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## LAURA GRILL REFUSES TO LET COVID DEFINE EAMC'S FUTURE

Even coming off another COVID-19 peak, East Alabama Health CEO Laura Grill finds a way to be optimistic about the future.

East Alabama Health, a health system with locations spread across Lee and Chambers Counties, is anchored by East Alabama Medical Center (EAMC) in Opelika. The 340-bed, full-service regional hospital serves a six-county area and employs about 3,000 people. Combined with its sister EAMC-Lanier hospital in Valley, EAMC's footprint covers approximately 3,500 employees, making the hospital Lee County's second largest employer.

The health system has been in and out of the throes of the coronavirus pandemic for going on three years now, and EAMC just experienced another record high in COVID hospitalizations in January.

Grill outlined that hospital employees are exhausted, both physically and mentally, as are health care workers across Alabama. EAMC has dealt with unique surges throughout the pandemic, in addition to seasonal peaks seen nationwide, and Grill said that the system's staff has shown exemplary resilience and leadership.

However, there is certainly a deep desire to get back to normal hospital operations. In addition to the obvious public health reasons for wanting the pandemic to be behind us, one thing that the general public may not realize is that hospitals like EAMC are losing significant money due to COVID,



with elective procedures and other routine care and services being either set aside by patients or unable to be offered due to capacity. That loss of revenue, although partially recovered at points during the pan-

free-standing emergency department in Auburn last summer. That positive announcement, while an oasis of good news amid the pandemic, is also indicative of the steady way in which EAMC has navigated this unprecedented time.

***"IF YOU DO TAKE CARE OF YOUR PEOPLE... REMEMBER WHAT'S OUR MISSION AND WHAT WE'RE HERE TO DO, GOOD THINGS WILL FOLLOW."***

demic due to government aid, is still a large burden on hospitals across our nation and state.

Thanks to strategic leadership by East Alabama Health, they have been able to weather the storm so far. In fact, their long term expansion plans have continued during the pandemic. For example, EAMC opened a new 84,000 square feet,

This is highlighted by Grill being named one of the nation's top-five hospital administrators during the pandemic, an honor that specifically cited her support of East Alabama Health's frontline workers. She "was singled out for her extraordinary response and commitment to safety of her physicians, staff, and the community at large," an article noted.

In turn, Grill thanked her colleagues and surrounding community for their service



and support these past few years. She also praised Auburn University for being a strong partner to the health system.

"It's been challenging. This is an understatement. But, you know, I think I think our staff have been very resilient. I could not be prouder of our physicians and employees working together, supporting each other, and stepping into unfamiliar roles during this time," she said. "And I think our community has supported us tremendously."

Grill in 2018 became East Alabama Health's seventh president in its 66-year history and first-ever female to hold the position. A graduate of UAB, she first joined the health system in 1992 following several nursing stints across the Southeast. Since then, Grill has held roles ranging from Director of Cardiology to Chief Nursing Officer to COO and Executive Vice President.

She advised that 30 years ago when she made the move to EAMC, she never could have foreseen her career trajectory in health care administration.

One thing that immediately hooked her? "I loved the culture of this organization and the leadership," Grill remarked.

Fast forward three decades, and some things have not changed.

"I've just grown up through the organization and believe in the mission and the vision of this organization. And I truly love it



here. I love the people I work with; that's the reason I'm excited to get up to come to work every day. I work with a great group of folks," Grill stressed.

She also shared that one of EAMC's keys to success has been innovating and staying on the cusp of what's next. Every decision and long-term plan is born out of meeting an identified community need.

Grill's leadership philosophy is centered on listening – both to members of the community and her team – as well as paying attention to and appreciating what motivates those around her. The result is everyone being highly committed to the mission because they're bought in.

"You've got to take care of your people," she advised. "And if you do take care of your people, respect the quality of care, stay patient focused, remember what's our mission and what we're here to do, good things will follow."

For East Alabama Health, good leadership continues to save lives and keep the organization strong amid the pandemic. As the Lee County area continues to boom, so too will its health system.

"I think the future is very bright here," Grill concluded. "I think we're just going to continue to grow." **BA**

### LEFT PAGE

*East Alabama Medical Center is the regional health system's flagship facility, employing about 3,000 people. This left: East Alabama Health continues to grow along with the communities it serves, even amid the challenges of COVID-19.*

### THIS PAGE

*Right: Laura Grill, CEO of East Alabama Health, was named one of America's top-five hospital administrators for her leadership during the pandemic.*



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