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A Healthy Partnership

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A Healthy Partnership

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Monday January 9, 2023

By Eric F. Spina

When the local history books are written about our times, we'll read about how the **University of Dayton** and **Premier Health** transformed a basketball arena into Southwest Ohio's first mass public COVID-19 testing site — all within 48 hours in the beginning days of a global pandemic — and staffed it with employees and volunteers from both of their organizations.

We hope school children will learn how these two anchor institutions purchased a former fairgrounds on the edge of the city and pragmatically over time built an inclusive, productive new neighborhood from scratch and dubbed it OnMain.

In the annals of Dayton and those of UD, we can already discover that a long line of Premier Health CEOs and executives have helped UD in moments of both opportunity and challenge. Retired CEOs Tom Breitenbach and Mary Boosalis spent stints on the board of trustees, with

Mary serving as chair for three years. Sharon Howard, System Director of Community and Government Relations and Site Communications for Premier and president-elect of the Alumni Association, will soon join the board when she assumes the presidency of the Association.

As an anchor institution, we pride ourselves on developing mutually beneficial partnerships in the community, but the one with Premier Health stands tall in my mind. As neighbors, we share a special bond that goes beyond proximity to philosophy.

“UD focuses on the total person — mind, body, spirit — and we share the same philosophy in health care,” Mary Boosalis once told a reporter about the synergy between our two organizations.

That was never more evident than during the pandemic. The University’s Path Forward team worked with a Medical Advisory Panel of Premier doctors, infectious disease specialists, and testing experts chaired by Dr. Steve Burdette to develop protective measures — testing, contact tracing, and positive case management while keeping abreast of ever-changing recommendations. We’re indebted to this panel, which included Drs. Roberto Colon, Tom Herchline, Joe Allen, Greg Kohls, and Jeff James as well as Paula Thompson and Nick Lair.

Beyond the marquee projects that grab the headlines, the depth of the engagement between our two organizations is deeply rooted.

During Brother Ray Fitz’s presidency, UD and Miami Valley Hospital joined forces with Citywide Development and the city of Dayton to transform the Fairgrounds neighborhood through the “Genesis Project” into a vibrant place to live and work. The neighborhood’s revitalization, including the addition of affordable housing, sparked the renaissance of Brown Street into a thoroughfare of shops and restaurants.

Premier Health’s sports medicine team partners with our athletics program to support athletes in injury prevention, treatment, and recovery.

In addition, Premier Health is the anchor tenant in a new medical office building under construction on Brown Street that will include evening and weekend urgent care services for UD students, a clinic for faculty and staff, and outpatient services for all. The facility also will serve as an experiential learning site for physical therapy, physician assistant practice, nursing, dietetics, health science, and sport and wellness students.

We’re both deeply committed to training and retaining the local health care workforce of the future. Consider:

- More than 70 percent of candidates in the master's of physician assistant practice program perform clinical rotations at Premier facilities. When Premier put out a call for help, these students worked to distribute nearly 4,000 COVID-19 vaccinations to the local vulnerable population at a UD Arena clinic.
- As a member of the Greater Dayton Area Hospital Association, Premier helped to provide seed funding for the launch of UD's doctor of physical therapy program. Premier's physical therapists guest lecture and serve as lab assistants in the program.

In partnership with Premier, UD established a master's of dietetics and nutrition program in 2019 to meet regional demand.

In 2023, UD and Premier will pilot a mentor program for nursing students to prepare them for practice.

I've found Mike Riordan, Premier Health's new president and CEO, to be a servant-leader committed to the common good and dedicated to building healthier communities. While it's not unusual for universities to engage with hospitals, we believe our partnership will continue to go well beyond curricula and clinicals.

Is it any wonder that the UD-Premier relationship is longstanding and deep? After all, it is deeply rooted in community and benefits from a shared vision to serve and advance the common good. We are blessed.