



## THE FACE OF Rural Healthcare

**W**ashington County Memorial Hospital opened its doors nearly 60 years ago in Potosi. The hospital has experienced many changes since 1963. The hospital's founding fathers – Dr. Edward Lake, Dr. George Cresswell and Dr. Joseph Thurman – had a vision to provide much-needed care to the growing community. A little-known fact is that the first administrator hired also served as the lab and radiology supervisor.

Although today's WCMH is vastly different in structure from the original hospital, the same vision and motivation still drive the hospital: to provide quality care to its surrounding communities.

WCMH transitioned to a Critical Access Hospital (CAH), which is a Medicare reimbursement model for safety net hospitals, in June 2001. The hospital is currently licensed for 25 beds which includes any variation of acute care, swing beds and observation.

As a CAH, WCMH serves a rural area for anything from life-threatening injuries to heart attacks or sinus infections.

"Providing everything a rural community needs to be healthy is a tall order, but it is a role that WCMH gladly fills day after day," said Kelly Brueggen. She is WCMH's director of grants and marketing and community champion for the Delta Regional Community Health System Development Grant.

WCMH qualified as a CAH for several reasons. It's the only

facility which offers an emergency room or hospital services in any direction for at least 35 miles. The availability of CAHs for millions of rural Americans can be the difference between life and death for those experiencing trauma, respiratory or cardiac failure.

CAHs are often overlooked or viewed as inadequate when compared to large facilities in major U.S. cities.

"But we are a vital team player in America's healthcare landscape," said Brueggen. "Without thriving CAH's, higher acuity hospitals would not be able to manage patient load, and valuable life-saving minutes will be lost when every second counts."

Nearly 300 staff members are employed at WCMH. Numerous services, five rural health clinics, inpatient unit, 24-hour emergency department, and specialty clinics have been added to WCMH to meet the demands of patients.

"We offer exceptional care no matter the time of day to whomever is in need," said Brueggen, "and we believe residents of the Parkland shouldn't have to travel more than an hour for excellent patient care."

*Pictured: The staff at Washington County Memorial Hospital*

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