

Monmouth

HEALTH & LIFE

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HAPPY AND HEALTHY FROM HEAD TO TOE



THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

VOLUME 20 ISSUE 6 | DECEMBER 2022/JANUARY 2023

{ WELCOME LETTER }

Proud To Offer The Best Care

For many of us, gratitude and reflection set the tone for a joyful holiday season.

As the new year approaches, I am incredibly grateful to reflect on the unwavering commitment of our Monmouth Medical Center staff to providing the highest quality, safest patient care. This is evidenced by the most recent national recognitions that continue to distinguish us as the health care provider of choice in our region, including our most recent “A” Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade. Announced in November, the Leapfrog score was our unparalleled 16th consecutive “A.”

The Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade is a national distinction that recognizes our achievements in patient safety, and our latest “A” comes on the heels of our being named among just 148 U.S. hospitals included on the digital platform *Money’s* inaugural list of the Best Hospitals in America. Created in partnership with The Leapfrog Group, the list identified hospitals that consistently deliver the safest care for patients and excellence in hospital experience. *Money* and Leapfrog also teamed this fall to announce its list of the Best Hospitals for Maternity Care, with MMC among just 259 U.S. hospitals to receive the award.

We have long been the provider of choice in our region for maternity care, and this award followed our recognition by Healthgrades for excellence in women’s care, receiving the 2022 Obstetrics and Gynecology Excellence Award and Labor and Delivery Excellence Award. We have received these two Healthgrades distinctions for seven consecutive years, ranking us among the top 5 percent of hospitals evaluated for both obstetrics and gynecology, and for labor and delivery.

We are also proud to share we are one of 34 U.S. hospitals honored with the Emergency Nurses Association’s 2022-2025 Lantern Award, which recognizes Emergency Departments that demonstrate exceptional and innovative performance in leadership, practice, education, advocacy and research. It is yet another recognition that serves as a visible symbol to our community that excellence is valued, and that exceptional care is provided here.

All of these national recognitions are designed to inform communities how well their hospitals perform in providing the highest quality care in a safe and compassionate environment. Each one is a testament to our staff’s unwavering commitment to our patients, our communities and each other.

On behalf of Monmouth Medical Center, I wish you and your families safe and healthy holidays. It is my hope that taking care of your well-being as you go through not just the holiday season but the rest of your life is a resolution we can all commit to together.



ERIC CARNEY
President and Chief Executive Officer
MONMOUTH MEDICAL CENTER
AND MONMOUTH MEDICAL CENTER
SOUTHERN CAMPUS



BUILDING A STRONGER COMMUNITY

Monmouth Medical Center receives a federal grant to continue battling food insecurity within the service area.



Volunteers, from left, Julie Kehoe and Lynn Kentz at the Mercy Center Food Pantry in Asbury Park



Shown from left at St. Brigid's Pantry & Kitchen at St. James Episcopal Church in Long Branch are Maria Lodeiro-Skennion, nutritionist, Monmouth Medical Center; Nancy Frances Jr. Warden; Priest-in-Charge and Father Arian Wharff; and Jean McKinney, Regional Director, Community Health, Social Impact & Community Investment, Monmouth Medical Center

the lowest income group reported job loss. Lost income creates difficulties in paying for basic needs like food and housing, two critical social determinants of health (SDOH). These challenges ultimately affect an individual's health and well-being. As we continue to see changes in our economy, collecting and distributing healthy food to vulnerable populations is always a key concern."

A portion of the funding will be used for educational purposes as well. "The grant provided a small amount of funding to

the Community Health, Social Impact and Community Investment Department.

With the funding, MMC will work directly with community partners to distribute more than 7,000 boxes of fresh produce, bread, beans and canned tomatoes through the remainder of 2022 to vulnerable members of the community. Addressing food insecurity is one of RWJBarnabas Health's pillars of social impact and part of MMC's commitment to improving the health of the entire community by addressing underlying social determinants of health.

Some of the recipients of MMC's grant include: The Mercy Center, Asbury Park; St. Brigid's Pantry at St. James Episcopal Church, Long Branch; Ezekiel's Wheels, West Long Branch; Soldier On, Tinton Falls; Reformation Community Food Pantry at Lutheran Church of the Reformation, West Long Branch; St. Vincent DePaul at Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Long Branch and Casa Freehold, Freehold.

"The global pandemic put millions of families out of work, including many families in MMC's service area," McKinney says. "According to resident surveys from Asbury Park, Long Branch and Red Bank, which were collected as part of the hospital's 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), a third of Hispanic families and a third of those in

provide MMC's bilingual nutritionist to rotate through food pantries to provide nutritional information about the foods being distributed, the importance of reducing sugar in the diet and tips for preparing the foods being distributed," McKinney says.

"Long-standing relationships within the communities we serve allows for building bridges between the residents and resources they need. The most effective way to increase knowledge, build skills and promote self-efficacy for long-term, sustained behavior change is through health education and addressing social determinants of health. By working upstream and preventing a problem before it starts, the incidence of emergent health crises can be reduced."

To help at any of these food pantries, contact one of the organizers below:

- Ezekiel's Wheels: Rev. Sue Mamchak, 732.618.2440
- The Mercy Center: Tracy Wilson, 732.687.8875
- Reformation Community Food Pantry: Debbie Keszler, wlbfoodpantry@gmail.com
- St. Brigid's Pantry & Kitchen: Nancy Frances, 732.222.1411
- St. Vincent DePaul Food Pantry: Donna Cetrulo, 732.222.3216, ext. 108

Monmouth Medical Center (MMC) has been awarded a generous grant to support its efforts to combat food insecurity. Monmouth County allocated a total of \$20 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to nonprofit organizations that provide services for the following needs: mental health, veterans, food insecurity, animal welfare, the special needs community and art, historical and cultural resources.

MMC's Community Health, Social Impact and Community Investment Department began distributing food shortly after the onset of the COVID pandemic. RWJBarnabas Health's Corporate Services partnered with Jersey Cares and the Common Market, a nonprofit regional food aggregator that connects communities with food from sustainable farms, to source produce and shelf-stable goods. Together, the partnership distributed 9,420 pounds of produce, dairy and bread during the pandemic, says Jean McKinney, Regional Director of

{ IN GOOD HEALTH }

MAKING THE GRADE

MMC earns highest score for patient safety from The Leapfrog Group for the 16th straight year.



President and CEO Eric Carney and Chief Nursing Officer Darla Harmer, shown center, gather with team members from throughout Monmouth Medical Center, which recently earned its 16th consecutive Leapfrog "A" rating for safe patient care.

Monmouth Medical Center (MMC) was awarded an "A" Hospital Safety Score rating by The Leapfrog Group, an independent national nonprofit run by employers and other large purchasers of health benefits, in results announced on Nov. 16. MMC is the only hospital in the region to receive an "A" Hospital Safety Score by The Leapfrog Group for 16 consecutive rating periods.

The Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade is the only hospital ratings program based exclusively on hospital prevention of medical errors and harms to patients.

"It is our responsibility to deliver the safest, most high-quality care to our patients and their families every day," says Eric Carney, President and Chief Executive Officer of Monmouth Medical Center. "Earning 16 consecutive 'A' ratings is a testament to the unwavering commitment our physicians and staff demonstrate daily to consistently deliver the very best care to our patients."

"The Leapfrog Group tells communities more about things like

how well their hospitals prevent infections and encourages hand-washing, how much they value patient safety by supporting strong health care teams and if they have protocols and standards in place for preventing errors," Carney adds.

Developed under the guidance of a national Expert Panel, The Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade uses publicly available hospital safety data to assign grades to more than 2,700 U.S. acute-care hospitals twice per year. The Hospital Safety Grade's methodology is peer-reviewed and fully transparent, and the results are free to the public. For more information on The Leapfrog Group and the fall 2022 scores, visit hospitalsafetyscore.org.



To learn more about Monmouth Medical Center, visit rwjbh.org/Monmouth.

SPINE SURGERY IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

'Dr. P' helps mom, dad and daughter get back on their feet again — and they continue to travel from their Florida home for follow ups at MMC.



Michael, Doreen and Brianna Weizenecker each underwent successful spine surgery performed by Steven Paragioudakis, M.D.

As Program Director of Orthopedic Surgery at Monmouth Medical Center, Steve Paragioudakis, MD, has performed spine surgery on members of the same family many times over the years. However, the Weizenecker family was a first: "I've done parents and children, but never on multiple members from the same household," says Dr. P, as he is commonly known.

Michael and Doreen Weizenecker, 59 and 58, respectively, and their daughter Brianna, 21, lived in Jackson, N.J., until recently when they moved to Ocala, Florida. Doreen, a former supermarket manager, was evaluated by Dr. P first. She had previous spinal fusion surgery with another surgeon, but "there was no improvement, in fact it was getting worse," she says. Dr. P told her she needed to wait a year prior to any further intervention.

In the meantime, Brianna, who had been suffering back pain for a while, was on a school trip to Disney World when, suddenly, "I collapsed. I couldn't walk. The pain was excruciating," she says. She flew home and saw Dr. P, who determined she needed emergency surgery. "I was numb from the waist down, and he was concerned I might never regain feeling again," she said. Dr. P performed a

laminectomy (removing bone inside the spinal column) and discectomy (removing herniated disc material) to relieve the pressure on the nerves that was causing the pain and numbness. Following the procedure, Brianna regained sensation and her ability to function, allowing her to finish her studies and continue with professional school.

Michael Weizenecker was a 40-year career plumber. He also had back and leg pain with numbness, and his symptoms prevented him from working and living comfortably. He had already

had surgery in 2000 by another surgeon, but some symptoms continued. By 2021, his symptoms increased, and non operative treatment was not working. He was evaluated by Dr. P, who recommended a laminectomy on three vertebrae. That procedure helped him keep working till retirement, "but Dr. P told me it would probably come back, and I will need a spinal fusion," Michael says. "I will definitely use him for that."

Finally, it was Doreen's turn. She needed "a big revision" of her previous fusion, in which he removed and replaced several screws and rods. "She did great like the others," he says, though recovery will take longer.

Now in Florida full time, the parents are retired, and Brianna is in college studying radiology technology. But they return to New Jersey to see Dr. P for follow ups. "His office really worked with us" on payment options, Michael says. "He has the best bedside manner, he explains everything clearly and makes you feel so comfortable. We trust his decisions." Brianna adds, "He is very compassionate person."

"It's a feel-good story," Dr. P admits. Especially with everyone feeling well and

recovering. "Our team strives to provide excellent and compassionate care to every patient we encounter. My partner, Dr. Menkowitz, and I perform nearly all of our surgeries together providing unparalleled expertise and attention to our surgical patients. We are experts in robotic assisted spine surgery and use minimally invasive techniques when appropriate. Our nurse practitioner, Courtney Ellenberger is also an integral member of our team and ensures excellent perioperative services. We are very proud to service our community in such fashion."

About The Spine Center

As a high-volume program dedicated to treatment of the spine, The Spine Center performs more procedures than any other program in the region and ranks second in all of New Jersey for the number of spine surgeries performed. The Spine Center provides patients with highly customized treatment designed to deliver long-term success. Surgeons perform leading-edge and minimally invasive reconstructions procedures designed to eliminate and reduce cervical, thoracic and lumbar pain, while restoring function.

The Spine Center also offers the following: a dedicated operating room for orthopedic surgery; a dedicated orthopedic unit for recovery and rehabilitation; physical and occupational therapy seven days a week, on the unit; a pain management program that ranks in the 99th percentile for patient satisfaction; comprehensive patient education programs and convenient pre-hospital screening; clinical coordinator/patient navigator; discharge planning and coordination; and pain management service.

MMC has successfully achieved Joint Commission Disease Specific Certification for Spine Surgery in recognition of the program's commitment to excellence. The hospital was also the second health care facility in the state to introduce the cutting-edge Globus Medical Excelsius GPS robot for minimally invasive spine surgery.



For more information about The Spine Center or for a calendar of upcoming spine surgery information sessions, visit rwjbh.org/jointandspine.

{ IN GOOD HEALTH }

MONMOUTH MEDICAL CENTER DELIVERS EXCELLENCE IN MATERNITY CARE

The hospital receives a host of national recognitions for the quality of its childbirth care.

Members of the Monmouth Medical Center mother/baby team gather at the TeamBirth NJ launch in September.



Money and The Leapfrog Group

announced its list of the Best Hospitals for Maternity Care in October, with Monmouth Medical Center (MMC) joining sister hospitals Newark Beth Israel Medical Center and Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset among just 259 U.S. hospitals to receive the award.

To compile its list of the best hospitals in the country for maternity care in partnership with the digital platform Money, The Leapfrog Group, a nonprofit organization that helps to help consumers make informed decisions about their health and access to safe, high-value care, used maternity care data submitted via the 2022 Leapfrog Hospital Survey. For over two decades, The Leapfrog Group has collected and published data on patient safety and quality of care from voluntary surveys and other sources. More than 2,200 hospitals completed its flagship Leapfrog Hospital Survey in 2022.

Eligible hospitals were required to receive an “A” or “B” letter grade on the Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade assessment for spring 2022 and meet specific maternity care standards.

“As the health system that delivers the most babies in the state, we are deeply committed to ensuring we provide our communities with quality, equitable maternity care and these recognitions underscore that mission,” says Suzanne Sternal DNP, APN-BC, RNC-OB, C-ONQS, Vice President of Women’s Services, RWJBarnabas Health. “These distinctions are a testament to our facilities’ commitment to excellence in maternity care and are reflective of our dedicated and compassionate staff who ensure the highest level of care and safety for the patients we serve.”

Further illustrating MMC’s ongoing commitment to women’s health and maternity care, the recognition comes on the heels of the hospital’s recent distinctions in Healthgrades’ OB/GYN Excellence Awards. RWJBarnabas Health received 26 awards, the highest number of any system in the state, for excel-



Meredith (seated) and Nick (center) Picurro are pictured in an MMC postpartum suite with their newborn son Steven, who wears a commemorative TeamBirth onesie, with her care team (from left) Terry Tompkins, RN, and obstetrician-gynecologist Karen Smith, DO. Not pictured is Steven’s twin brother, Nicholas, who was being cared for in the neonatal intensive care unit at the time the photo was taken.



lence in comprehensive women’s care, with MMC receiving the 2022 Obstetrics and Gynecology Excellence Award and Labor and Delivery Excellence Award. For

seven consecutive years, the hospital has received these two HealthGrade distinctions, ranking among the top 5 percent of hospitals evaluated for both obstetrics and gynecology, and for labor and delivery. MMC also was a Five-Star Recipient for Vaginal Delivery, a distinction that on average results in a 45.1 percent lower risk of experiencing a complication in the hospital than if the patient were treated at One-Star hospital.

This fall, the excellence of MMC’s maternity care was once again in the spotlight when the hospital was chosen as one of three New Jersey hospitals (along with sister hospital Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center) to launch the TeamBirth NJ initiative. This evidence based, national model for better provider and patient communication is designed to enhance birthing experiences

and improve outcomes for people giving birth and their babies. Most recently, MMC was chosen by the readers of the *Asbury Park Press* in their annual “Best of the Best” survey as the best hospital in Monmouth County for maternity/childbirth care.

More than 6,000 babies are born at Monmouth Medical Center annually, more than any other regional facility. Monmouth Medical Center has been a Level III Regional Perinatal Center since the designation was initiated more than 40 years ago, and has built one of the safest obstetrical and gynecologic services in the nation.

“The recognitions of the excellence of our maternity care are representative of our deep commitment to providing superior care to women of all ages through a comprehensive range of women’s health services,” says President and CEO Eric Carney. “These distinctions would not be possible without the clinical excellence and compassion of our dedicated staff and clinicians that continually prioritize patient outcomes, safety and care for every patient we serve.”

For the Best Hospitals for Maternity Care list, visit money.com/best-hospitals/maternity/.



To learn more, visit rwjbh.org/womenshealth.