



Susan Bowden, Connie Register, Amanda Mason

Hospice grief coordinator retires

Many gathered last week to celebrate the retirement of Connie Register, coordinator of grief services at Hospice of South Georgia since 1995.

The reception was held at hospice's administration building with coworkers, hospice volunteers, and numerous community members whose lives were touched by her support.

Susan Bowden, executive director, opened the afternoon by describing Register as "the first person dedicated to a full program of grief services at hospice." Susan also stated, "Connie has been a tremendous and valuable resource to our community

for 23 years."

Hospice also surprised her with a newly renovated conference room in her honor, which is where Register conducted support group sessions.

Connie Register holds a certification in Thanatology, which is the study of psychological and social aspects related to death. With this certification and experience in social work, a full grief program was created involving one-on-one counseling, adult support groups, children's grief camps, and an annual Angel Tree Memorial Celebration. This grief support is free to the community and supported by community

volunteers and donations. Hospice does not receive government reimbursement for this program.

Hospice of South Georgia will continue to offer this program to all the communities they serve with a new coordinator, Sherry Tierney, who worked closely with Register while acting as a licensed clinical social worker at Hospice of South Georgia.

For more information on grief services, or care at Hospice of South Georgia and Langdale Hospice House, call 229-433-7000. You can also visit HospiceofSouthGeorgia.org and like their Facebook page.

LANIER COUNTY CANNING PLANT NOW OFFERING ADDITIONAL HOURS

The Lanier County Canning Plant, located 14 Brantley Street behind the Old Butcher Shop, is currently open 7:30 a.m. - 12 p.m. four days per week (closed each Wednesday) through July 6. To better serve the community, the Canning Plant will also open on Saturday, June 30 and Saturday, July 7, 7:30 a.m. - 12 p.m. Other dates in July include July 12, 13, 16 and 17.

Doctors found guilty for role in Valdosta and Columbus pill mills

Charles E. Peeler, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Georgia, announces that Dr. William Bacon, age 82 and Dr. Donatus O. Mbanefo, age 64, were found guilty by a jury of conspiracy to dispense controlled substances outside the usual course of medical practice and without a legitimate medical purpose at clinics in Valdosta, Georgia and Columbus, Georgia. Dr. Mbanefo was also convicted of two additional counts of unlawful dispensation of controlled substances. The trial was held before Senior District Judge Hugh Lawson between May 29 and June 13, 2018 in Valdosta.

Evidence presented during the trial of the case showed that in June 2011, co-conspirators Carol Neema Biggs, a/k/a Carol Johnson; Niliya Biggs and Junior Alexander Biggs formed the Wellness Center of Valdosta (WCV), located at 2016 E. Adair Street, to operate as a pain clinic. Dr. Bacon began working there in September 2011 and saw patients until the clinic closed.

The evidence showed that the clinic saw unrealistically large numbers of patients daily, accepted no forms of insurance or government benefits but took cash payments only of between \$250 to \$325 to see a patient, offered a "VIP" line which allowed patients to be seen sooner by paying additional cash. The doctors at the clinic saw an abnormally large number of patients from out of state, including some from as far

away as Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia, who often traveled in groups to the clinic. The evidence showed that the clinic offered no diagnostic testing, required only a paper MRI report, and that Dr. Bacon performed only cursory medical examinations. No alternative treatments outside prescribing large quantities of a "cocktail" of pain medications and other controlled substances were offered to patients. The "cocktail" generally included such highly addictive controlled substances as Oxycodone and Xanax, but also included Hydromorphone, Hydrocodone, Soma, Valium and Ambien. A number of pharmacies and regulatory agencies called the clinic with concerns about the types and amounts of controlled substances prescribed.

Dr. Mbanefo saw patients at the Relief Institute between mid-March 2013 and mid-June 2013. During that three month period of time, Dr. Mbanefo wrote more than 2,900 prescriptions for con-

A world with Lanier County fathers

By Carol A. Moore

Father's Day definitely found Lanier Countians and other fathers honoring and celebrating with their families on Sunday! Father's Day was also definitely multi-generational! A visit to China One Restaurant produced a number of fathers and their offspring as well as grandparents. China One was the lunch of choice by my children's father, just as other families made their way to other area restaurants, homes and backyards for a wide variety of food and activities!

It is certain that most area residents don't know much about how our official national holiday occurred. While President Calvin "Silent Cal" Coolidge made a recommendation that Father's Day be established as a national holiday, no official action was taken back in 1924. In 1966, President Lyndon B. John did sign an executive order designating the third Sunday in June as the official day to celebrate our fathers, though it wasn't

until President Nixon's watch that Father's Day was really celebrated in 1972.

My research turned up two different stories as to the origins of an official day in which to honor our Fathers. The East Coast version connects to Grace Golden Clayton in West Virginia, who spoke to her local Fairmont, West Virginia United Methodist Church about the need to honor fathers after a deadly mine explosion killed 361 men way back in 1908.

The second story, which is the more prevalent one, speaks to the effort that Sonora Smart Dodd who came up to the idea of celebrating and honoring her Washington state Civil War veteran father. Dodd's father raised his six children as a widower, after his wife died in child birth with their sixth child. It is said that Sonora was struck by the idea when a church pastor's Mother's Day sermon was given back in 1909.

Our images of fathers and their roles have

changed dramatically over the course of the 20th Century and into the 21st! When I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin's Columbia Hospital, my father wasn't allowed in the room for the delivery. My mother went off to the hospital with my father and came home ten days later, with all the business of childbirth complete. My father was a very proud parent of his very first child, a daughter with curly red hair from day one of life. It is obvious in the fact that he talked my mother into recreating my birth experience by going back to the hospital a couple of days later in order that he could "film the event" which was simply my mother leaving Columbia Hospital with me bundled up and carefully stepping down the hospital's steps which had a light dusting of snow that was absent on the "actual day"! None of the drama that is prevalent with "ultrasound pictures" and Facebook posts of fathers

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Three generations of the Evans family were celebrating on Sunday. L-R: Haley Evans, Jesse Evans, Easton Evans and (standing) Trey Evans.

trolled substances. Those included prescriptions for more than 127,000 Oxycodone pills and more than 43,000 Xanax and Soma pills. Evidence at the trial also showed that on April 8, 2013, Dr. Mbanefo prescribed large quantities of Oxycodone and Xanax to an undercover agent, who had no legitimate medical issues, with only a cursory medical examination and without discussing the dangers or addictive nature of those drugs.

On June 5, 2013, Dr. Mbanefo prescribed the same undercover agent Oxycodone, Hydromorphone and Xanax, without a legitimate medical purpose.

The doctors at both clinics were paid \$1,200 to \$1,400 per day to see patients at the clinics, with a bonus when a

doctor saw more than 40 in a single day. During the operation of the two clinics, patients made cash payments of more than \$2 million to see the doctors for prescriptions.

Dr. Bacon faces up to 20 years in federal prison and Dr. Mbanefo faces up to twenty (20) years in federal prison on each of the three counts, based on the convictions.

Others who worked at the clinics have previously pled guilty to various offenses and await sentencing. Dr. Vinod Shah, who had seen patients at the Relief Institute of Columbus in 2012-2013 and issued prescriptions for more than 398,000 Oxycodone pills and more than 100,000 Xanax and Soma pills, has previously entered a guilty plea to involvement in the pill mill

conspiracy. Co-conspirators Carol Neema Biggs a/k/a Carol Johnson, Junior Alexander Biggs, Shavonta Devon Bright a/k/a Sean, Nilaja C. Biggs, and Ionie Whorms have also previously entered pleas of guilty for their involvement in or knowledge and concealment of the conspiracy.

On their guilty pleas to conspiracy, Carol Biggs, Junior Biggs and Dr. Vinod Shah each face up to ten (10) years in federal prison, while Nilija Biggs faces up to five (5) years in federal prison. Based on pleas to knowledge and concealment of the conspiracy, Mr. Bright and Ms. Whorms each face up to three (3) years in federal prison.

"This case demonstrates

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Mark Your Calendar
Community Day Pre-Screening:
Monday, June 25 - 1pm-4pm
Tuesday, June 26 - 9 am-12 pm
Wednesday, June 27 - 1pm - 4 pm

Lakeland United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall

80 W. Main Street

lanierfamcom@gmail.com

229-585-1986 or 229-585-1987

www.lanier.gafcp.org

South Georgia
Partnership
to End
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