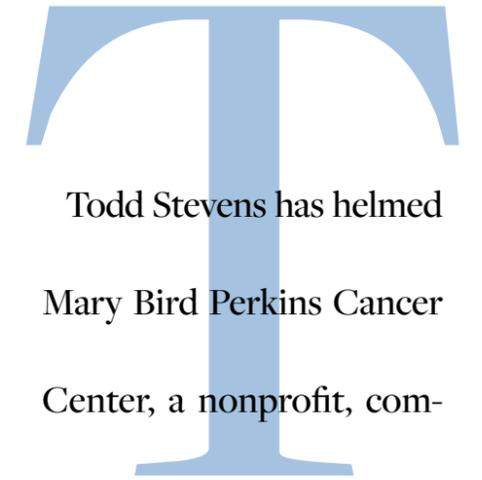


# One on One with Todd D. Stevens

President and CEO  
Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center



Todd Stevens has helmed Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center, a nonprofit, community-owned organization, for nearly two decades. Stevens and the board of directors' fundamental belief that everyone should have local access to high-quality cancer care has been the catalyst for Mary Bird Perkins realizing its vision to become Louisiana's leading cancer care organization.



contributing to this rapid progress through its extensive community outreach, graduate education, and research programs and partnerships. Because of the foresight of Mary Bird's founders, the organization is able to focus exclusively on assembling the expertise and resources required to bring these new and evolving advances to patients.

**Editor** Please describe the facility of Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center for those who have never been there.

**Stevens** With our partners, we have five locations in the greater Baton Rouge area. In 2015, we completed the renovation and expansion of Mary Bird Perkins – Our Lady of the Lake Cancer Center at 4950 Essen Lane. It was designed with patient comfort

and convenience in mind. A truly calming and beautiful setting inspired by nature and Louisiana artists' work, it includes some of the most powerful, sophisticated technology available today, and is inhabited by a team of highly skilled physicians and care givers who focus exclusively on caring for patients with cancer. Last year, Mary Bird Perkins – Our Lady of the Lake Cancer and Woman's Hospital partnered to open the Breast & GYN Cancer Pavilion, located at 500 Rue de la Vie on Woman's Hospital's campus. Similar to the Essen campus, the design is patient-centered and calming, and puts all the resources needed to detect and treat these specific cancers under one roof. In 2009, working with St. Elizabeth Hospital and community leaders from Ascension Parish, we opened a facility focused on providing local access to this growing area. Leaders in Ascension Parish continue to support the growth of this facility and the programs we are able to offer to area residents. Additionally, Mary Bird Perkins – Our Lady of the Lake Cancer Center provides medical oncology and support services to patients at the LSU Health North Clinic, 5439 Airline Highway, and is now working with Lane Regional Medical Center through a partnership that extends physician expertise to this community.

**Editor** Please describe the value of having a facility dedicated solely to cancer treatment.

**Stevens** Research confirms patients want as many cancer services clustered together as possible. As a result, our philosophy is to surround patients with everything they need to fight cancer. This is why our partnerships with hospitals, physicians, academic institutions, and community-based support organizations is so important; together, we provide comprehensive cancer care. We also find that close proximity fosters communication and collaboration among members of our medical staff and team members who provide care to patients. For example, Mary

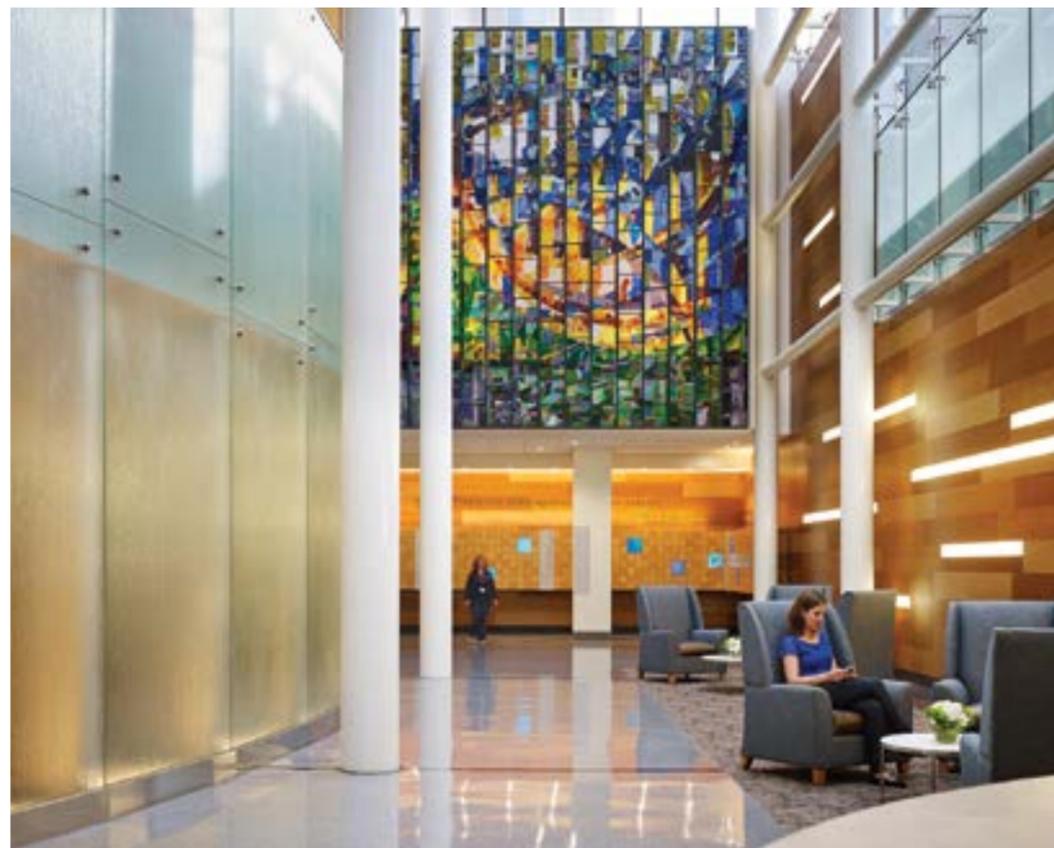
Bird Perkins – Our Lady of the Lake Cancer Center operates nine cancer-specific treatment teams, which each include medical and radiation oncologists, pathologists, surgeons, radiologists, and other specialists for cancers such as colon, rectal, lung, head and neck, and other cancers. Having all of these experts near one another makes our multidisciplinary approach possible. Over the past year, 117 physician-driven sessions were held to create enhanced patient care strategies among these nine cancer-specific teams.

**Editor** What are some of the environmental factors contributing to cancer? Should we be doing more in the area of prevention?

**Stevens** We know that prolonged exposure to certain chemical agents and materials may increase risk factors for some types of cancer. For example, inhalation of asbestos fibers or cigarette smoke is strongly linked to lung cancer. We also know that diet, alcohol use and obesity may increase a person's development of any type of cancer. Many cancers can be prevented or detected at a very early stage and treatment minimized, so there is always room for more education to help prevent the disease. Since 2002, Mary Bird Perkins' Prevention on the Go program, which provides mobile prevention, education, and early detection services, has screened over 80,000 individuals. Traditionally, our Prevention on the Go program was a community-based service that was offered primarily to the uninsured. Today, as a result of a generous donation from Albemarle Foundation, we are also bringing these services to workplaces because we've learned that individuals with health insurance are generally not likely to keep up with recommended cancer screenings. Since the inception of Prevention on the Go workplace program in 2016, more than 60 percent of those who have participated were being screened for the first time in their lives. This tells us that the historical reason for people

**Chief Editor Smith W. Hartley** What is new in the area of cancer care and treatment?

**Todd Stevens** Interventions to prevent, detect, diagnose, treat, and care for individuals with cancer are evolving at an unprecedented pace. Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center and its hospital, academic, and community partners were encouraged by recent news showing a 27 percent decline in deaths from cancer over a 25-year period. Louisiana's rates show improvements that mirror this national trend with a 26.5 percent reduction in cancer deaths since the 90s. This decline can be attributed to a greater emphasis on prevention, education and early detection, and advances in understanding the complex nature of cancer and how to interrupt, slow, or stop it from progressing. Looking ahead, we anticipate numerous new tools will be available to help patients and families who are burdened with cancer. Scientists and clinicians will continue to unravel tangles that have slowed progress in the past. Mary Bird Perkins is focused on



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not receiving cancer screening, which was believed to be lack of health insurance, is just one of the challenges preventing early detection. With amazing donors who support Mary Bird's mission, our team members are working hard to address all of these challenges through the Prevention on the Go community and workplace programs. We still have much work to do here in Louisiana.

**Editor** What is Mary Bird Perkins' commitment to cancer research? What is new on the cancer research front?

**Stevens** Mary Bird Perkins team members are making important contributions to new knowledge about cancer. Through our partnership with Louisiana State University's department of physics and astronomy, researchers have sourced discoveries that have advanced the fields of radiation therapy and imaging. Together with our hospital partners, we are able to operate a strong clinical research program where national trials are available to people close to home. We are proud to be partners with the LSU Health Sciences Centers in New Orleans and Shreveport in the National Cancer Institute's Community Oncology Research Program. Every patient is evaluated to determine if they are eligible for a clinical trial. Over the last two years, 65 percent of patients who fit the criteria participated in a study. Information gleaned from these national trials accelerates knowledge and future advances in treatment. In terms of emerging research, there are many treatment trials and studies that relate to early detection and survivorship. There are also numerous initiatives underway in other areas, including medical physics research with Louisiana State University.

**Editor** Can cancer be eradicated?

**Stevens** Cancer is misleadingly called by a single name. However, it is a myriad of diseases that have been influenced by modern medicine in both great advances and

painfully minimal advances. We hope that one day cancer will be a thing of the past, but it is likely that we will continue to see progress that allows clinicians to manage more forms of the disease as a chronic illness. One example of this is how we are seeing improved outcomes for patients diagnosed with certain types of late-stage lung cancers who respond favorably to new advances in immunotherapy. We have seen similar advances for other cancer types. In the future, science will continue to unravel why these interventions work for some patients, but not all. It is reasonable to expect more and more pathways will be discovered that lead to improved outcomes for more patients.

**Editor** What is Mary Bird Perkins' relationship with OLOL and other Baton Rouge area facilities?

**Stevens** Our partnerships in Baton Rouge and across the state are the foundation of how Mary Bird's mission to improve survivorship and lessen the burden of cancer is extended to individuals and communities. For individuals who seek care in the Baton Rouge area, Mary Bird Perkins – Our Lady of the Lake Cancer Center is by far the most resourced and comprehensive cancer program in the region. This was achieved by linking the physical resources and diverse subspecialty clinical expertise of a tertiary-quaternary hospital (OLOL) with a cancer focused organization (MBP) around a common mission. This foundational partnership made it possible to extend and advance partnerships with Woman's Hospital, LSU Health, and Lane Regional Medical Center. Each partner brings unique expertise and resources in cancer care around the patient, so that together we can improve survivorship and lessen the burden of cancer.

**Editor** Are patients staying in Baton Rouge for cancer care, or are some still traveling to Houston or New Orleans for treatment? How and why is staying in Baton Rouge for care important?

**Stevens** Research shows that survivorship and outcomes significantly improve, and the financial and emotional burdens of cancer are lessened, when patients access care in their own communities. It is a privilege to care for the residents of southeast Louisiana and beyond, and our team has the expertise, technology, and resources to support the most complex of cancers.

**Editor** What are some things about cancer and cancer care that the general public isn't normally aware of?

**Stevens** Typically, people don't think about cancer unless it affects them or someone they love, but the disease is pervasive and community support is vital to what we do. There are so many individuals, corporations, and grantors that fund key prevention, education, early detection, and research programs, and our progress would not be possible without their support. Also, people are generally unaware of when they should begin getting screened for specific cancers. We encourage people to talk to their doctors about which cancer screenings they should participate in and at what age. Education and early detection are key factors in preventing and beating the disease.

**Editor** What is the future of cancer and cancer treatment?

**Stevens** Immunotherapy, which deploys the body's immune system to fight cancer, is expected to play a major role in the future of treatment. It is an area that is still in its infancy and there is still so much to learn, but early results are already promising when used with some cancers. Additionally, personalized treatment regimens based on targets identified by evaluating the genetic profile of a patient's tumor will continue to evolve as therapies catch up with the information available by sequencing tumor cells. ■

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