

**A HISTORY FROM 1953 TO 2000**  
**History of South Florida Baptist Hospital Plant City, Florida**

Talk of a hospital for Plant City began in the late 1920s. At that time, a ten (10) bed hospital existed over Herring's Drug Store at the corner of South Collins and South Drane Street operated by Dr. T.C. Maquire. And there was another thirteen (13) bed hospital over White's Central Pharmacy at the corner of Reynolds and Collins Street, operated by Dr. J.W. Alsobrook and later by Dr. W.G. Meriwether. These small facilities (almost primitive compared to today's standards) certainly were not adequate for a growing population.

Further discussion in the 1930's did not accomplish much due to the Depression. In the 1940's, more active efforts were made. L.H. Duyck, President of the Merchant's Association, announced in 1942 that he thought there was a possibility of getting the Florida Baptist Convention to share the cost of building a hospital. Dr. Solomon, chairman of the Hospital Expansion Committee of the Baptist organization, later met at the Hotel Plant with L.H. Duyck, T.E. Moody, Dr. Maguire, Dr. Edgar Austin, Alvin Hinson, H.W. Moody, O.M. Andrews and other leading citizens.

*(The original property for the hospital was donated by Mrs. R.L. Mays and by Mr. M.E. Moody and consisted of 10 acres.)*

After expressing a desire to help with the undertaking, Dr. Solomon recommended that a professional consultant be hired to survey the area to determine support for the project. Mr. McGinty of Birmingham Alabama, was hired to make this survey and soon after recommended Plant City as a viable hospital site.

Every idea for financial support was considered, but nothing materialized until M.E. Moody, using his personal funds, setup a bank account for the hospital at the Hillsboro State Bank. Checks on this account dated July 3, 1944 purchased five acres of land on Alexander Street. The first name given the hospital was the Alsobrook – Moody Memorial Hospital in honor of Dr. J.W. Alsobrook who practiced medicine in Plant City for forty years and M.E. Moody whose contribution was enough to purchase half the land now occupied by South Florida Baptist Hospital.

The additional five acres owned by Mrs. R.L. (Rowena) Mays, was donated by Mrs. Mays in June 1945. Neither Dr. Alsobrook nor Mr. Moody lived to see their dream realized. Both died in 1945. On September 1, 1944, the President's Roundtable met at the Hotel Plant. John H. Cone and L.E. Morgan, Jr. Vice Chairman, were in charge of the meeting. A hospital committee was established with R. G. Pate, Chairman; L.E. Morgan, Jr., Vice Chairman; Mrs. Susie Pou, Secretary; and Jack Hooker, Treasurer. Other members were: A.R. Boring, L.H. Duyck, F.H. Moody, J.Y. Blake, and Dr. T.C. Maguire. A committee was appointed to solicit funds. Campaign headquarters were set up at the hotel, with Mrs. Evelyn Tipton as secretary, and the solicitation of funds began in earnest. On May 11, 1945, a Board of Directors was named which included Arthur Boring, H.S. Moody, Don Walden, L.H. Duyck, Jack Hooker, H.C. Durrett and Dr. C.T. Young. At that time a new name, South Florida Baptist Hospital was approved ("South" because of the Baptist Hospital in Pensacola). In January 1946, this Board hired the American City Bureau to conduct a campaign for funds and commissioned F.O. Adamson, a Tampa architect, to design a building. Unfortunately, the Bureau's campaign for funds was only moderately successful. Ten thousand dollars was given by the Florida Baptist Convention. But this was all that was received from the Baptist Convention. Hope of more assistance from that body faded when a revision in policy prohibited the convention from incurring any debt for construction of a hospital. This meant that if a hospital were to

be built, most of the money would have to come from the people of this area. For a while, the situation looked discouraging.

Then a minister with faith and confidence, G.A. Leichliter, D.D., with Mrs. Uldine Green as his secretary, took over the campaign and inspired enthusiastic response. Donations and pledges began to come in and the balance of \$425,000 came from a Hill-Burton government grant to build the hospital. An additional \$200,000 was eventually raised as operating capital. Hill-Burton grants had to be paid back in legitimate charity and reported annually to the Atlanta office. The Hill-Burton grant was repaid without a great effort, due to the large amount of charity work performed by the hospital.

*(Credit is due to Hospital Promotion Director G.A. Leichliter, D.D. who took over the faltering campaign and stayed with it even through a 3-year work stoppage resulting from shortage of funds.)*

In January, 1948, a construction contract was awarded to Paul Smith Construction Company of Tampa, and work was begun on the four-story one-hundred bed hospital. When post-war inflation and a shortage of funds threatened a shut-down, Paul Smith continued without payment to a point where the unfinished building could weather a waiting period.

The waiting period lasted 3 years, but fundraising continued. Citizens, churches (the First Baptist Church had the hospital in its budget for years and made monthly payments to the hospital), civic clubs, businesses, the county and city all rallied to the support of the hospital. By June, 1950, more than \$30,000 had been raised toward the \$225,000 needed. Door-to-door solicitations, pleas from pulpits and church dinners all helped. It would be impossible to list all the people who contributed to the hospital, but those who did made a lasting contribution to Plant City's welfare.

*(Donations came in to support the fledgling new hospital from congregations all over the state of Florida.)*

Some outstanding memorable benefit performances "The Follies of 1949" a Woman's Club extravaganza which made possible a \$4,000 gift, and "The Hospital Roundup", a benefit rodeo which featured a parade and rodeo queen, Sandra Mays, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Arden Mays. Also worth mentioning is the fact that Plant City's Garden Club did the original landscaping.

*(Work began on the structure in February of 1948 but was discontinued in December 1948, because of a lack of funds, new hope was held out for the 109-bed hospital in 1949 when the hospital was authorized \$440,000 from Federal aid funds.)*

Some of the first to give individual service were Burton Walker, who cleared and leveled the ground before construction; Judge J. D. Burton, who worked with Dr. Leichliter and handled, without charge, the hospital's legal affairs; and A.P. Cooke, publisher of The Courier, who promoted the hospital in his newspaper. The L. H. Duyck family postponed construction of a new home in order to make another large donation.

In May 1952, Paul Smith's company returned to finish the hospital. Also deserving mention is Edward Blackmon, engineer. He worked throughout the original construction and for thirty (30) years afterward. Governor Fuller Warren was present in December for the laying of the cornerstone. Sharing the platform with him were Dr. Leichliter, Dr. Maguire, Arthur Boring, Dean Byrd, G.R. Pate, Rev. Don Miley, Dr. Austin, L.H. Duyck and H.C. Durrett.

Listed on the cornerstone of the hospital were the first Board of Directors: Dr. T. C. Maguire, Chairman; Dr. Edgar Austin; A.R. Boring; J.L. Cone; H.C. Durrett; L.H. Duyck; Grover H. Carter; C.R. "Jack" Hooker; L.T. Langford; Willard McGinnes; Henry S. Moody; R. G. Pate; Don Walden and Dewey Wilbanks.

Administrator Dean Byrd submitted a list of required furnishings, equipment and supplies, but there was not money to pay for them. At the request of Dr. Leichliter, Paul Smith and Julian Cone, a non-resident hospital Director, signed a personal note to purchase these items. James Farmer was hired in 1953 to set up the accounting and property control system. As Business Manager, he worked closely with Mr. Byrd. "When we opened on December 29, 1953, our pharmacy and supply department were not fully operational and nothing was priced explained Mr. Farmer.

"Dean Bryd had to price patient charges each night, and I would post them in the morning. Most of the employees back then worked sixteen (16) hours a day, seven (7) days a week". Then he added an interesting side note: "The hospital provided laundry services for two (2) hotels that Paul Smith had an interest in. The laundry charges were applied against the balance due Franklin O. Adams, architect for the hospital".

When the hospital opened on December 29, 1953, Dr. Edgar Austin was the first patient admitted. Others were transferred from the Dr. W.G. Meriwether Hospital located above White' Central Pharmacy at the corner of Collins and Reynolds Streets.

In 1967, a \$300,000 fund drive plus another federal grant allowed the construction of a three-story south wing and the steel building for the Purchasing Department and Dietary offices. By 1969 this addition had been completed, adding ninety-six (96) patient beds, a new lobby, office space and an employee cafeteria, at a cost of approximately one million dollars. The third floor was left uncompleted. In the summer of 1976 work was begun to complete this floor and to renovate the original structure. This work ended in 1978.

The three and one-half million dollars for the 1970's renovation and modernization came from 1) a federal Hill-Burton grant of \$500,000, 2) about \$1,900,000 from a H.E.W. loan, 3) \$750,000 from direct obligation note and 4) \$350,000 raised by individual gifts. Professional Contractors, Inc. Of Lakeland was awarded the contract with Richard Jones, also of Lakeland, the architect.

The major part of the renovation was in the north wing (original building). Fourth floor north wing was reconstructed to provide for a pediatric area and a new pharmacy. Second and third floors north wing were designed for medical and surgical services.

The north section of the second floor north wing was modernized to include five (5) new operating rooms and a recovery room. Dietary and Business Offices were updated, and the obstetrical service area was enlarged. New equipment and furniture were provided.

Administrators since Mr. Bryd have been Bert Davidson, H.F. Holmes, Dale Howard, William H. Anderson, William G. Ulbricht, Steve Nierman, and current (now President) Karen Kerr. Mr. Bryd's secretary was Julia Haltiwanger. Mrs. Marguerite Hart was secretary to Davidson as well as Holmes and Howard. Bill Anderson was named Administrator on August 15, 1988 and in November of that year, Margie Rogers took over the job as Administrative secretary and then became Executive Assistant. Jill Moon joined Margie in July of 1997 when the hospital signed a joint operating agreement with BayCare

Health Systems. James Farmer was first business manager, then became controller and Assistant Administrator before retiring January 2, 1987.

Richard Kafka, M.D. and Norman Gensolin, M.D. were the hospital's first radiologists. In 1981, a contract was made with Radiology Associates of Tampa, with Dr. A. John Elliott heading the group until his retirement in June, 1997. Currently Radiology and Imaging Specialists are SFBH Radiology group.

The hospital's first pathologist was Dr. John Patterson. Others have been: Dr. John Feegle, Dr. J.A. Cimafranca and Dr. Ledwina Colina. In May of 1998, Dr. Frank Taylor became Chief of Pathology when Associated Pathologists took over the contract. The first pharmacist was Alvin Goldberg.

George Doyle, a part-time Baptist minister at Orient Park Baptist Church near Tampa, was the first Chaplain. The Rev. C.E. Kolb, Rev. DeVane and Rev. Roy Reynolds continued the job until Rev. Richard Bills took over. Following Rev. Richard Bills was Rev. James Smith, followed by Chaplain Gary Shepherd.

Minnie West was the first Director of Nursing, serving from 1953-56; Others were: Wilma Fowler, 1956-63; Elizabeth Bell, 1963-68; Patty McColpin, 1968-70; Ruth Gaberle, 1970-74; Yvette Morgan, 1975-86; Karen Silver, 1986-90 and Karen Kerr 1990 through December 1997. In December of 1997 Betty Davis became Director of Patient Care Services followed by Karen Kerr, Terri Colletti and now June Ramsey.

The first volunteer organization was called the "Grey Ladies" with Dr. John Coleman's wife as President. Then in 1971, an "official" Auxiliary was approved by the Directors, and in March of that year, the Auxiliary held its first meeting. By year's end, there were one hundred forty-two active members and forty associate members. The first President was Harriette Midyette with Patsy Hull, Vice President; Sallie Holmberg, Secretary; Topsy Meriwether, Treasurer; and Hazel Moody, Parliamentarian. Mary Sinnett and Virginia Weeks set up a gift shop in the lobby which was and still is, run by the Auxiliary. The purpose of the Auxiliary has been three-fold: service, public relations and fundraising. The hard work and dedication of all these generous people have really made a difference. Many working hours have been put in by these busy men and women.

The 1980's and 90's were busy years. South Florida Baptist Hospital expanded the medical staff to include specialists of every discipline. A ten million dollar expansion included a new east wing, major renovations and new state-of-the-art equipment and procedures.

The east wing contained forty private rooms, a twenty-four hour emergency department, an intensive care unit, a radiology department, an admission area, and a respiratory therapy department.

In 1989 a mobile Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) was added to diagnostic services and Home Health services opened. In 1990 the same day surgery center was added and Marriott Health Care took over Dietary. In 1991, a new expanded Physical Therapy Department opened, and South Florida Baptist Hospital joined the Ask-A-Nurse program. The first Children's Health Fair was held in 1992.

Laparoscopic surgical equipment was added to the Surgical Department; Focus, the Center for Women's Health, was opened; construction was begun for a new OB Unit called the Family Center for Childbirth, and South Florida Baptist Hospital celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 1993.

McLeod Lab was purchased by the hospital and opened in the new Plant City Diagnostic Center along with a new in-house MRI unit in late 1994. An additional mammography machine was also added at that

time with a donation from the Auxiliary. The center was renamed the Ed and Myrtle Lou Swindle Diagnostic Center in August of 1997 through a generous donation from the Swindle Family.

In 1995, the South Florida Baptist Hospital Foundation, Inc. was created. Its purpose was to promote donations to the hospital and to build an endowment fund. The Foundation is led by a twenty four (24) member board of directors.

In late 1997, Judy D. Martin was named Executive Director of the Foundation. In 2012, Judy Martin retired and Jana L. Butler took over as Executive Director.