Meeting Notes – Oct. 25, 2022

Mr. Greg Nichols, who serves as the administrator at East Alabama Medical Center – Lanier, was the guest speaker at the LaFayette Rotary Club meeting on Oct. 25, 2022. Greg said he and his wife Angela have had the great pleasure of calling LaFayette home for the past 19 years. They have raised 6 children here and are proud to call Chambers County home. He went on to say that “some of their children have moved away, but their oldest son and daughter-in-law Jane just bought a house in Lanett. It is great to see them returning here to work, live and be part of the community.”

Greg explained the upcoming vote to extend a Chambers County 4-mil ad valorem tax. He said 10 years ago, the people of Chambers County voted to approve a 4-mill ad valorem tax to support our local hospital, George H. Lanier in Valley. He said, “I am so grateful for the results of that vote, and it truly has enabled the hospital to remain open and provide care to our community.”

He explained in the past year, the hospital has provided care to our community through:

* 456 Inpatient stays
* 250+ Acute Rehab Patients
* 15,340 ER visits (wide range of patients, 3 babies delivered in the last month, strokes, heart attacks, motor vehicle accidents, and trauma that needs stabilization before transferring to another hospital)
* 20,570 Radiology Procedures
* 2115 ASC procedures
* Other outpatient services (Rehab, Cardiac Rehab, Lab, etc.)

He said that in addition to the care that these funds have enabled the hospital to provide, the money has also allowed it to have a greater impact that may not be as evident. The impacts he outlined are:

First, and most importantly, the tax proceeds were intended to fund capital investments in our facility and equipment. While we have received $10.3 million in the first 9 years of the program, in that same time frame we have invested $21.5 million in capital and spent an additional $9 million on debt retirement for Lanier. The items that we have purchased over the last 9 years range from wheelchairs to an MRI to a 3D mammography machine for our hospital.

Secondly, having a hospital in our area allows us to offer a solid and steady employment opportunity. As of today, we have over 450 employees within our local organization. This includes full-time, part-time, and per diem. With this number of employees, we have an annual expense of $18 million for payroll and benefits. Admittedly not all these employees live in Chambers County, but the clear majority do and much of that $18 million is spent in our local economy.

Next, through investments in our facility we have been able to open an Ambulatory Surgical Center, Inpatient Rehab Unit and have opened a Geriatric psych unit last week and have started to take patients. While these are much needed services and allows us to care for many patients, it also gives us an opportunity to showcase our community to those that live outside Chambers County. Many of these patients are from the counties surrounding Chambers County and want them to come to our area.

And last, the hospital has provided a base for having a strong physician presence in our area to meet the primary care needs of the community. The physicians and nurse practitioners that are at the Medical Pavilion include Dr. Fagan, Dr. Hammond, Dr. Dusek, Dr. Kamath, Dr. Bakshi, Dr. Downs, Leanne Knowles, Carla Moore and Christy Johnson.

And last, I strongly believe that the presence of a hospital and access to local doctors that are here because of East Alabama Health, helps attract businesses and people to our community.

Greg concluded by saying he was reminded of the support this community has provided for our hospital over the years and am asking for that support once again. Specifically, he:

* Asked each member for a personal commitment to vote for the continuation of this ad valorem tax. Use the sample ballot as the visual aide for this vote.
* Secondly, he asked each member to reach at least 10 people to vote for the continuation of the program
* Finally, he said he needed advice and wisdom on how to be successful in making sure this ballot initiative is successful.

He said, “It is important to our community that we have a strong community hospital, ER, and providers to serve all who live here, and we cannot do it without each of you.”

For more information on East Alabama Medical Center – Lanier, go to <https://www.eastalabamahealth.org/location/eamc-lanier>