



# ST. LUKE'S HOSPITAL

A 95-Year Legacy of Serving Polk County

## 2024 ANNUAL REVIEW

For nearly a century, St. Luke's Hospital has been a steadfast partner in the health and well-being of Polk County residents.

Our journey has led us to become one of the Southeast's top-rated critical access hospitals.



# 2024 Board of Trustees

St. Luke's Hospital

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## Serving Polk County for 95 years

**ST. LUKE'S HOSPITAL** is one of the top-rated critical access hospital within a 200-mile radius, rapidly becoming a healthcare center of excellence in Western Carolinas. We are well on our way to becoming the model for "critical access" hospitals in the southeast. To that end, and through much hard work, St. Luke's is bringing worldclass to rural Polk County, NC.

As a nonprofit, community-owned hospital, St. Luke's relies on the generous support of our community. The Foundation for St. Luke's Hospital, Polk County Community Foundation, Polk County Economic Development, NC Office of Rural Health, and many others help keep medical care local and convenient.

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**ON THE COVER:** Since 1929, St. Luke's Hospital has been the primary provider of acute healthcare in Polk County, NC.

**Thank you for the privilege** of serving as St. Luke's last CEO. While my official title has been one of interim, I've been honored to have served St. Luke's Hospital. On October 1, 2024, St. Luke's transitions to AdventHealth Polk. The transition is a sign of the times when the size of an organization leverages greater purchasing power and influence in the healthcare industry, and it is necessary to secure the future of our hospital for the next twenty years. But for this annual report, the last for St. Luke's, the theme is our ninety-five-year legacy.

**From humble beginnings:** Set on the mountainside in Polk County, NC, St. Luke's Hospital has been a fixture in healthcare services for nearly a century. Since admitting our first patient in 1929, healthcare delivery in Polk County has witnessed monumental changes. Our modest beginning was with two doctors, four nurses, a housekeeper, a cook, a maid, and a houseman. Today, we are a team of nearly 300 healthcare professionals who have experienced tremendous advances in technology and resources.

**The St. Luke's legacy began** when Dr. Allen J. Jervey and Dr. Marion C. Palmer moved to Tryon, where the pure air and pristine views aided patients' recovery. From Godshaw Hill, the Tryon Infirmary relocated to a new building on Trade Street. Miss Lucy Embury, a patient of Dr. Allen Jervey, left the property in trust to the two doctors to construct a hospital she asked to be named after Luke, the great physician and the New Testament author of the Books of Luke and Acts.

For several reasons, Miss Embury's property was unsuitable for hospital use and sold for \$10,000. Dr. Jervey then donated the property on Carolina Drive. With the \$10,000 from the sale of Lucy Embury's gifted property, a \$43,000 donation from the Duke Foundation, and contributions from citizens of Polk County, St. Luke's Hospital was constructed for \$100,000 and opened on November 8, 1929.

**By 1933, the large charity load** of patients placed St. Luke's under financial burden. Facing closure, substantial contributions by individuals spared the hospital.

In early 1935, the community leaders formed the St. Luke's Hospital Association, and through a community-wide fundraising campaign, philanthropists raised money to maintain daily operations.

When the Carolina Drive building was no longer viable, the community rallied for their hospital in the early 1970s to fund and build a new state-of-the-art facility. On Feb.16, 1968, a special election received support to move ahead to build a new hospital on N.C. 108 near Columbus on 25 acres donated by the St. Luke's Auxiliary. A groundbreaking ceremony was held in the spring of 1970, with the new hospital opening for patients April 16, 1972.

**A New Era of Healthcare:** In 2004, the Board of Trustees applied for Critical Access designation. This financial strategy included a more stable Medicare reimbursement. Another critical decision was to partner with an extensive hospital system for management expertise, experience in developing community-based clinical services, and participation in volume-based purchasing. The partnership focused on managing productivity and expenses, delivering excellent patient service, and rebuilding relationships with the medical community.

As a non-profit, community-owned hospital, St. Luke's relies on the generous support of our community. The Foundation for St. Luke's Hospital, the Duke Endowment, the Polk County Community Foundation, Polk County Economic Development, and many others have played a crucial role in our operations. Support from these philanthropic organizations has enabled us to upgrade our medical equipment, expand our services, and attract top healthcare professionals, all of which have contributed to our recognition as a leading hospital for patient experience.

**Today, nearly a century after its founding,** the St. Luke's legacy continues to grow. We are one of the top-rated critical access hospitals within a 200-mile radius, rapidly becoming a healthcare center of excellence in Western Carolinas. To that end, our new partnership with AdventHealth promises more significant growth and long-term stability for the healthcare needs of Polk County.

Alex Bell  
Chief Executive Officer  
Interim

Bill Miller  
Board of Trustees  
Chair



Rose Robertson  
2024 Daisy Award for  
exceptional patient care



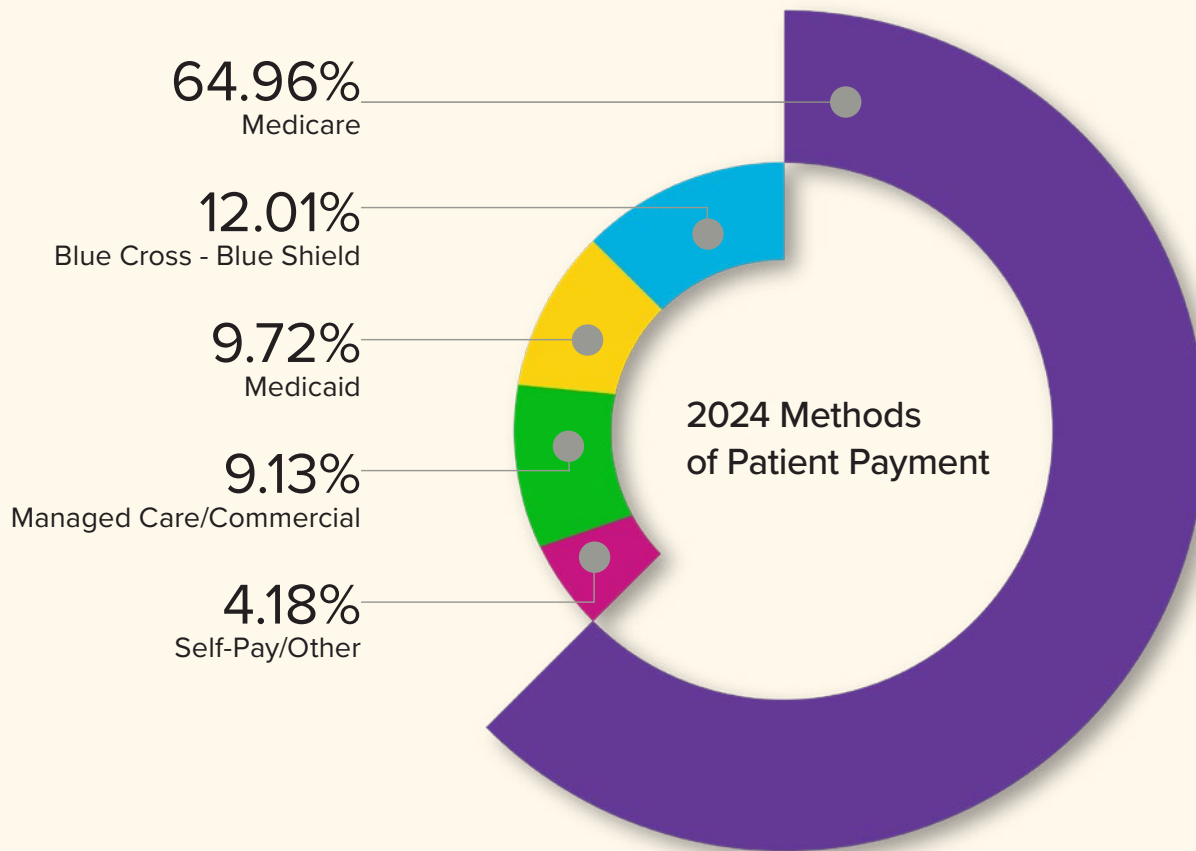


**Katheryn Lowrie**  
MSW, LCSW

**Katheryn Lowrie** is the behavioral health program manager at St. Luke's Hospital. She has a master's degree in clinical social work and over ten years of experience in the behavioral health field. Katheryn is pursuing her master's in nursing to expand her scope of practice and address the intricate interaction between mental and physical health. She is a part of the National Council for the American College of Lifestyle Medicine and integrates lifestyle interventions into her daily practice. Katheryn is a fervent advocate for mental health and addiction recovery and is passionate about normalizing mental healthcare, increasing access to behavioral health services, and implementing preventative measures for youth. Her specialties include trauma-informed care, co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, cognitive behavioral therapy, and family systems theory. Katheryn lives in Columbus, NC, with her husband and two children.



# 2024 Fiscal Highlights



## FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

Hospital	
Salaries	\$ 12,274,045
Benefits	\$ 3,787,901
Contract Labor	\$ 2,644,838
Enterprise (HOSPITAL & SLPN)	
Salaries	\$ 18,385,137
Benefits	\$ 4,401,609
Contract Labor	\$ 2,644,838

## PHYSICIAN NETWORK ENCOUNTERS

Foothills Medical & Surgical Associates	12,226
(including General Surgery & Cardiology)	
St. Luke's Orthopedic & Sports Medicine	4,979
CHG Hospitalist	3,719
Saluda Family Medicine (including Behavioral Health)	2,241
St. Luke's Urology	874
Hospital	
Discharges	874
Patient Days	3,864
ALOS	3.2
Outpatient Visits	27,452
ER Visits	11,148
IP Surgeries	89
OP Surgeries	670

## 2024 CARE to those who need it, regardless of ability to pay

Uninsured patients assistance	\$ 1,073,314
Unpaid bills from patients	\$ 1,200,611
Health clinics subsidies	\$ 630,345
Community benefit programs	\$ 214,905
<b>TOTAL community benefit</b>	<b>\$ 3,119,175</b>

**George Azar, MD**  
Orthopedic Surgery



**John Hutto, MD**  
Cardiology



## 2024 Board of Trustees

Foundation for St. Luke's Hospital

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Joanie Newman

Barbara Oklesen

Ron Peters

Lane Price

Linda Schutter

C. Edgar Spencer

George Sweet

### STAFF

Wendy Hamil Executive Director



## From the Chair and Executive Director

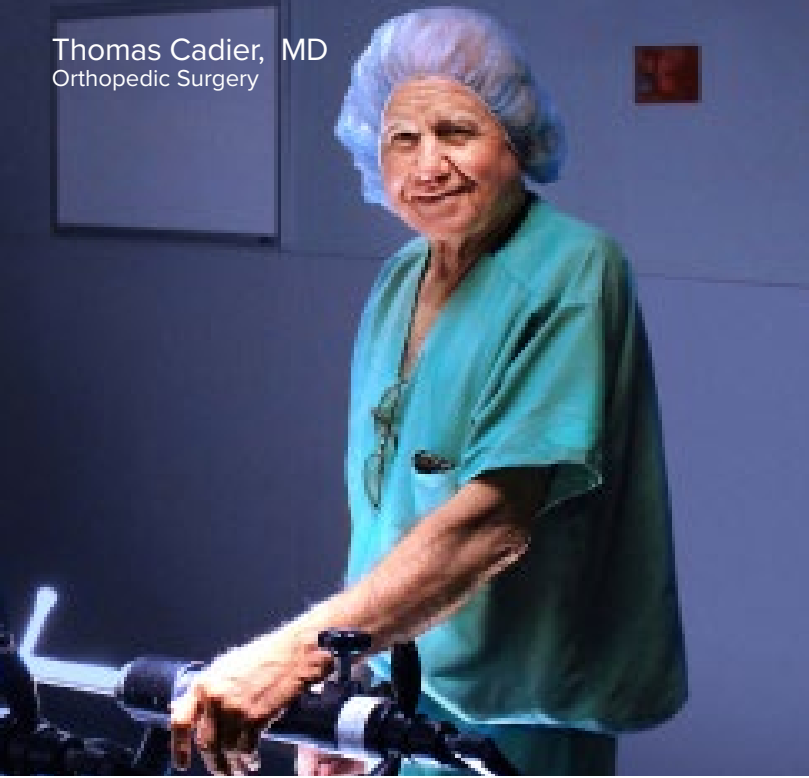
At the center of philanthropy is service, and to serve is to care. The lease of St. Luke's Hospital to AdventHealth at the end of 2024 created a path toward a strong future built on care, while recog-

nizing a meaningful past founded on compassion. Just as Dr. Allen Jervey and Dr. Marion Palmer treated patients like family in a small clinic during the early 1920s, we are committed to follow in their footsteps to serve.

In 1991, St. Luke's Hospital Foundation was established to serve as a conduit for community philanthropy, supporting the hospital. Today, we see the purposeful work of those who have provided healthcare to this community for nearly one hundred years fulfilled through our donors. You inspire us to serve, and we thank you for your vision to ensure top quality healthcare for your community.

Connections within our community are fundamental, and relationships are created through serving. From the Polk County Community Foundation and community leaders to local, state, and federal entities, our partnerships foster growth. We are thankful for their shared passion to serve and are honored to work with them for the betterment of community healthcare.

Thomas Cadier, MD  
Orthopedic Surgery



Joshua Knolhoff, MD  
General Surgery



This year, your generous support through the Foundation helped the hospital purchase new equipment, complete hospital renovations, and offer free health screenings. We saw many lives saved because of free health screenings and new equipment now provides more insight into your health needs.

Orthopedics and Sports Medicine purchased a portable ultrasound machine and the St. Luke's Rehabilitation Services installed a new balance machine to help patients improve stability during recovery. Renovations of the Pre-Op Room and patient showers were completed. Pre-Op rooms now feel inviting and offer a space that feels warm while giving nursing staff all the equipment they need readily on hand. Having more accessible showers with a welcoming, well-designed space gives patients a sense of security.

Through grants from Polk County Community Foundation, Polk and Rutherford County residents had the opportunity to receive free calcium scoring exams, and uninsured Polk County residents could continue to receive free 3-D mammograms. The Men's Health Tune-Up & Car Show in June served over 150 people with free health screenings and many hospital providers attended to answer questions.

The Foundation's work is vital, and through philanthropy we learn from the stories of our community's history, its successes, and its challenges so that we can continue to serve in our journey forward. We are honored to fulfill your charitable wishes while serving this community. Our success lies within people like you who serve and walk in the shoes of two dedicated doctors, looking to build a strong future for healthcare in our rural community.

Thank you for helping us make a difference in so many lives.

Linda Greensfelder  
Interim Chair

Wendy Hamil  
Director

\$936

Average Contribution

578

Contributions

\$540,975

Raised



Marion Cherigny Palmer, MD  
Founding Physician



Allen Jones Jervey, MD  
Founding Physician



Set on the mountainside in Polk County, NC, St. Luke's Hospital has been a fixture in healthcare services for nearly a century. Since admitting our first patient in 1929, healthcare delivery has had monumental changes. Beginning with two doctors, four nurses, a housekeeper, a cook, a maid, and a houseman, we've grown to a team of nearly 300 healthcare professionals and have experienced tremendous advances in technology and resources.

The St. Luke's legacy began when Dr. Allen J. Jervey and Dr. Marion C. Palmer moved to Tryon, where the pure air and pristine views would aid patients' recovery. From

Godshaw Hill, the Tryon Infirmary relocated to a new building on Trade Street. While the clinic provided a valuable service, it needed improvements to meet the community's needs. Miss Lucy Embury, a patient of Dr. Allen Jervey, left the property in trust to the two doctors to construct a hospital she asked to be named St. Luke's, after Luke, the great physician and the New Testament author of the Books of Luke and Acts.

For several reasons, the property donated by Miss Embury was unsuitable for hospital use and sold for \$10,000. Dr. Jervey then donated the property on Carolina Drive. With the \$10,000 from the sale of Lucy

Embury's gifted property, a \$43,000 donation from the Duke Foundation, and contributions from citizens of Tryon, St. Luke's Hospital was constructed for \$100,000 and opened on November 8, 1929.

By 1933, the large charity load of patients placed St. Luke's under severe financial burden. Facing closure, substantial contributions by a few individuals spared the hospital. In early 1935, the community leaders formed the St. Luke's Hospital Association, and through a community-wide fundraising campaign, philanthropists raised a considerable sum of money to maintain daily operations.



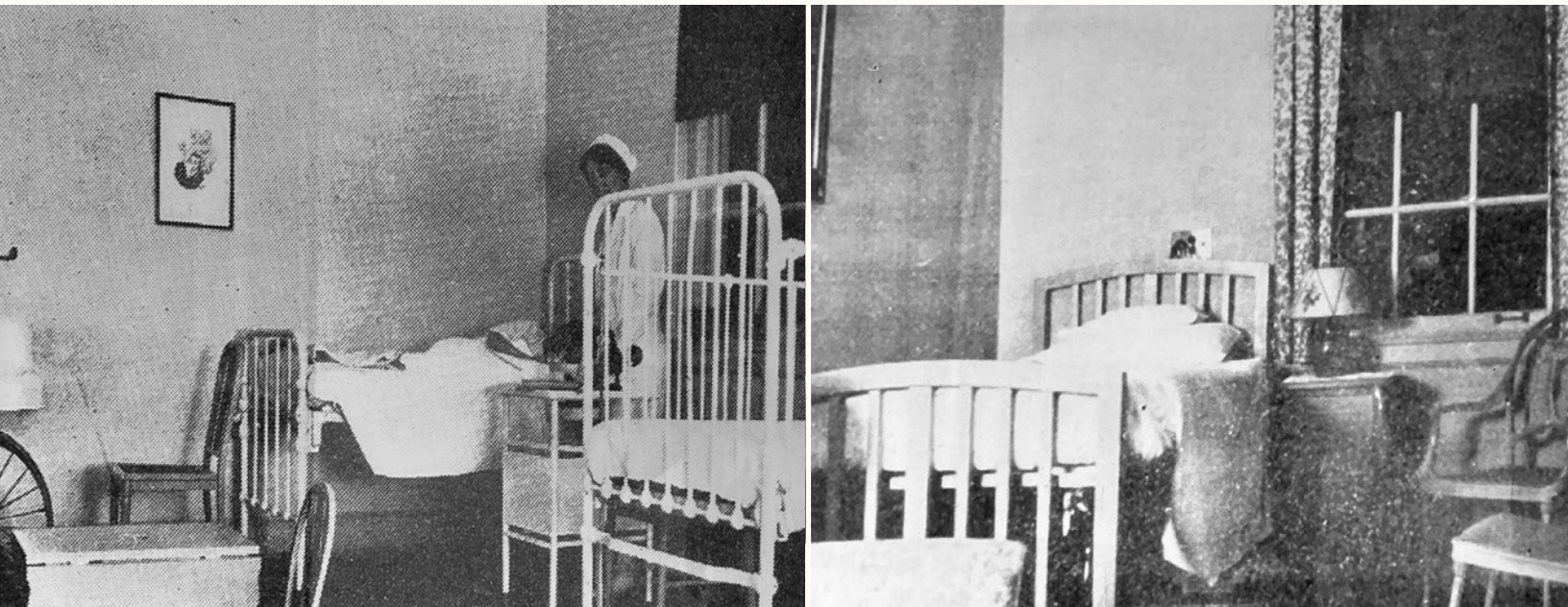
When that building was no longer viable for expansion, the community rallied again for their hospital in the early 1970s to fund and build a brand-new state-of-the-art facility.

In 2004, the Board of Trustees applied for Critical Access designation. This financial strategy included a more stable Medicare reimbursement. Another critical decision was to partner with an extensive hospital

service, and rebuilding relationships with the medical community. As a result, St. Luke's Hospital experienced a renewed ability to meet our community's healthcare needs.

In 2020, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recognized St. Luke's as a 5-star hospital for patient experience. In addition, in 2021, Healthgrades.com

our operations. Their support has enabled us to upgrade our medical equipment, expand our services, and attract top healthcare professionals, all of which have contributed to our recognition as a 5-star hospital for patient experience. We are deeply grateful for their contributions, which have helped keep medical care local and convenient.



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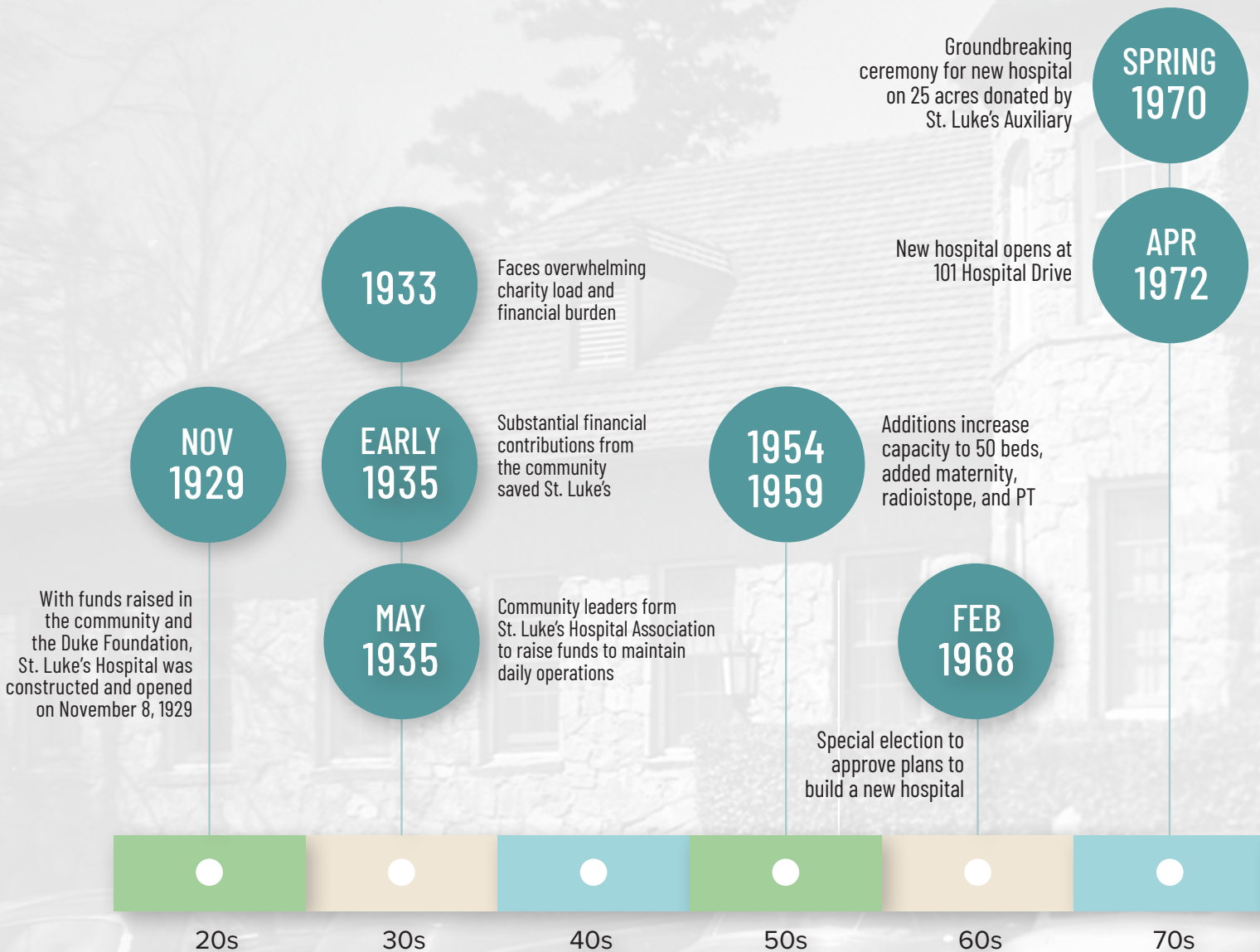
In 2008, the Board entered into a management agreement with Atrium Health to assist St. Luke's leadership with developing a strategic plan for growth and sustainability. The partnership focused on improving staff morale, managing productivity and expenses, delivering excellent patient

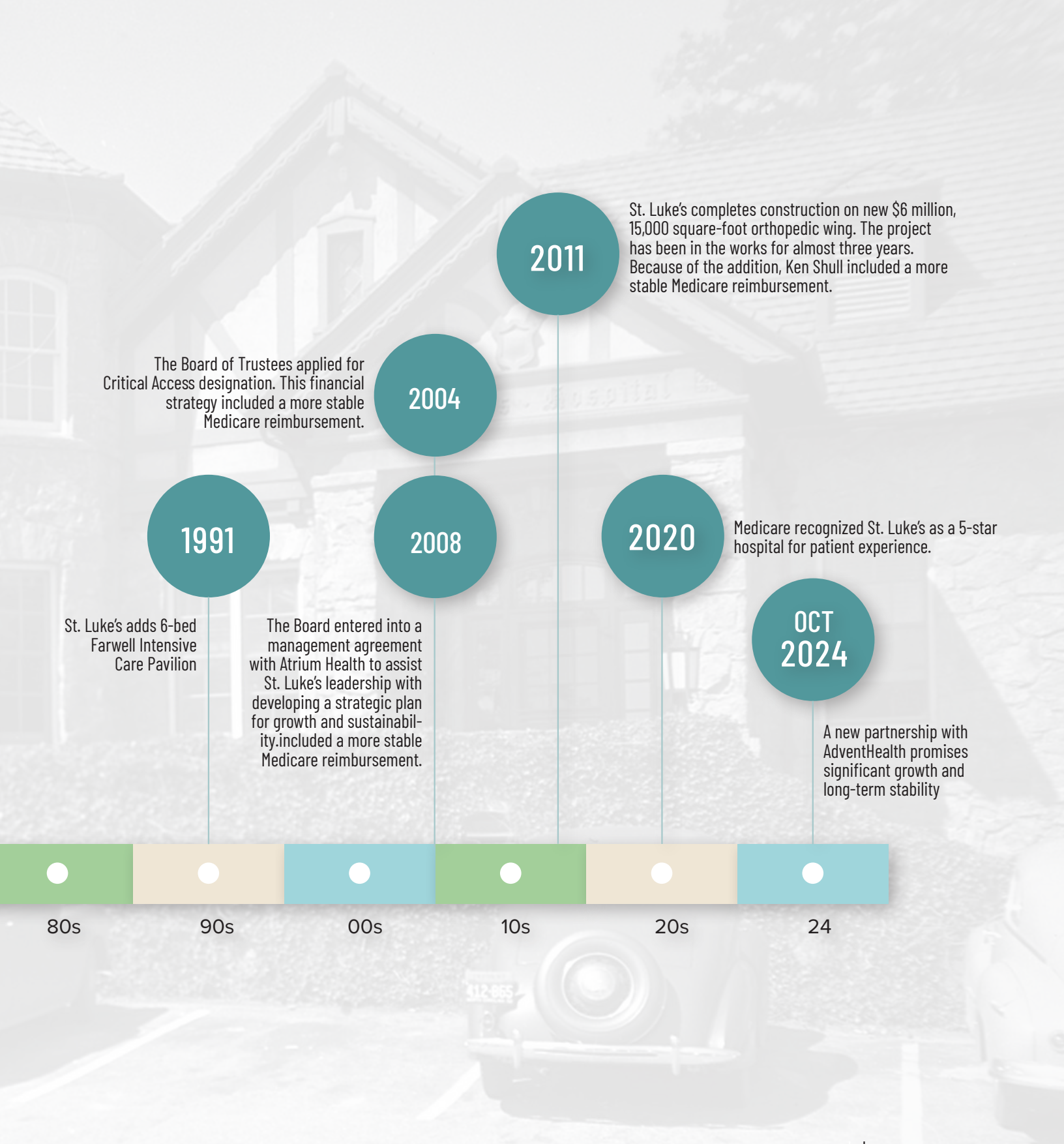
ranked the hospital 16% higher than the national average, and we're now #1 in the greater Western Carolinas for "outstanding patient experience."

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# 1929 – 2024. The legacy of St. Luke’s Hospital





2011

St. Luke's completes construction on new \$6 million, 15,000 square-foot orthopedic wing. The project has been in the works for almost three years. Because of the addition, Ken Shull included a more stable Medicare reimbursement.

2004

The Board of Trustees applied for Critical Access designation. This financial strategy included a more stable Medicare reimbursement.

1991

St. Luke's adds 6-bed Farwell Intensive Care Pavilion

2008

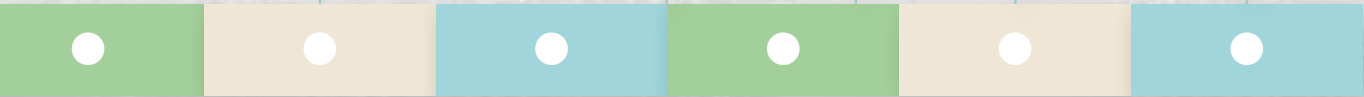
The Board entered into a management agreement with Atrium Health to assist St. Luke's leadership with developing a strategic plan for growth and sustainability. Included a more stable Medicare reimbursement.

2020

Medicare recognized St. Luke's as a 5-star hospital for patient experience.

OCT 2024

A new partnership with AdventHealth promises significant growth and long-term stability



80s 90s 00s 10s 20s 24



## 2024 Year in Review — The Foundation

### **Women’s Ambassador Group at Tryon International Equestrian Center – Funds Raised for Sustaining Surgical Excellence**

The Women’s Ambassadors Group gathers twice a year to learn about various health and wellness topics, services provided by St. Luke’s Hospital, and how to support the Foundation’s current fundraising efforts. These ambassadors then disseminate the information learned throughout the community.

- **Presenter Dr. Jeffrey Viar and Dr. Joshua Knolhoff** – On April 23rd, over 70 ladies adorned in spectacular Derby hats gathered to learn about diabetes prevention and treatment. Dr. Viar from the PCP Foothills Medical Associates shared the importance of diabetes prevention and treatment. He comes to St. Luke’s Hospital with over 25 years of experience and services on the Hospital Board as a trustee. Dr. Viar was voted Best Doctor in the Tryon Daily Bulletin and was also awarded the 2020 Rural Health Practitioner of the Year, a first for North Carolina.

Dr. Joshua Knolhoff, a General Surgeon with St. Luke’s Hospital, announced the Foundation’s new fundraising campaign “Sustaining Surgical Excellence” to raise funds for new equipment for the hospital’s three operating rooms. He discussed two of the vital operating room items that will be beneficial to his patient care, the electrocautery system with ligasure and the scope cleaner. Dr.

Knolhoff explained the benefits of the new electrocautery system used to perform colonoscopies and EGDs. This machine uses decreased energy, which preserves healthy tissue and promotes faster healing. In addition, purchasing a new scope cleaner ensures that there is no downtime in endoscopy procedures. The Surgical Excellence Campaign will purchase essential equipment that keeps local community members from traveling long distances for health-related procedures and ensures our rural community can access timely and efficient life-improving surgeries near home.

- **Presenters Brandon Nudd and Jared Keresoma** – On September 12th, over 80 local women came to welcome AdventHealth leaders to Polk County and meet the Foundation’s new Executive Director, Wendy Hamil. Themed “Fall in Love with AdventHealth Polk”, Chair of the Board of Trustees for St. Luke’s Hospital Bill Miller explained the details of why AdventHealth was selected as a partner. Mr. Nudd and Mr. Keresoma shared their excitement about expanding services in Polk County. Attendees also learned that the two hospitals have a similar history that arose from philanthropic women and each hospital shares quality, compassionate, patient-centered healthcare approaches. On October 1, 2024, AdventHealth’s formal lease will go into affect. Staff, physicians and services will be connected, ensuring Polk County a wide range of services and health care accessibility.



### **Ache Around the Lake 2024 — Cancelled this year due to Hurricane Helene**

- The 19th Annual Ache Around the Lake Run Festival was unfortunately cancelled this year due to Hurricane Helene, but the story does not end here. Without hesitation, local businesses who sponsored the event donated their sponsorship money. Many participants who also felt strongly that St. Luke's Hospital's compassionate work reached across our WNC region to help its community elected to donate their entry fee for the mission of the Foundation. The event may not have brought us together for a run alongside friends this year, yet the heartfelt meaning behind the event was not lost. The 2025 Ache Around the Lake event is scheduled to take place on Saturday, October 25, 2025, with the hopes that those we missed will be joined by many more runners and walkers who want to tackle the undulating course around Lake Lanier for the benefit of our local hospital. The race is made possible by The Ann Jacob Toms Fund at Polk County Community Foundation. Thank you to all our sponsors and volunteers for making this event a success every year, even in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

### **2024 Palmer and Jervey Society Appreciation Reception**

On November 15th, National Philanthropy Day, the Foundation hosted an afternoon reception at the Foundation office to thank our Palmer & Jervey Society Donors for their generosity this past year. Providers and front-line staff shared with donors the impact their donations have had on patient care and hospital services. Orthopedic Surgeon and Sports Medicine Specialist Dr. George Azar, MD, was the highlight of the afternoon, showcasing the Orthopedic Team and their advances in orthopedic care. He explained how he chose to specialize in this field and shared a humble story of why surgery is often his last approach when treating injuries. With over 23 years of experience in orthopedics, Dr. Azar's background includes a healthcare career that began in the laboratory, followed by volunteering for medical missions in the US and abroad. His compassion and dedication to each patient speaks volumes as many patients come to him through referrals because he embraces whole-person care.



## Fundraising Campaigns

### **Sustaining Surgical Excellence - Funds raised \$309,000**

This campaign seeks to raise \$1 million to ensure that St. Luke's can maintain the highest standards of surgical excellence for year's to come. Despite our smaller size, our commitment to excellence is evident in our diverse range of surgical procedures, covering cardiology, general surgery, orthopedics, pain treatment, and urology. This unique offering establishes us as a vital healthcare hub, providing essential surgical services to our rural community and minimizing the need for residents to travel long distances for critical care. Your donations support new anesthesia machines, orthopedic power tools, patient monitors, sterilization equipment, electrocautery equipment, and more.

### **Medical Equipment - FY24 Donations \$17,638**

Donors supported the initiative of raising funds for needed medical equipment into FY24. Funds raised supported new mobility and balance equipment for rehab, portable ultrasound equipment for orthopedics, exam tables for Foothills Medical Associates, TEE probe for cardiology, and lab equipment for urology.

### **Hospital Renovations (Include pic of shower)- FY24 Donations \$1,580**

In 2023, donors generously gave to renovate three patient shower rooms in the hospital to make these more accessible and modern. Renovations were completed in September 2024.

### **Pre-Operative Wing Renovation (include pics of room and 3 donor plaques)- FY24 Donations \$10,723**

In 2023, donors supported the needed renovation of our preoperative wing, as this is often the first impression our surgical patients have of our hospital. In 2024, renovations started on the 12 patient rooms and hallway. Donations supported new flooring, paint, headboards, sinks and countertops, door wraps, chairs, and other miscellaneous materials. Thank you for beautifying this space for our patients and their families.

### **Ann Jacob Toms Fund at Polk County Community Foundation- Received \$85,302.16**

[Update this received amount after 9.30.24. Wendy use spreadsheet from PCCF that shows what they have reimbursed us for the year. This fund was established by the late Ann Jacob Toms at the Polk County Community Foundation to encourage and support lifetime health and wellness and prevention efforts. The Fund is used to serve all people in Polk County, North Carolina, regardless of means. All programs and services supported by the Fund are offered without charge to citizens. In FY2024, the Ann Jacob Toms Fund was used to provide several new community health and wellness offerings and prevention programs.](#)



- **3rd Annual Men's Health Fair and Car Show** – In recognition of National Men's Health Month, St. Luke's Hospital and The Foundation for St. Luke's Hospital hosted a free community car show and health fair on June 8th at Harmon Field in Tryon. The free event was made possible by the Ann Jacobs Tom Fund of the Polk County Community Foundation with the focus on health screenings for prevention or early detection of many health-issues such as diabetes, cardio illnesses, and skin cancer.

The event provided health screenings to 107 attendees, including 163 free labs, 53 skin cancer screenings, blood pressure screenings, hands-only CPR, and a variety of health and wellness education all at no charge to our community.

The car show attracted 82 vehicles who showcased classics to modern day beauties. From a 1968 Dodge Charger owned by Mike O'Connor, and a 1965 Ford Cobra by owner Mark Thompson, to a 1957 BMW R60 motorcycle with a Steib sidecar, all participants came with a superb display of automotive history. The overall car show winner was Richard and Lynn Coombs, with their 1934 Rolls-Royce 20/25.

- **Fitness Trail and Wellness Walk and Talks** – The Tom Raymond Fitness Trail is located behind the St. Luke's Emergency Department parking lot, next to EMS. The maintenance of this trail is a partnership between St. Luke's Hospital, The Foundation for St. Luke's Hospital, Polk County Parks, Recreation, and Maintenance Department, and Polk County

Community Foundation. The trail received renovations in 2023. In 2024, funds were used for six new benches for the lower portion of trail, trail resurfacing, trail labor, and tree removal. In early Spring, a new gazebo with a concrete pad was installed, giving walkers a serene rest with mountain views along the trail.

Also in 2024, the Foundation began to host a series of St. Luke's Wellness Walk and Talks. At these fitness-focused events, a St. Luke's provider or teammate share important health and wellness tips, followed by a healthy snack and lively group walk on the trail.

The public is welcome and encouraged to use the trail and benefit from the workout stations positioned along it, as well as new benches for rest and relaxation. Utilizing this .36 mile trail, walkers can increase cardio strength, increase pulmonary health, and even find mental health wellness in a beautiful forest setting. Bring your friends and benefit from this local, scenic trail.

## 2024 Year in Review — The Foundation (continued)

- **Community Easter Egg Hunt** – Even though rain changed our initial plans of having a Glow Egg Hunt on the fitness trail, over 160 children still had a wonderful time hunting eggs and enjoying a meal with their families. The Foundation’s Board worked tirelessly stuffing over 2,000 eggs to prepare for this event. Thank you to With ALL Church and Stearns Gym for providing an indoor alternative and to Polk County Parks and Recreation for providing a s’mores and a camp fire after the egg hunt. Kids searched for several coveted “golden eggs” to win gift baskets with items donated by the following local businesses Wild Petunias, KidSenses Children’s Interactive Museum, Carolina Dragonfly Boutique, All Good Things Bakery, and Mary Scruggs, realtor at Walker Wallace & Emerson Realty.
- **Free 3D Screening Mammograms** – Funding continued for free mammograms for uninsured Polk residents

### FOUNDATION FUNDS TO SUPPORT ST. LUKE’S

- Lab equipment for Urology
- Ultrasound machine for Ortho
- Electronic Exam Tables for Foothills
- Patient mobility devices for Rehab
- Balance Machine for Rehab
- Transesophageal Echocardiogram program for cardiology
- Pre-op Room Renovations
- Renovation of 3 Patient Showers
- Contrast Enhanced Mammography
- Free calcium scoring exams for Polk and Rutherford County residents
- Free Community Health Events
- Free 3D Mammograms for uninsured Polk County residents

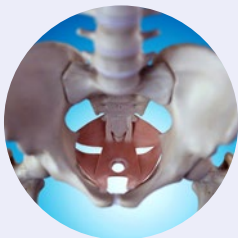


Nikki Laughter

2024 BEE Award

Be Exceptional  
Everyday

**Casey Harris**  
MS, APRN, FNP-C



**Casey Harris** received a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. After working as a registered nurse, she obtained a master's degree from Clemson University to become a Family Nurse Practitioner. She is certified by the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and a member of the American Urological Association. She has prior experience as a nurse practitioner in cardiology and urgent care.

# 2024 Year in Review — Grants

## New Awarded Hospital Grants

St. Luke's Hospital has received a significant boost in its modernization efforts with the approval of \$2.8 million in federal funding, thanks to the efforts of North Carolina District 11 Congressman Chuck Edwards. This funding will continue the hospital's transformation, enabling it to keep pace with evolving building codes, equipment, and technology. The proposed upgrades will begin in FY25 to include replacing the normal and emergency gear supplying power to the entire facility, replacing the manual and emergency automatic transfer switches supplying power to the facility, installing branch distribution panels downstream of the automatic transfer switches, and installing an additional water supply line to the facility from the public utility to meet the redundant water supply required by the plumbing code.

## Hospital Grant Updates

NC Office of Rural Health – Final Year 3 of Community Health Cardiology Grant to provide access to cardiology services.

NC State Fiscal Recovery Fund – Virtual Behavioral Health Program Grant- Awarded in FY23 to create and expand access to critically needed outpatient mental health services in our community. St. Luke's Mental Health and Wellness officially launched in January 2024 at Saluda Family Medicine. Funding provides a dedicated tele-psychiatrist and tele-therapist to serve our community. Patients can connect to the tele-providers either at home or can come on-site to the clinic where there is a dedicated, private space to connect. Funding will continue through December 2026.

Nearly one in five North Carolinians experience a mental illness and more than one in seven of those people lack health insurance. According to the 2021 Community Needs Assessment, mental health was identified as the number one issue in Polk County. During FY24, St. Luke's Mental Health and Wellness served 184 community members who benefited from this vital service.

## Hospital Accomplishments

**Addition of Casey Harris, NP Urology** — Graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 2012, Casey worked as an RN in inpatient nursing until 2017. She then earned a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) from Clemson University and became a certified Family Nurse practitioner in 2017. Her experience working in urgent care, cardiology, and urology gives her valuable insight into patient needs. Her care philosophy is to treat you and your family as she would her own.

**Dr. John Hutton, Sr.**, came to St. Luke's Hospital from Orangeburg, SC, bringing more than 39 years of experience in cardiology and implant devices. His specialized area in Internal Medicine focuses on cardiovascular disease, a critical health concern and the number one cause of mortality in Polk County. In October of 2023, Dr. Hutto began consulting with patients at St. Luke's who either had a pacemaker or needed one to regulate their heart's rhythm. His knowledge of pacemakers has been instrumental in rapidly growing cardiology services, offering care close to home, and providing carefully monitored care in a small, more personal clinic. Working in sync with Dr. Evans Kemp, who specializes in advanced diagnosis and management of heart diseases, and our Cardiopulmonologist, Greg Hunt, who monitors our heart devices, the Cardiology team serves our rural community with advanced technologies to restore quality of life to patients. Seeing a strong need for more cardiology services, Dr. Hutto added Loop recorders and defibrillators to their cardiology services in early Spring of 2024.


**Contrast Enhanced mammography** — At St. Luke's Hospital, 3D mammography screening identifies women at high risk for developing breast cancer. An educational promotion to help women understand their Gail score launched this year. The Gail score derived from the Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool and estimates a woman's risk of developing breast cancer based on personal and family medical history.

In addition, patients now have access to a contrast-enhanced 3D Mammography service, an advanced imaging technique that uses an iodine-based contrast agent to improve the detection of breast cancer, particularly women with dense breast tissue. Contrast-enhanced mammography (CEM) has several advantages. CEMs are much less affected by dense breast tissue than conventional mammography and can be done in women who cannot tolerate a breast MRI. Compared to an MRI, contrast-enhanced mammograms process faster and are less expensive. This addition step to ensure breast health enables earlier detection of cancer or other irregularities. Education coupled with the latest technology gives St. Luke's Hospital a unique advantage as a rural hospital to save lives with these early detection approaches.

[Launch of St. Luke's Mental Health and Wellness Program in Jan 2024](#)

[NURSE CALL LIGHT](#)

[VOIP- new phone system](#)

A portrait of Kandra Cunningham, a young woman with long dark hair, smiling. She is wearing a white and orange striped shirt and a St. Luke's Hospital ID badge. In the background, there is a painting of a path through a field of red flowers and some framed certificates on the wall.

**Kandra Cunningham**  
Registered Nurse



**Kandra Cunningham** has 15 years of experience in health care, with 11 of those in mental health nursing. Kandra is a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse with Senior Life Solutions at St. Luke's Hospital. Kandra's background is in geriatric psychiatry and nursing leadership.

Kandra's specialty skills include:

- Psychiatric evaluation and care
- Crisis intervention
- Mental health nursing assessment and education
- Psychiatric medication education
- Overseeing day-to-day operations of the IOP program

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**Marion Palmer, MD**, was a pioneer in the medical field, making house calls to many of his patients in the mountains on horseback. Dr. Palmer played a key role in organizing the Tryon Hospital and served as its superintendent until its success necessitated the establishment of St. Luke's Hospital.

In addition to his medical services, Dr. Palmer held various important roles, including county health officer, hospital staff member, and consultant on many critical medical issues. He was well-known for his selfless contributions, often referred to as the numerous acts of kindness that characterize good doctors. However, Dr. Palmer was also forward-thinking in developing the civic and business interests of the area.

He was the first to recognize the potential of a lake where Lake Lanier now exists. A progressive farmer and cattle raiser, he sought to improve agricultural conditions in the region. Dr. Palmer was instrumental in organizing and directing the new Thermal Belt Telephone Company, which aims to grow and improve the local community.

His leadership extended to various organizations; he served as a vestryman in his church, president of the Country Club, president of the Rotary Club, and as a commissioner in the town government. The chamber of commerce and many other groups have benefitted from his time, financial support, and dedication to promoting the welfare of the community.

Dr. Palmer is fiercely loyal to his friends and committed to his various activities. He enjoys hunting, golf, baseball, and any other pursuits that foster fellowship and friendships among his fellow citizens. He is a vital figure in the community he has served so well.

After the First World War and a devastating influenza epidemic, **Dr. Allen Jervey** was compelled, for health reasons, to leave his native Charleston and his promising career as a surgeon and professor of anatomy at the Medical University of South Carolina. He had been a contract surgeon for the Army and became ill in the epidemic.

After Dr. Jervey's release from a government hospital, he came to Tryon in 1920 with his wife and four children, well-known for its pure mountain air. Dr. Palmer, originally from the same low-country area, proposed to Dr. Jervey that he make the move, where he served for the next twenty-eight years.

Over this time, his service to the community and his efforts to help others became his trademark. Out of his early meager store, he sent money to a young medical student to come here. He opened his home and his practice to this student. Dr. Jervey was the local influence around which our hospital has grown.

Miss Lucy Embury, a patient of Dr. Jervey's, was greatly interested in the infirmary conducted by Dr. Jervey and Dr. Palmer in a building owned by W. Y. Wilkins on Trade Street. In her will, she left her property in trust to Dr. Jervey and Dr. Palmer as a site for the construction of a new hospital, and requested that it be named St. Luke's Hospital. Ultimately, the land proved unsuitable for a hospital site, and the doctors sold the land for \$10,000.

On land donated by Dr. Jervey, \$10,000 from the sale of Miss Embury's land, a \$43,000 gift from the Duke Foundation, and contributions from local citizens, the community constructed St. Luke's Hospital for about \$100,000. It opened on November 8, 1929.