, Banner moved behind the counter and quickly started learning about prescription drugs. That on-the-job training helped her climb the ladder at Eckerd's and eventually to Methodist Hospital, where she became the lead pharmacy tech and managed the hospital's Pyxis Medstation machines, which dispense patient drugs to doctors and nurses.

Having moved to the North Shore after Hurricane Katrina, Banner is now a certified pharmacy tech at Slidell Memorial Hospital. Banner thrives on helping implement upgrades at the hospital and sees pharmacy as a critical role in patient care.

"It's just about making sure that the nurs-

es can get what they need. I love being here and helping the patients. It's about getting out the right medications in a timely manner," Banner said.

Aside from her duties at the hospital, Banner is involved with the American Heart Walk. In 2009, she was the leading fundraiser for the event, which made Slidell Memorial Hospital the top performer among organizations involved in the walk. Banner became involved with the American Heart Association as a tribute to her father, who died from a heart attack in 2008.

"It means a lot to me to do what I can for the heart association in dedication of my dad. It has been a real success, and I like to do whatever I can to help out with it," she said.

Banner has encouraged her children to engage in community service and her son, Jonathan, is a regular around the hospital, volunteering in the gift shop.•

— Craig Guillot

# Julie Catellier

**Position:** medical center director, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System

**Age:** 55

**Education:** bachelor's degree in nursing, George Mason University; master's degree in public administration and health care, Golden Gate University

Spearheading a new era of care for military veterans in Southeast Louisiana, Julie Catellier's greatest hope is the opening of a new \$995 million Veterans Affairs Medical Center downtown.

"We have just completed a two-year design process and hope to begin the actual construction this summer," said Catellier, the center's director.

The new facility is set to open in 2013. Plans call for a 31-acre campus bordered by Canal, Galvez and Rocheblave streets and Tulane Avenue. It will include 200 beds and up to 1.7 million square feet of clinical space.

Catellier said the completion of the new center will be regarded as a benchmark in her tenure as director. It replaces the former VA hospital downtown that was flooded following levee breaches after Hurricane Katrina. The upside of the disaster was the creation of seven regional outpatient clinics in the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System.

"We expanded our home and community programs and even provided care in patients' homes," Catellier said.

The demand for VA services has only increased with the addition of military members returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. They join veterans from World War II, the Korean and Vietnam wars, and Operation Desert



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

Storm who are already being treated in the system.

"We have altogether 55,000 veterans who are enrolled with us for care, with roughly 40,000 coming in on a regular basis," Catellier said. "Veterans are surviving theater or battlefield injuries today at a greater percentage than in previous wars because of the battle gear and equipment."

There also are more female veterans than before.

"Right now they make up about 7 percent of all veterans, but the projection is about 10 percent," Catellier said.

"When the new hospital opens, it will have a special women's center geared toward their care."

Summing up the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care Systems' mission, Catellier said, "We've been taking care of 90 percent of the workload with 50 percent of the staff and 40 percent of the space."

Catellier said she remains determined to increase numbers in all three areas. •

— Garry Boulard

photo by Frank Aymami



# Myra DiGange

**Position:** hospital administrator, St. Charles Surgical Hospital

**Age:** 53

**Family:** husband, Charles DiGange

**Education:** initial diploma, Charity School of Nursing; bachelor's degree in nursing, Louisiana State University

Myra DiGange credits her grandmother, Irma Buras Breuille, with instilling in her a passion for helping people. It's a mindset that ultimately led her to a career in health care.

DiGange's grandmother worked as a midwife in Plaquemines Parish at a time when doctors and other medical professionals were scarce.

DiGange said she knew from the time she was in junior high school that she wanted to be a nurse, a decision strengthened by time spent as a candy striper and volunteering in hospitals in various other capacities. After high school, she studied under the nuns at the Charity School of Nursing, where she earned a nursing certificate. Later, she received a bachelor's degree in nursing from Louisiana State University.

Thirty-three years into her career, DiGange is now hospital administrator at St. Charles Surgical Hospital. The facility, which opened in February 2009, specializes in reconstructive surgery for breast cancer patients.

Fortunately for DiGange, who spent most of her working life in the operating room before

taking her current position, her new role doesn't keep her tied exclusively to a desk or boardroom.

Occasionally, she said, she is called in to help other nurses with patients, one of the upsides of working for a small facility that DiGange said is designed around the holistic approach to medical care that she embraced as a young nurse in training.

"I'm very, very fortunate that I'm able to help with the decision making of the day-to-day activities of the facility and yet still come to the bedside," DiGange said.

No matter her title, the appeal of her work is helping to make life for patients dealing with potentially devastating health situations "as positive as it can possibly be," DiGange said.

When she's not at the hospital, DiGange can be found volunteering in all capacities at Holy Cross School, where her husband, Charles, serves as headmaster. DiGange jokes that while she doesn't have any children of her own, "I have 870 of them at Holy Cross School." •

— Emilie Bahr

PROFESSIONALS

# Lori Fonte

**Position:** director of radiation oncology and cancer program coordinator, Slidell Memorial Hospital  
**Age:** 42  
**Family:** husband, Danny; son, Ethan, 13  
**Education:** bachelor's degree in allied health, University of St. Francis

Lori Fonte discovered as a child while tending to her ailing grandmother that she wanted to work in health care. Her grandmother, Cecilia, lived with Fonte's immediate family and was often a heart patient at Slidell Memorial Hospital, where Fonte is now the director of radiation oncology and cancer program coordinator.

"I can remember sitting on the floor in her hospital room doing my homework from the light shining from the hallway through the cracked door," Fonte said. "Her doctor would have to step over me to get to her bedside."

Some of those same doctors now serve with Fonte at Slidell Memorial.

"Dr. (Thomas) Hall would come to visit her at the hospital. He's now a board member at SMH and as a director, I've had to stand up in front of him and present things for my department," Fonte said.

Fonte said she became interested in caring for cancer patients while studying radiation technology at Ochsner's School of Allied Health.

"It was just something about those cancer patients that attracted me to this profession," Fonte said. "These patients come every day for several weeks of treatment, and



Radiation oncology physicist Bailey Pullen, left, reviews patient files with Lori Fonte, Slidell Memorial Hospital's director of radiation oncology and cancer program coordinator.

you really get to know them. Cancer patients are so genuine and grateful. It's so rewarding to know you made a difference in someone's life."

Fonte is abreast of advances in cancer treatment and is hopeful that more lives will be saved from the various forms of the disease.

"Most of all it's the challenges of this profession and the constant growth and improvements that make this profession so exciting," she said, having worked in management the past

eight years. "It works for me because I don't like being idle."

Fonte serves as the survivor chairwoman for the American Cancer Society's annual Relay for Life and coordinates Slidell Memorial Hospital's participation in the event.

"When the day comes and we find a cure, it'll all be worth it," Fonte said. She recently returned to school and is in line to earn a master's degree in health care management from the University of New Orleans this winter. •

— Diana Chandler

photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer



PROFESSIONALS

# Michael Griffin

**Position:** president and CEO, Daughters of Charity Services of New Orleans  
**Age:** 38  
**Family:** wife, Tracie; children, Michael, 7, Ameliagrai, 3, Victoria, 1  
**Education:** bachelor's degree in health management, Dillard University; master's degree in public health, Meharry Medical College

For most people who work in public health administration, expanding one floor of a medical center is a daunting task.

Not so for Michael Griffin, who is undertaking a comprehensive expansion plan that will redefine community health care while doubling the capacity for Daughters of Charity Services of New Orleans.

With the decline of hospital beds in the metro area, Griffin saw an opportunity to establish local, neighborhood and community-based "medical homes" that will offer a "one-stop-shop" approach to health care.

Under Griffin's leadership, the Daughters of Charity is opening a 33,000-square-foot health care center in the Carrollton area followed by a similar facility in Bywater. Each will offer comprehensive care — dental, optometry, behavioral health and pharmacy services — at one location.

Born in Baton Rouge, Griffin learned to care for others by watching his parents. His father, who ministered to offenders and their

families within the state prison system, often took in recently released prisoners to help them change their lives.

After graduating from Dillard University, Griffin went on to complete an administrative fellowship at hospitals in Indiana and Texas, then served as administrator of the Center for Health Promotion at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

"I didn't want to come back to New Orleans unless I could help change things in health care for the needy," Griffin said. "Once I got here, we started focusing on how to reinvent care in this city."

Griffin also is co-founder and vice chairman of 504HealthNet, a nonprofit of community health providers who seeks to coordinate the area's primary care services. He also serves on the boards of Louisiana Primary Care Association, the Louisiana Children's Museum and the Urban League of Greater New Orleans. •

— Thomas Leggett

# Staci LeBlanc

**Position:** director, Audrey Hepburn Children at Risk Evaluation Center at Children's Hospital

**Age:** 45

**Family:** husband, W.J.; children, Megan, 14, Trey, 13

**Education:** bachelor's degree in general studies, Louisiana State University; master's degree in early childhood development, University of New Orleans; juris doctor, Loyola University College of Law

Child abuse poses some tricky problems for investigators. At the Audrey Hepburn Children at Risk Evaluation Center at Children's Hospital, Stacie LeBlanc helps tackle those issues.

As the director of the CARE Center, she manages and recruits doctors, and trains forensic interviewers.

Interviewing abused children is a delicate matter, LeBlanc said. The questioner should not phrase questions in a way that avoids implying that the child is responsible for the abuse. At the same time, the interviewer must not ask leading or suggestive questions.

Having worked as the supervisor of the felony child abuse unit in Jefferson Parish for 10 years, LeBlanc realized the most important piece of successful prosecution of sex offenders was having trained doctors and interviewers performing examinations and providing testimony.

LeBlanc said she is often asked how she can work with abused children, which exposes her to unspeakable adult behavior,

and not get burned out. Her response: the rewards are immeasurable.

"Children who are abused are the most amazing, resilient individuals and they give so much back," LeBlanc said.

She remembers one 7-year-old who was abused by two families. After the child was treated for her injuries and placed into a foster home, she returned to the CARE Center for her follow-up and the difference was astounding.

"She seemed so much more like the 7-year-old God intended her to be," LeBlanc said.

In addition to her work with abused children, LeBlanc works in the community to educate people about sexual abuse. She often visits high schools to educate kids about the age of consent and the legal ramifications of new trends such as "sexting," which could be considered a felony if it involves a juvenile.

"A lot of our expansion efforts are focused on prevention," LeBlanc said. •

— Fritz Esker



photo by Frank Aymami

# Julia Mora-Guillot

**Position:** senior director of quality improvement initiatives, American Heart Association

**Age:** 47

**Family:** husband, Michael; children, Michael, 22; Christopher, 18, Emily, 10

**Education:** bachelor's degree in nursing, William Carey College School of Nursing; master's degree in health sciences administration, University of St. Francis

Julia Mora-Guillot knows what it's like to be a stroke patient, but not because she's had one.

"I'm an educator, in a sense, to health care professionals," said Mora-Guillot, who has a background in communications, international business and health care.

Mora-Guillot, senior director of quality improvement initiatives for the American Heart Association, directs the organization's Get With The Guidelines program, helping hospitals provide a higher quality of care by following evidence-based rules.

One way she assesses hospital care is to walk through the facility as a stroke patient would with the hospital's clinical coordinator. The staff knows Mora-Guillot is coming, and she doesn't pretend to be an actual patient.

"I'll walk to the front window and look to see if that person in the window can recognize the symptoms of a stroke," Mora-Guillot said. "I'd want them to alert the charge nurse. There needs to be a sense of urgency for treatment of a stroke. Typically, the patient has a three-hour window."

Mora-Guillot can point out those weaknesses and help the hospital tighten its procedures. She also works with first responders and hospitals to implement Mission Lifeline, another AHA program that speeds up care for heart attack patients.

"There needs to be a plan in place," Mora-Guillot said. "My role isn't the nursing piece; mine is the process improvement piece."

To that end, she's calling for more electrocardiogram education for emergency medical technicians.

Another emerging need is for rural hospitals to develop telestroke technology, she said, which allows a doctor to transmit a patient's vital signs to a stroke neurologist miles away. Mora-Guillot helped develop the program with the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals.

"The American Heart Association improves systems of care for health," Mora-Guillot said. "Its mission has become a passion of mine." •

— Anne Berry



Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

PROFESSIONALS

# Steve Moye

**Position:** president and CEO, Louisiana Gene Therapy Research Consortium and Louisiana Cancer Research Consortium

**Age:** 48

**Family:** wife, Donna; daughters, Madison, 12, Grace, 9, Andie, 4

**Education:** bachelor's degree in political science, Georgia State University

Steve Moye is supervising construction of the Louisiana Cancer Research Center, the first facility to be built in the city's biomedical district. His aim is for the facility to earn a National Cancer Institute designation.

"The city has this tremendous biosciences center taking place, and the (Louisiana Cancer Research) Center will be the first to come out of it," Moye said.

The Louisiana Cancer Research Consortium partners the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center School of Medicine, Tulane and Xavier universities and Ochsner Health System.

Moye, consortium president and CEO, has helped the organization create more than 240 new jobs and generate \$440 million in revenue through grants, state funding and fundraisers.

The LCRC has conducted more than 400 clinical trials since 2002, and with the new facility, Moye said the LCRC hopes to provide new treatments and cures and diag-

noses through its pathology research.

Recruited from Atlanta to Louisiana to work with Gov. Mike Foster's administration, Moye was asked to lead the development of the biotech industry. Since that time, he has overseen the operations of the LCRC and the Louisiana Gene Therapy Research Consortium.

Moye led the overhaul of the Louisiana Gene Therapy Research Consortium, increasing revenue from \$22 million to \$243 million. Through prioritizing and focusing efforts on how and where monies are being utilized, Moye directed the LGTRC to target "low-hanging fruit opportunities."

Both of the organizations are anchors to the biosciences initiative, Moye said.

"They will help the city get national recognition, and they will help rebrand the city as a biosciences player. Building and housing the best research minds under one roof is something we should all be proud of."•

— Whitney Pierce Santora

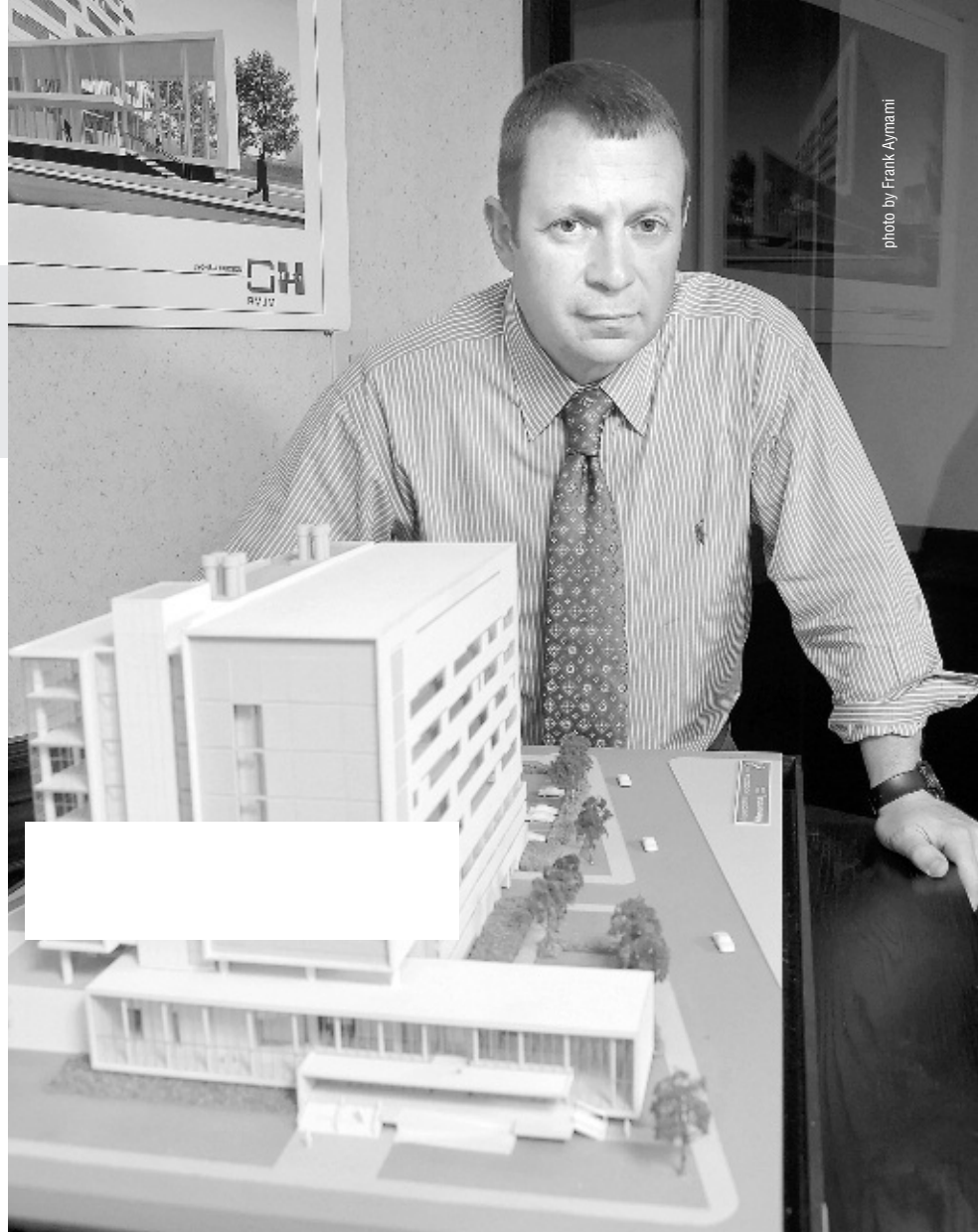


photo by Frank Aymami

PROFESSIONALS

# Lillian O'Cain

**Position:** occupational therapist and liaison, Touro Infirmiry

**Age:** 46

**Family:** husband, Keith; sons Ian, 20, and Cody, 14

**Education:** bachelor's degree in occupational therapy, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center

Last summer, just after occupational therapist Lillian O'Cain had put her teenage son through the paces of a car safety program designed for seniors, he was hit by an intoxicated driver and walked away unscathed.

O'Cain helped secure a grant to bring Car-Fit, a hands-on event sponsored by the American Occupational Therapy Association, the American Automobile Association and AARP, to Touro Infirmiry. Participants received pointers on things such as how to position themselves in front of the steering wheel to see properly and how to use the rear view and side mirrors more effectively.

Touro plans to hold additional Car-Fit events, and O'Cain eventually would like to expand the program to reach teenagers.

As one of only two certified aging-in-place specialists in New Orleans, O'Cain helps senior citizens monitor their health, avoid falls

and learn about other safety issues so they can stay in their homes longer. Her involvement in community education and outreach also includes giving educational seminars at area senior centers and participating in community health fairs. She's also a faculty member in the LSU Occupational Therapy Department, teaching master-level courses in geriatrics and psychiatry.

It was her own aging parents who influenced O'Cain's interest in issues such as fall prevention and other matters affecting older adults. Her goal now is to educate others about the risks of falling in the home.

"The three major fall factors are slippery surfaces, poor lighting and poor footwear,"



photo by Frank Aymami

Lillian O'Cain helps Landry Couvillion make sure his car seat and mirrors are in the correct position.

O'Cain said. "Also, a lot of older seniors tend to want to use the handles on their faucets ... to get in and out of the tub. You might not think that's a big issue, but they are not weight-bearing surfaces."

Early in O'Cain's occupational therapy

career, she worked mainly with mental health patients and has extensive experience working with Alzheimer's patients.

"It's been a wonderful career for me," she said. "I love helping people."•

— Sonya Stinson

# Angie Ruiz

**Position:** assistant director, Jefferson Parish School-Based Health Centers

**Age:** 48

**Family:** son, Jeffrey, 11

**Education:** bachelor's degree in science and physical education, Southeastern Louisiana University; master's degree in social work, Tulane University

A professional social worker, Angie Ruiz said she communicates naturally with students. Before joining the Jefferson Parish Public School System-based health centers, Ruiz was training for seven years to be a nun and worked with homeless and at-risk children at the Covenant House in New Orleans.

"I decided that I did not want to take my final vows but remained very interested in children and social work," said Ruiz, who joined the Jefferson school system in 2000 and serves as its assistant director of health centers. In that capacity, she oversees five health clinics with a staff of more than two dozen people.

"There is always something going on when you are working with so many people," said Ruiz, who in her free time also serves as a Boy Scout leader. "And that is one of the things I like best about what I do."

Working daily with teenage students, Ruiz lives with the ongoing specter of suicide.

"It very often comes to a point where a

young person doesn't want to live anymore," Ruiz said. "They are facing a lot more challenges today than we did when we were in school. And they may also have social or family issues that play a large part, making them often feel hopeless to the point of not wanting to live any more."

Although Ruiz said a suicide-prevention program sponsored by the school health centers has prevented deaths, the effort is constant and ongoing.

"We screen all of the kids that come into the clinic for any reason, and that is one of the things we screen them for."

Ruiz said there is a misconception that if people talk about suicide, students will try it. But she and her team take a different approach.

"We want students to be informed about suicide with the goal of preventing it, rather than going the route of just saying it is taboo and pretending it doesn't exist."•

— Garry Boulard



photo by Frank Aymarni



Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

# Rebecca Stubenrauch

**Position:** clinical supervisor of cardio pulmonary rehabilitation, Slidell Memorial Hospital

**Age:** 51

**Family:** husband, Steven; children, Rachel, 31, Joseph, 29, Steven, 20, Samantha, 18

**Education:** bachelor's degree in nursing, Loyola University

Rebecca Stubenrauch found her way to the health care field during an especially tumultuous period in her life. She was in her mid-20s, raising two children and was going through a divorce. In search of a secure source of income, she turned to the newspaper want ads.

"There were three pages of RN, RN, RN," Stubenrauch said. "I had two kids and wanted to be able to support myself, and I said, 'I'm going to nursing school.' And that's what I did, in the middle of a divorce."

"Real fun," she said, sarcastically, "but it worked."

That was 26 years ago.

Since then, Stubenrauch, has remarried, had two more children and is clinical supervisor of cardio pulmonary rehabilitation at Slidell Memorial Hospital, her employer for the past 23 years.

Stubenrauch supervises rehabilitation and physical therapy programs for heart disease

patients who have recently undergone heart-related surgery or who are coping with chronic lung disease. The programs teach patients about their conditions and the factors that contribute to them.

Though the work is challenging, Stubenrauch said she loves what she does and finds tremendous satisfaction in seeing her efforts yield results. Rather than just patching up a problem, she takes pride in helping people change sometimes deeply ingrained habits to live healthier lives.

And that's no small task in the Bayou State, Stubenrauch said, where patients often attempt to rationalize their poor habits.

"Everybody says, 'We live in Louisiana.' And I say, 'OK, I do, too,'" Stubenrauch said.

"(The job) fits me. I love what I do, and it's very rewarding. They come in sick in wheelchairs and walkers and leave whole human beings. You do make a big difference."•

— Emilie Bahr

The Rev. Mickey Hillary works out at Slidell Memorial Hospital under the supervision of cardio pulmonary rehabilitation supervisor Rebecca Stubenrauch.



**VOLUNTEERS**

# Dolores Guidry

**Position:** volunteer cosmetologist for Look Good-Feel Better, West Jefferson Medical Center

**Age:** 75

**Family:** husband, A.G. Guidry; children, Rhonda Byerly, 53, Glenn Guidry, 54, Paris Chaisson, 56; four grandchildren; three great-grandchildren

**Education:** general education degree; cosmetology diploma, Russell's School of Cosmetology

Volunteer Dolores Guidry once gathered a family in a prayer circle at West Jefferson Medical Center's cafeteria while a relative was undergoing surgery.

It's that kind of concern for others that drives Guidry. A retired cosmetologist who once sold wigs, she helps women who have received chemotherapy with hair care through West Jefferson's Look Good-Feel Better chapter, an international outreach of the Personal Care Products Council.

"It makes me feel wonderful to help other people. It's a feeling that everybody should have," Guidry said. "The world doesn't have enough people going out and helping others."

Guidry has volunteered for 15 years with Look Good-Feel Better, teaching cancer patients how to wear wigs, turbans, hats and scarves, and advising them on styles and color. While the service doesn't provide wigs, Guidry has a supply of wigs at home and donates them to patients who can't afford their own.

She recalls one patient who was going to Disneyland and didn't have a wig. Guidry invited her to her home to choose one from her personal supply.

"I always tell them just call me and if I have one, you can have it," Guidry said. "We surely did find her something."

Guidry has donated about 30 wigs to the program for use in educational sessions for patients, held once every six weeks.

Guidry wore wigs herself after suffering a stroke in 1994 and undergoing subsequent brain surgery. The change encouraged her to open a wig salon, which she has since closed.

"I'm fine now," she said. "I went into brain surgery laughing and joking. Everybody was praying for me."

Guidry's volunteer work extends beyond West Jefferson. She sponsors two residents at Our Lady of Wisdom Nursing Home and sings in the choir at First Assembly of God Church in Metairie. •

— Diana Chandler



photo by Frank Aymarni

**VOLUNTEERS**

# Buddy Rini

**Position:** volunteer, Touro Infirmary Rehabilitation Center

**Age:** 63

Pay it forward has become a popular phrase that suggests someone show their appreciation for a good deed by doing a good deed for others.

Touro Infirmary volunteer Buddy Rini has his own way of paying it forward.

Rini suffered a brain injury after falling through the roof of a building while repairing an air conditioning unit in March 2008. For the next several months, he went through extensive rehabilitation at Touro to relearn basic functions such as walking and talking.

Appreciative of the care he received there, he has been returning to Touro twice a week for the past nine months as a volunteer.

"It's a way of giving back," Rini said. "When I was going through this, they didn't have anybody who does what I am doing. The therapists and nurses don't have time to spend talking to the patients like I do. When new people come in, I enjoy talking to them. I let them know there is light at the end of the tunnel."

Rini said he considers his motivational volunteer work a new calling.

"What I'm doing is a small thing compared to what they (the nurses) do every day," he said.

Rini performs a variety of tasks when he's on campus,



photo by Frank Aymarni

Touro Infirmary patient Michael Fitzgerald, left, visits with volunteer Buddy Rini.

including helping in the gym with rehab patients, interacting with patients through playing games and providing lots of encouragement. He often can be heard telling patients, "I've been where you are," "You are doing so good," and "Hang in there."

He's also an encouragement to the staff.

"He reminds us of the good we can do and the difference we can make," said nurse Tracy Ferrara, who worked closely with Rini during his rehab. "He is a walking miracle." •

— Lisa Bacques

# Julie Rodriguez

**Position:** development chairwoman, Cafe Hope

**Age:** 52

**Family:** husband, Roger; children, Leigh, 29, Julie Ann, 26, Ryan, 23

Julie Rodriguez is a self-made woman. Even though she didn't earn a college degree, she became president and CEO of her own company, Epic Divers and Marine. When she retired, she was looking for a way to stay active in the community and found her calling as development chairwoman for Cafe Hope.

Located on the West Bank, Cafe Hope teaches at-risk children skills for the food service industry, including cooking, catering and waiting tables, as well as basic life skills, such as resume writing and how to interview for a job. Once its graduates enter the work force, Cafe Hope provides a nine-month mentoring program so they can receive advice if they have an on-the-job problem.

What Rodriguez loves the most about her role is making a difference for children. She sees herself in many of the participants, most of whom will not get the opportunity to go to college.

"I don't have a college degree," Rodriguez said. "I went through the school of hard

knocks, learn-while-you-earn program."

Because of her experience, participants look to Rodriguez as an example of what a person can do with hard work, she said. Many have even expressed to her an interest of working in the offshore industry when they finish school.

"You see the hope in their eyes, their enthusiasm and dedication is amazing and inspiring," Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez's responsibilities have included giving participants personal attention, going into the community to attract interest and sponsorships for the café, and finding a home for the facility.

"I like getting my hands dirty," Rodriguez said. "You teach by example."

By teaching valuable skills and positive attitudes to the youth of the West Bank, Rodriguez is helping to create a healthier community.

"Nothing just happens," Rodriguez said. "You've got to make it happen."•

— Fritz Esker



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

# Janet Trahan

**Position:** palliative care volunteer, East Jefferson General Hospital

**Age:** 67

**Family:** husband, Rodney Sr. (deceased); children, Lisa, 44, Rodney Jr., 43, Matthew, 31; three grandchildren

**Education:** graduate, Dominican High School

Janet Trahan had been a palliative care volunteer for about two years when her husband of 42 years, Rodney, died of lung cancer.

"His death in late 2006 brought me to my knees," said Trahan, who volunteers at East Jefferson General Hospital. "And it made me extremely sensitive to loss."

She returned to palliative care about a year later, having gone through grief counseling and helping create a bereavement support group in her church.

"I had a very good support system when Rodney died," Trahan said. "My family and friends affirmed me and loved me, my faith in God was very strong. But the bottom line is when I got home, I was alone."

That sense of loneliness is what Trahan relives when she sits with a patient.

One morning a week, Trahan comforts patients who are dealing with end-of-life issues. She's part of a team of nurses, doctors and social workers who help patients and grieving family members deal with death.

She meets with elderly couples, such as a

couple celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary in the hospital. The wife, who was dying, told Trahan about how they met, fell in love, about children and grandchildren — in short, about their shared journey.

Once, she was working with a woman who was in her mid-30s who had terminal breast cancer — and two toddlers.

"She asked me, 'How do I tell my children I'm dying?'" Trahan said. "You can't answer that. I can only do so much."

Trahan responds to patients who ask for palliative care. Before she walks in the room, she's briefed about the patient's situation. But it's once she's inside that she learns what is needed from her.

"I sense whatever the need is, to sit and pray with them, or just to listen with compassion and empathy," Trahan said. Sometimes they can express things to a stranger and not to their own families, but I'm real clear about my role. My gift is to be present for them."•

— Anne Berry



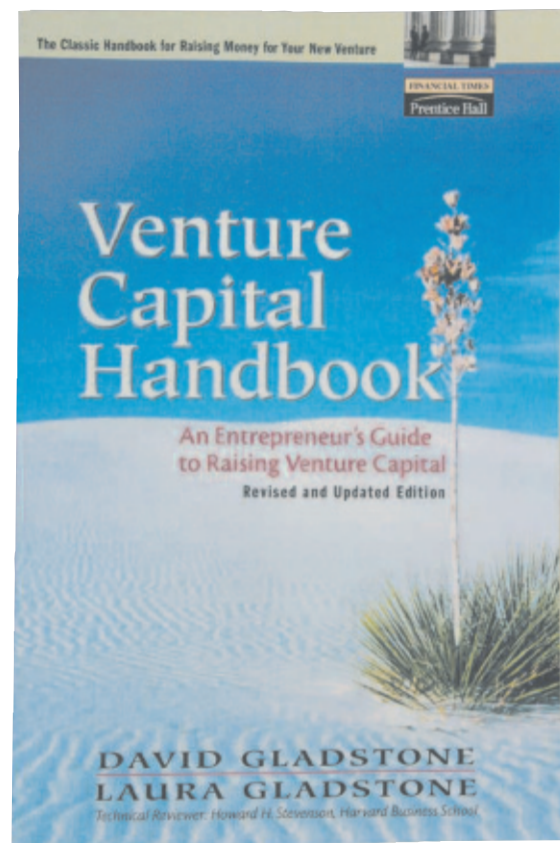
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