

Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center marks 30 years

Thousands of cancer patients have walked through the doors since Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center in Hammond opened in March 1988.

Prior to the organization's entry into Tangipahoa Parish 30 years ago, there were no significant cancer care services in the area. Today, Hammond patients and their families have access to the most advanced early detection, technology, treatments and support services available.

"The Cancer Center has the clinical expertise and technology rivaling that of what's available in larger cities," said Andrew Elson, M.D., radiation oncologist at the Hammond location. "We also have the resources and backing of the entire Mary Bird Perkins network that extends throughout Southeast Louisiana; this adds additional strength to what we can offer patients with rare or highly-complicated diseases."

The Cancer Center recently installed the Elekta Agility multileaf collimator, a state-of-the-art device allowing more precise radiation delivery only to the affected area, minimizing the impact to nearby healthy tissue

and improving outcomes and quality of life for patients.

The center is also the only provider in the area to offer Optune, a technology used to treat adult patients with recurrent glioblastoma multiforme, a form of brain cancer. This technology disrupts tumor cell division and inhibits tumor growth, enhancing quality of life for those with GBM.

In addition, the cancer center's physics team has worked with North Oaks Health System to extend highly-specialized technological innovation to areas residents.

It has credentialed and established protocols to enable the MRI scanner at North Oaks to produce high resolution images for use with the breakthrough Gamma Knife Icon used for brain tumors and other central nervous system disorders. This streamlines the process of radiation planning and delivery for patients living in the Hammond area, requiring them to travel to Baton Rouge only once for GKI treatment.

In the Hammond area each year, approximately 1,300 cancers are diagnosed.

Todd Stevens, presi-

dent and chief executive officer, Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center, said the facility opened on the North Oaks campus at a time when many people diagnosed with the disease did not have the resources nor transportation to access cancer treatments in larger cities.

"It really was a critical situation in the fact that some people were going untreated because there were no cancer services available in the area and they were unable to travel to Baton Rouge or New Orleans to receive care. When Mary Bird Perkins opened its Hammond Cancer Center, it removed a major barrier to patients receiving treatment because it brought advanced cancer care closer to their doorsteps; it has been an absolute privilege serving this community," said Stevens.

Tammy Asmus, radiation program manager, said she and the rest of the Hammond Cancer Center team are proud of the investments Mary Bird Perkins has made in the location, including a major facility renovation and technology upgrade several years ago. She also said that the relationship with the community has been particularly strong



IN HAMMOND — Attending a reception celebrating Mary Bird Perkins' Hammond location's 30th anniversary on the North Oaks Health System campus are Jonas Fontenot, Ph.D., chief operating officer and chief of medical physics, Mary Bird Perkins; Andrew Elson, M.D., radiation oncologist, Mary Bird Perkins; Todd Stevens, president and chief executive officer, Mary Bird Perkins; Michael Watkins, chief operating officer, North Oaks Health System; Tracy Randazzo, vice president of strategy and outreach, North Oaks Health System; and Tammy Asmus, radiation therapy program manager, Mary Bird Perkins-Hammond location.

and special.

"The community's generosity and support has fueled our ability to improve survivorship and lessen the burden of cancer for families impacted by cancer for 30 years. And we continue to need the community's engagement to keep pace with leading advances in care. We're also so appreciative of our wonderful

volunteers who dedicate many hours to providing a helping hand to Cancer Center patients and staff," Asmus said.

"Many of us not only work here, but also live in the Hammond area; our patients are our friends, neighbors and loved ones. We have a vested interest in providing the highest quality care, and it's the right thing to do."

At a recent event celebrating the Hammond location's 30th anniversary, Stevens thanked the center's volunteers who have contributed many hours of service. Volunteers recognized and their number of years of service included: Rosemary Rownd, 28 years; Juanita Pearson, 27 years; Mary Greathouse, nine years; and Lynn McRae, six years.