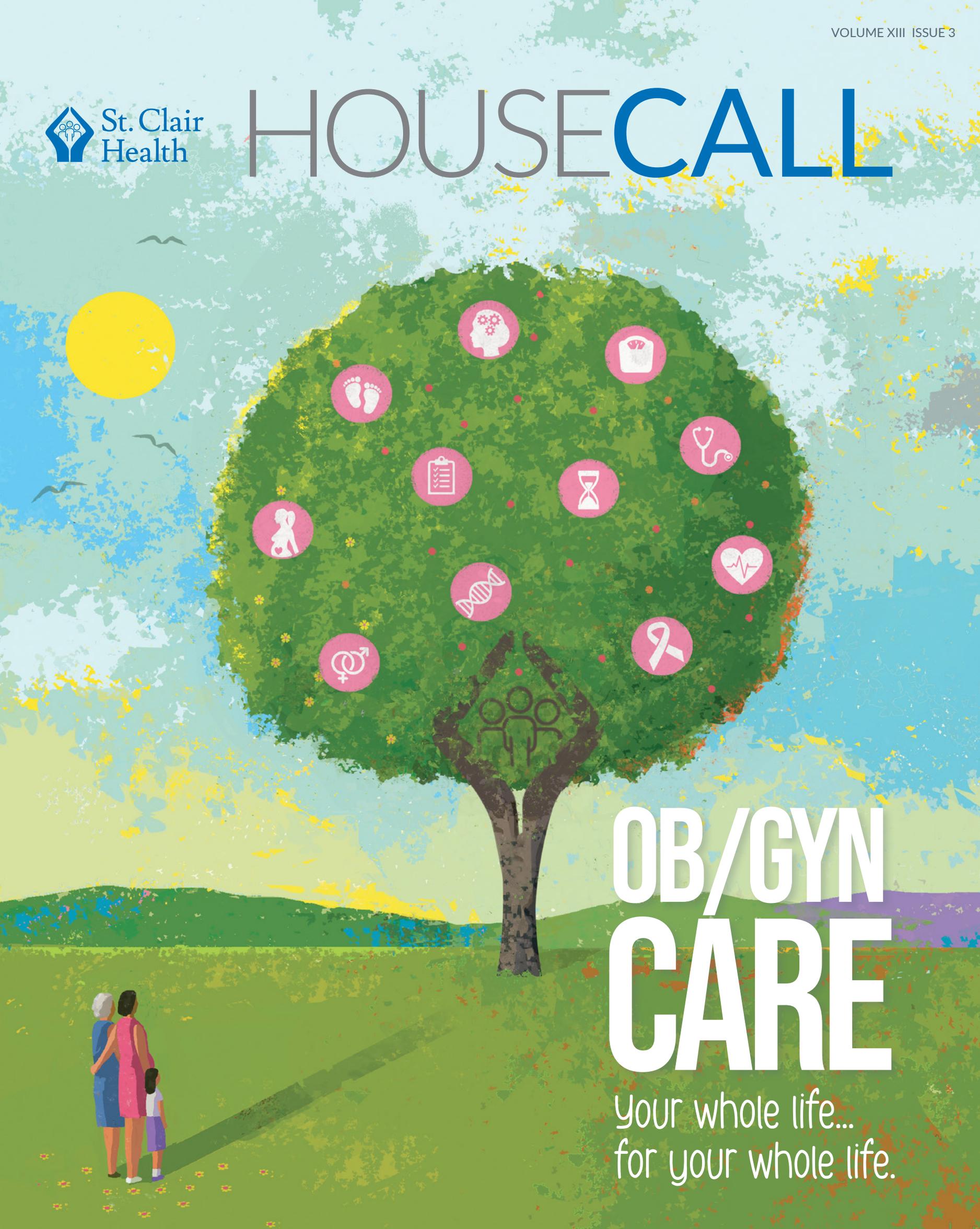




# HOUSECALL



## OB/GYN CARE

Your whole life...  
for your whole life.

# inside

**SINCE 1954**, St. Clair Health has been dedicated to quality, innovation, responsiveness to community needs, and the humanity of the physicians, nurses, and caregiving staff.

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# HOUSECALL

A publication of St. Clair Health

Articles in this publication are for informational purposes and are not intended to serve as medical advice. Please consult your personal physician.



**Michelle Lois Harvison, M.D.**  
Chair of OB/GYN

## ST. CLAIR HEALTH MAKES OB/GYN CARE PERSONAL

**W**hen you're choosing something as important as where to deliver your baby or receive obstetric and gynecologic care, the most important thing is finding a dedicated team you can trust—one that strives to build relationships that last.

And that's exactly what we do here.

Other than being a mom, the most important aspect of my life—and my mission as a physician—is to be the person who advocates for women and partners with them to provide the expert-level care they need.

And that starts by listening to you.

At St. Clair Health, we take great pride in working through all the facets of your life to recognize challenges, solve problems, set goals, and personalize treatment plans that get you exactly where you want to go.

This is a group of passionate doctors, nurses, and support staff that truly care about the community, and many of us have longstanding ties to the area. I'm from a small town south of the city, and growing up I always knew two things: 1) I wanted to be a physician and 2) I wanted to work in service of women in the community I call home. The OB/GYN field is so fulfilling because it has a primary care component while also being a surgical subspecialty, plus the long-term care that allows us to create connections for life—and delivering babies brings a whole lot of joy. I love when I see kids that my kids play sports with and I get to say, "Hey, I delivered that little girl!"

And that compassion is as true for younger patients who are navigating relationships and learning how to treat their bodies with respect as it is for pregnant patients who are becoming moms or expanding their families—and the difficulties they may encounter through this process. The

next stages of life are just as important—helping patients navigate midlife anxiety or pelvic pain and then helping guide women through life cycle changes related to menopause.

We are here for you, every step of the way. We truly care about your quality of life—wherever you are on your journey. And our shared goal is to empower you.



As the Chair of the Department of OB/GYN, one thing I'm intensely proud of is how we were able to maintain our culture of patient safety during the pandemic. At the same time, the tireless effort of our care teams ensured that the labor experience for moms and their families was still that uniquely magical moment in their lives. Even as we enacted safety protocols, utilized negative-pressure rooms, and decreased Hospital foot traffic, we continued to deliver the one-to-one, expert-level care that St. Clair is known for.

One of the things that's so special about St. Clair is that our goal isn't to be the biggest, but the best healthcare system for our patients. This allows us to take a more personal approach—and that was both a stated goal from Day 1 of building our OB/GYN program and the driving detail of our relentless focus on continual improvement moving forward.

I meet so many strong, amazing women right here in the South Hills—and I learn so much from them at the same time. That's what success is to us: continuing to learn as we grow. Together. That means getting everyone on the same page and being ready to make a difference every single day. Sometimes it's deciding on the best minimally invasive surgical technique and sometimes it's being a sounding board. Most of the time, it's both.

Because at St. Clair, we care for your whole life...for your whole life. ■

### MICHELLE L. HARVISON, M.D.

Dr. Harvison specializes in obstetrics and gynecology and is board-certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. She earned her medical degree at the Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine at Marshall University. Dr. Harvison completed residency at Riverside Methodist Hospital. She practices with Advanced Women's Care of Pittsburgh and was named a Top Doctor by *Pittsburgh Magazine* in 2022.

To contact Dr. Harvison, please call 724.941.1866.



"We're able to provide a very personalized experience for patients and their families in a more calming environment, all while providing an exceptional level of medical care."

TERA S. CONWAY, M.D.  
Doctor of Obstetrics and Gynecology

# CURATED CARE DELIVERS BEFORE, DURING & AFTER THE BIG MOMENT ARRIVES

You're expecting a lot when you're expecting. With a focus on personalized care for you and your baby, the labor and delivery experts at St. Clair Health expect just as much from themselves.



**T**he birth of a child is a momentous occasion that mom, baby, and the whole family will remember forever. Making that day welcoming and comforting on every level—physically, mentally, and emotionally—is the goal of St. Clair's Family Birth Center.

"We're able to provide a very personalized experience for patients and their families in a more calming environment, all while providing an exceptional level of medical care," says **Tera S. Conway, M.D.**, an OB/GYN with St. Clair Medical Group (SCMG). "St. Clair is really a great place to have your baby because our whole team is dedicated to your delivery."

Adds **Patrick T. Christy, M.D.**, also of SCMG, "Each patient has their own goals and dreams for their family—and helping them achieve that is very rewarding for all of us."

The Family Birth Center includes 11 private labor and delivery rooms designed specifically to provide exceptional warmth, comfort, and safety from labor through recovery. It's also the definition of one-to-one care, with one nurse assigned to one patient upon admission. Education. Conversation. And working through your plan of care. Labor and delivery nurses focus on much more than the moment of your baby's arrival—they're intimately involved before, during, and after delivery. Certifications held by nursing staff include: inpatient obstetric nursing, low-risk neonatal intensive care nursing, maternal newborn nursing, electronic fetal nursing, and obstetric and neonatal quality and safety.

"St. Clair is intensely proud of its culture of continuous learning, and the Family Birth Center nursing staff is a

prime example of that," Dr. Conway says.

"They really are the heartbeat of labor and delivery."

At the onset of labor, the rooms are set up to make you feel like you're at home with a rocking chair, oversized bathrooms, and soft lighting. Then the room feels like it transforms to reveal all the necessary equipment once delivery begins. And because adding a new member to the family is a special occasion for all, each room is spacious enough to welcome guests after delivery, outfitted with a sleeper sofa to accommodate birthing partners. Plus, a concierge comes and takes your meal orders.

Of course, mom's primary concern is that she and her baby will be well cared for, and St. Clair's commitment to delivering the very best labor and delivery care ensures peace of mind on that front. "Healthy baby, healthy mom—that's our mantra," says Dr. Christy. "And we cultivate the process at every step to ensure that every patient's labor and delivery progresses safely."

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Private labor and delivery rooms are designed to provide exceptional warmth, comfort, and safety.

Each labor and delivery room is supported by state-of-the-art technology, including fetal monitoring systems that allow staff to keep a close eye on your baby—with every labor and delivery nurse completing an Association of Women’s Health Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN) Intermediate Fetal Monitoring Course and maintaining these competencies annually.

In addition, a board-certified Pediatric Hospitalist is on-call 24/7, supporting nurses that are specially trained in labor, delivery, and postpartum care. And a pair of specially designed operating rooms are available and reserved exclusively for expecting moms who require emergency C-sections. “And they’re right there on our unit, so no one has to travel to an OR on another floor,” Dr. Conway says. “We know women don’t necessarily like to think about it, but we’re prepared for every situation, and we have an excellent support staff and consulting physicians who are always available to help.”

St. Clair’s Level II Nursery provides a specially designed environment for babies that are born requiring a higher level of care, from oxygen support to intimate and quick, life-saving procedures. All of these

caring professionals work as a team to make decisions. The night before baby is ready to go home, parents are invited to spend the night “nesting” with their little one to provide a transition from the special care nursery to

home, and privacy shades provide a little extra comfort for respective families.

The Center’s technology also helps women feel more comfortable during labor by offering options that allow patients to walk freely.



**PATRICK T. CHRISTY, M.D.**

Dr. Christy specializes in obstetrics and gynecology and is board-certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. He earned his medical degree from Jefferson Medical College and completed residency at Lankenau Hospital. Dr. Christy practices with St. Clair Medical Group. **To contact Dr. Christy, please call 412.788.1330.**



**TERA S. CONWAY, M.D.**

Dr. Conway specializes in obstetrics and gynecology and is board-certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. She earned her medical degree at Northeast Ohio Medical University. Dr. Conway completed residency at AHN West Penn Hospital, where she served as administrative chief resident. She practices with St. Clair Medical Group. **To contact Dr. Conway, please call 412.788.1330.**

“St. Clair offers wireless monitors so that an expectant mother doesn’t have to spend her entire labor in bed,” Dr. Conway adds. “If it makes her more comfortable to walk a bit, we can still track all of her vital signs—it’s something that many women have told us they really appreciate.”

After a delivery, mom and baby are united immediately to create a bond and to initiate early feeding. A certified lactation counselor from St. Clair’s on-site Lactation Center is available to help new moms learn the ins and outs of breastfeeding. Before delivery and after your hospital stay, the Center remains available for consultations, complementary bra fittings, and other breastfeeding supplies.

Beyond the birth of a child, the Family Birth Center mirrors the holistic care that St. Clair provides for women across their OB/GYN service line.

“At St. Clair, it’s about more than delivery day,” says **Kristen E.M. Peske, D.O.**, an OB/GYN who practices with Advanced Women’s Care of Pittsburgh. “Our focus begins much earlier in the pregnancy, and from Day One we’re determined to deliver complete care for both mother and baby as a whole. We’re looking at

their emotional well-being and for any signs of postpartum depression following delivery. Whatever they need during their journey, we’ll help provide it. And whether the pregnancy is slow and steady the whole way or presents high-risk complications at any point, we’re there for you every step of the way.”

A commitment to that level of personal care is a hallmark of St. Clair—one that is shared by everyone at the Family Birth Center. That’s why a perinatal social worker will visit with every patient on the unit to make sure they’re totally prepared for discharge and have everything they need at home. From setting up transportation or childcare to ensuring that any clinical consults are conducted after delivery, patients can think of this extra set of helping hands like their liaison between St. Clair and their own home.

“This is truly woman-focused care,” Dr. Peske adds. “It means the world to us that we get these opportunities to develop relationships where every member of our team remembers their patients—and vice versa. These are the kind of lifelong connections that last.”

## Connectivity is a cornerstone for the experts at St. Clair.

“There’s a continuity of care, and that’s exactly what drew me to become an OB/GYN in the first place,” Dr. Peske says. “It starts when a young lady is 11 or 12 years old, and continues for her entire life. Our commitment is to each patient’s whole life—all of a woman’s biggest and, at times, most challenging moments. The Family Birth Center is a vital part of that.”

After more than two decades of delivering babies at St. Clair, Dr. Christy remains intensely proud of the relationships the teams continue to build. “It’s the ultimate reward to have multi-generational families that trust us to bring their next generation into the world,” he says.

If you’re expecting, or expecting to be expecting, the Family Birth Center offers virtual tours online. To learn more, visit [stclair.org/womenandchildren](http://stclair.org/womenandchildren). ■



“Whether the pregnancy is slow and steady the whole way or presents high-risk complications at any point, we’re there for you every step of the way.”

KRISTEN E.M. PESKE, D.O.  
Doctor of Obstetrics and Gynecology

### KRISTEN E.M. PESKE, D.O.

Dr. Peske specializes in obstetrics and gynecology and is board-certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. She completed medical school at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and residency at AHN West Penn Hospital. Dr. Peske practices with Advanced Women’s Care of Pittsburgh and was named a Top Doctor by *Pittsburgh Magazine* in 2022. To contact Dr. Peske, please call 724.941.1866.

# CARE: AROUND THE CLOCK. COMPASSION: ALWAYS ON.

In addition to expert physicians and nurses, Pediatric Hospitalists serve as a staple of St. Clair Health's relentless commitment to always have moms and babies covered.

 St. Clair Health  
Dayle B. Griffin, M.D.

If you're the parent of a young child, then you typically visit a pediatrician at their practice office. But there are board-certified pediatricians who work exclusively in hospitals—and they're called Pediatric Hospitalists.

One of the leading experts in the field is **Dayle B. Griffin, M.D.**, Medical Director of Pediatric and Newborn Services at St. Clair Health.

"Being present for the start of a new family is an amazing gift for us," she says. "And for the families, one of the wonderful reasons to choose St. Clair is that we strive to provide an environment where you feel completely supported."

Dr. Griffin and her team of Pediatric Hospitalists provide 24/7 coverage for pediatric and newborn care. They attend high-risk deliveries, care for newborns, see consults in the Emergency Room, and care for pediatric patients who are admitted to the pediatric floor.

For Pediatric Hospitalists, it all comes down to adding value to your continuum of care.

"We care for healthy newborns and newborns admitted to our Special Care Nursery," says Dr. Griffin. "Our Special Care Nursery is for babies that need extra oxygen or closer monitoring. We're also always ready to consult in emergent situations—our Emergency Room physicians are excellent colleagues who are wonderful at caring for the vast majority of patients, and they call on us when an infant or child needs to be admitted to the pediatric floor."

St. Clair averages 1,500 deliveries annually. Newborn babies are examined and evaluated daily by a Pediatric Hospitalist. And if a newborn or pediatric patient requires admission, the highly trained team of Pediatric Hospitalists tend to them in the Special Care Nursery and on the pediatric floor. From routine vaginal deliveries to emergency C-sections—from the first sign of



Every new addition is equally important to everyone on your care team.

distress to the first breath of new life—a St. Clair Pediatric Hospitalist is right there. "So much can happen in those first few seconds after a baby is born," Dr. Griffin says. "We're there to help in any way we can."

And it's not only infants who receive this attention to detail.

"We had a little boy who had moderate, intermittent asthma from the time he was in preschool—he would have significant flare-ups and require periodic hospitalization," Dr. Griffin says. "He became a patient of ours for years—sort of a 'return customer' at St. Clair. We all knew him by name, and whenever we got a call that he was in the ER again, we say, 'Okay, let's get his room ready.' We knew he'd need to be hospitalized because we'd experienced it together many times before."

Often, he experienced complications around the holidays.

"The nurses would prepare an Easter basket for him in advance, anticipating his

"Being present for the start of a new family is an amazing gift for us... And for the families, one of the wonderful reasons to choose St. Clair is that we strive to provide an environment where you feel completely supported."

DAYLE B. GRIFFIN, M.D.  
Medical Director of Pediatric  
and Newborn Services

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arrival. And whenever we'd see him around Christmas, the staff would put together a special present for him. It was so gratifying that his family felt comfortable returning to St. Clair—and it was just as wonderful when he progressed to the point where he didn't require nearly as many hospitalizations. Even then, we'd keep in touch. And not long ago, I ran into him at the grocery store—he invited me to his high school graduation! I felt so proud seeing him doing so well," says Dr. Griffin.

After a brief pause and a big smile, she continues. "One reason he and his mother came back to St. Clair was the feeling that they weren't just a number here. Our pediatric nurses are so warm and caring with every family—they make a concerted effort to connect with the family, making sure the patient is well-cared for and the family is made as comfortable as possible. Anyone who's ever had a sick child knows it's very stressful—that's why we care for them like they're our own. I know his mom would say we cared for her as much as her child."

For Dr. Griffin, the reason for becoming a Pediatric Hospitalist and continuing her career in the field run parallel to one another. "I got into this because I've always loved working with children. I continue because I deeply enjoy working with the families," she says. "My goal is to ensure that they feel prepared to take their newborn home when that day arrives. Our entire staff sees our job as helping families take home a healthy baby—and whatever we need to do to help make that happen, we'll do."

**Janice E. Valko, M.D.**, is a Pediatric Hospitalist who has worked with Dr. Griffin for several years. She attends deliveries at



Dr. Valko tends to a newborn in the Special Care Nursery.

St. Clair, makes rounds to check in on newborns, performs consults in the ER, and sees admitted pediatric patients.

"Dr. Griffin is a salt-of-the-earth person," says Dr. Valko. "She's one of the most resourceful people I've ever met—always thinking ahead on what we can do to deliver the best possible care for our patients."

Dr. Valko has experienced many memorable moments at St. Clair, including some very literal life-saving ones—like the time she performed a needle decompression in the middle of the night when a baby had suffered a pneumothorax, which is when air collects around or outside the lungs. "If a baby doesn't start crying after delivery and I'm able to help that baby start breathing and crying,"

she says, "that's always a pretty wonderful feeling. And it's just as fulfilling to have the opportunities to simply listen to any baby's parents and help them really feel ready to care for their child."

Those emotions carry over to the community Dr. Valko serves and the teams that stand together every single day. "Our reputation for expert-level care is a privilege to work hard to live up to for every patient. And it's equally special to work alongside pediatricians, OB/GYN physicians, nurses, and surgical technicians who feel the same way," she says.

Dr. Griffin shares Dr. Valko's feelings about working at St. Clair. "I love being part of an institution that truly values personal care. We're



**JANICE E. VALKO, M.D.**

Dr. Valko specializes in pediatrics and is board-certified by the American Board of Pediatrics. She earned her medical degree from Drexel University College of Medicine and completed residency with Nationwide Children's Hospital. Dr. Valko practices with St. Clair Medical Group. To contact Dr. Valko, please call 412.942.5900.

a team that wants to make each of our families feel special—and that starts from the moment you walk in the door and continues with the Environmental Services colleague who says, 'Good morning,' and looks you in the eye...the dietary staff who remembers that you prefer Coke over Sprite. The medical aspect is really part of the bigger picture here—and that makes it easy to enjoy what we do."

Stressing the importance of finding a place where you can experience that for yourself, Dr. Griffin continues.

"Choose an obstetrician you feel comfortable with. Our obstetricians are incredible. Many will stay with mothers and coach them through delivery for hours on end. How many places can you go where a board-certified OB sits with you one-on-one like that? I've seen them do incredible work performing stat C-sections and other

life-saving procedures—they're so invested in the best outcome for every patient. After you choose a great OB, then there's the fact that our Hospital simply provides the best birthing experience. Our specialty nurses in the Family Birth Center are wonderful. They're skilled, compassionate, and attentive caregivers who work hard to ensure our patients get the best possible care."

Starting a family is an amazing time in anyone's life. At St. Clair, Dr. Griffin is mindful to point out that every new addition is equally important to everyone on your care team.

"Every new addition changes a family into a new entity. Being present for that first moment—wherever your family is on their journey—is an amazing gift for all of us. And for families, choosing an environment where you feel supported is another wonderful reason to choose St. Clair." ■

"Our reputation for expert-level care is a privilege to work hard to live up to for every patient."

JANICE E. VALKO, M.D.  
Doctor of Pediatrics



**DAYLE B. GRIFFIN, M.D.**

Dr. Griffin specializes in pediatrics and is board-certified by the American Board of Pediatrics. She is Medical Director of Pediatric and Newborn Services at St. Clair Health. Dr. Griffin completed medical school at Howard University and residency at UPMC Mercy Hospital. She practices with St. Clair Medical Group. To contact Dr. Griffin, please call 412.942.5900.



# A DECADE & CHANGE FOR THE HENNON FAMILY

**Life is full of surprises.** One patient's experience offers an inside look at the wide-reaching expert care delivered by St. Clair Health obstetricians through the ups and downs at every step of the journey.

**J**acki Fury Hennon is many things. Project administrator. Financial analyst. Floral designer. Lifelong Pittsburgh Pirates fan. And on October 2, 2010—after 18 months of meticulous planning—she was expecting to pull off her dream wedding, complete with a reception at PNC Park.

But in that final week leading up to her big day, Jacki's dream became a nightmare.

"I was running last-minute errands with my mother on the Saturday before when I started feeling nauseous and having stomach pain. After a weekend of rest I actually felt worse and was running a fever," she says. "The pain was agonizing, beyond anything I'd ever experienced."

On Sunday night, Jacki's fiancé, Chris, took her to St. Clair's ER.

An ultrasound showed an ovarian cyst. On Wednesday, a CT scan and follow-up ultrasound revealed that the cyst was large enough within her pelvis to create a rare and potentially life-threatening condition called ovarian torsion—one of Jacki's ovaries had become twisted with a fallopian tube, cutting off blood flow to the ovary.

On Thursday morning—the same day as their rehearsal dinner—Jacki and Chris met with **Douglas H. MacKay, M.D.**, a board-certified OB/GYN who practices with Advanced Women's Care of Pittsburgh. "Everything changed for the

better when he arrived," says Jacki. "There was a lot to talk about, from the wedding to wanting to have a family, and he explained everything about the minimally invasive surgical techniques. I still felt hopeful knowing that both things would still be possible, even if I lost my left ovary."

Jacki underwent a salpingo-oophorectomy—removal of the ovary and fallopian tube—almost immediately. "The cyst had twisted tightly around Jacki's ovary," says Dr. MacKay.

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Christopher and Jacki Hennon's wedding photo from 2010 at PNC Park.





“Dr. MacKay always makes me feel like I’m not just patient number seven that day.”

JACKI FURY HENNON  
Patient

Photo Credit: Lisa Hooper Photography

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“Sometimes we’re able to twist the vessels back and then see if blood flow returns to the ovary, but in Jacki’s case the ovary and the tube could not be saved.”

The size of the cyst presented another challenge for Dr. MacKay.

“Jacki’s cyst was so large that I might have done a large abdominal incision, but a large, open incision would have meant that she couldn’t have her wedding as scheduled. My goal is always to be as minimally invasive as possible with every patient, and doing this laparoscopically means that recovery is faster and there’s less post-op pain,” he says.

Still, Jacki spent that evening in a recovery room instead of at her rehearsal dinner. It was worth the trade.

“I woke up in a different world,” she says. “My four days of agony were over and I was so grateful for Dr. MacKay. After the dinner, Chris, my sister, the bridal party, and then

some of my cousins all came to see me.”

Missing the rehearsal dinner was one thing. Cancelling the wedding was not an option for Jacki. “Not even if I had to be pushed down the aisle in a wheelchair with an IV,” she says. “Dr. MacKay told me I could do it, and I had no doubts. I was a bride—and I was even able to dance a little.”

Going from hospital gown to wedding gown in 48 hours was a remarkable experience for Jacki. Through it all, Dr. MacKay kept her long-term goals in mind. “It’s best to be conservative with a young woman and not rush to operate, because she’s in her child-bearing years,” he says.

Jacki became pregnant the following spring, but unfortunately suffered a miscarriage later that summer. “We kept trying,” she says, “but had no luck for over a year. We came in to discuss Clomid (a prescription medication that stimulates ovulation) with Dr. MacKay. He greeted us by

saying, ‘Congratulations! You’re pregnant!’ And eight months later he delivered our daughter, Madelyn.”

In 2015, after seeing Dr. MacKay throughout the course of a new pregnancy, Jacki suddenly started showing signs of labor. **Deborah Lenart, M.D.**, a colleague of Dr. MacKay’s at Advanced Women’s Care of Pittsburgh, was on call in labor and delivery that day. She delivered Jacki’s second child, a baby boy named Carson.

Two years later, Jacki began experiencing painful periods that severely impacted her quality of life. Dr. MacKay recommended and performed a uterine ablation, which completely cures only a small percentage of women. “Thanks to his skill, I’m one of them,” says Jacki.

She has turned her floral business side hustle into a full-time operation and still sees Dr. MacKay for annual checkups and preventative screenings. “I just really

Jacki is grateful for the expert care that helped grow her family.



Photo Credit : Lisa Hooper Photography



“I love being able to encourage mindfulness, mental fitness, emotional strength, and preventative care. I love my job, and I’m blessed to be able to see my patients and their families grow and develop.”

DOUGLAS H. MACKAY, M.D.  
Doctor of Obstetrics and Gynecology

**DOUGLAS H. MACKAY, M.D.**

Dr. MacKay specializes in obstetrics and gynecology and is board-certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. He earned his medical degree at The Ohio State University School of Medicine and completed residency at AHN West Penn Hospital. He practices with Advanced Women’s Care of Pittsburgh and was named a Top Doctor by *Pittsburgh Magazine* in 2022. To contact Dr. MacKay, please call 724.941.1866.

appreciate him as a person,” says Jacki. “When you go through so many kinds of life experiences with someone, there’s a special connection that’s created. He always makes me feel like I’m not just patient number seven that day—and we still talk about my wedding. I’ll never forget how he made it possible for me to have my dream wedding, and how he helped us start our family.”

Dr. MacKay shares Jacki’s sentiment and values their relationship in turn.

“After that challenging start for her, I’ve been able to help see her through birth, loss, and the day-to-day gynecologic issues that all women face. I feel very fortunate to have seen her through these different phases of her life, and that’s true for all of my patients. I love being able to encourage mindfulness, mental fitness, emotional strength, and preventative care. I love my job, and I’m blessed to be able to see my patients and their families grow and develop,” he says. ■



# DOCTORS WITH LOCAL TIES

OBSTETRIC AND GYNECOLOGIC PHYSICIANS AT ST. CLAIR HEALTH ARE PROUD TO BE ABLE TO ADVOCATE FOR AND PARTNER WITH WOMEN THROUGH EVERY STAGE OF THEIR LIVES. MANY ARE DOING SO RIGHT IN THEIR OWN BACKYARD.

Sometimes, you just know. And for Elizabeth J. Pronesti, M.D., FACOG, an OB/GYN with St. Clair Medical Group, precocious awareness made her want to tell the whole world. “First grade, second grade, all through school—whenever you’d get that assignment or really if anyone even asked, ‘What do you want to be when you grow up?’ my answer was always the same,” she says.

Wanting to become a doctor also meant actively looking for ways to get started on her path. The Scott Township native began her St. Clair Health journey as a volunteer in the Snack Shop. “I really wanted to get my foot in the door—whatever it was going to take to start experiencing the hospital environment. So entering high school, I reached out to peers who were ahead of me and learned from what they were doing,” she says.

Dr. Pronesti transitioned from waiting on customers to clerical work with Lifeline, the emergency call button service. That role expanded to include interactions with patients on the phone over more than 200 volunteer hours. “I was hooked—and looking back, it was such valuable experience. I really enjoyed learning something new every day, which is something that continues to carry through today at St. Clair,” she says.

After her junior year, Dr. Pronesti achieved acceptance into the prestigious Pennsylvania Governor’s School for Health Care at the University of Pittsburgh—a summer program that gives rising high school seniors an expanded look at their potential future fields. “I always liked biology, and the program provided hands-on experiences and research opportunities across the different areas of healthcare. That was

such a great experience—being able to shadow physicians and interact with other aspiring doctors really solidified my goal of becoming a doctor one day,” she says.

With a pair of physician-parents, those who know Mary J. Sims, M.D., MA, an OB/GYN with Advanced Women’s Care of Pittsburgh, might be inclined to say that becoming a doctor is the family business. Dr. Sims gets a good chuckle out of that perception. “I have three siblings, and I’m the only one that went into medicine,” she says. “I have had the opportunity to have incredible role models both personally and professionally. They taught me not only how to work hard, but exemplified the

“What do you want to be when you grow up?  
My answer was always the same.”

ELIZABETH J. PRONESTI, M.D.  
Doctor of Obstetrics and Gynecology

## ELIZABETH J. PRONESTI, M.D.

Dr. Pronesti specializes in obstetrics and gynecology and is board-certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. She earned her undergraduate degree in neuroscience from the University of Pittsburgh and her medical degree from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. She then completed residency at UPMC Magee-Womens Hospital, where she served as administrative chief resident. In training, Dr. Pronesti earned awards for excellence in high risk obstetrics, female pelvic medicine, and laparoscopic surgery. She practices with St. Clair Medical Group. To contact Dr. Pronesti, please call 412.942.1066.

Photo Credit: Rachel Rossetti Photography



importance of providing the greatest level of care to every patient.”

While Dr. Pronesti grew up keen on biology, Dr. Sims once intended to study kinesiology in preparation for a career in sports medicine, “I was very tall in the fifth grade and loved playing basketball and running track. Playing sports was my passion and my initial interest was in physiology.”

After completing her undergraduate work in kinesiology at Penn State, the Mt. Lebanon native conducted postgraduate research in the female athlete triad at Boston University. The diagnosis encompassing menstrual dysfunction, decreased bone mineral density, and energy drain or calorie deficit, often prevalent in young female athletes, made her realize how she could make a bigger impact. “I became enamored with all of the different aspects of women’s health,” Dr. Sims says. “After initially looking through the lens of athletics, researching all of the other components and challenges that women experience—and how those elements are connected—made me want to pursue a career in medicine.”

What Dr. Sims found in the OB/GYN Department at Drexel University shaped the perspective that ultimately led her back to where it all began. “Experiencing different subspecialties opened my eyes to what is really important: creating connections with patients. Drexel does a phenomenal job of taking care of the women of Philadelphia—and they’re so passionate. I wanted to bring that same passion back to Pittsburgh and deliver expert-level care to the women of my hometown,” she says.

Dr. Sims joined Advanced Women’s Care last year after completing her OB/GYN residency with AHN West Penn Hospital. “The driving force through those four years was to learn as much as I could from everyone around me. My goal is to help every patient feel as comfortable as possible in the face of any challenge, and sometimes, even something as small as knowing where your doctor is from—in my case, right down the

road—creates the connection that can enhance that level of comfort,” she says. “It’s one of the biggest reasons why I’m here.”

Although Dr. Pronesti’s path was more direct, she did experience a pull from different subspecialties—particularly those that included time in the operating room—after matriculating from undergraduate neuroscience studies at the University of Pittsburgh to their School of Medicine. With St. Clair’s Chief of Neurology, Dr. Maxim D. Hammer, serving as her research mentor, she considered neurology and general surgery. “Then I got to my OB/GYN rotation, and I found myself in tears whenever a baby was born—I would actually get mad when I knew the end of my shift was coming because I didn’t want to go home,” she says. “There’s just so much joy within this field. I realized that it was the best of both worlds: the specific surgical aspects, which I really love, and also the long-term continuum of care, which is really unique.”

She matched at UPMC Magee-Women’s Hospital for residency, where she served as Administrative Chief Resident, and signed on with St. Clair two years before graduation. In much the same fashion that she always knew she wanted to become a doctor, Dr. Pronesti has long known exactly where she wanted to be when that day came.

“St. Clair’s reputation for excellence and continuous clinical training and compassion at bedside is unmatched,” she says. “As an OB/GYN, I depend on my partners just like our patients do. And everything I’ve experienced here tracks back to that—everyone I work with cares for our patients like they’re one of our own family members.”

That closeness stems from the village of women who raised Dr. Pronesti.

“I was raised by my mom, extremely close to my grandmother, and my aunt is like a second mom to me. It was almost like I had three moms, plus my sister, and the five girls were always together. I come from a

family of strong women who are extremely close, which is why women’s health is so important to me,” she says. “It’s an honor to be able to advocate for and partner with women in the South Hills community—to experience every day some connection with a neighbor down the street or a friend of a friend that’s been referred to me. When a patient refers their own daughter to me, that is really the ultimate honor—there’s just so much trust in that. I put the same trust in my partners who delivered both of my children at St. Clair’s Family Birth Center.”

Dr. Sims echoes that literal everyday trip down memory lane.

“My grandfather was really sick when I was young. He moved in with us while I was in elementary school and I would come home every day and want to take care of him, just to be by his side and tend to anything that he needed,” she says. “I was very fortunate to grow up here and have such a supportive community around me.”

More than nostalgia, she seeks the privilege within. “I feel very grateful for the opportunity to be part of the St. Clair community where I can provide OB/GYN care to patients at every juncture of their life while developing long-term relationships,” she says. ■

#### MARY J. SIMS, M.D.

Dr. Sims specializes in obstetrics and gynecology. She graduated from Drexel University College of Medicine and completed residency at AHN West Penn Hospital. She practices with Advanced Women’s Care of Pittsburgh. **To contact Dr. Sims, please call 724.941.1866.**

Photo Credit: Rachel Rowland Photography





# SMALL TOOLS MAKE A BIG IMPACT ON GYNECOLOGIC SURGERY

Scalpel. Scissors. Endoscopic camera. The most advanced surgical system puts a 3D image of each patient in expert hands.

Dr. Brown achieves technical expertise through intense training.

**T**oday, thanks to advancements in non-invasive and minimally invasive techniques, fewer women face the prospect of undergoing a hysterectomy than ever before. And yet, this procedure still remains the second most common surgery for women in the United States: approximately 400,000 hysterectomies are performed each year. Ultimately, one in nine women will need one in their lifetime.

At St. Clair Health, robotic surgery is a prime example of the organization's commitment to delivering advanced care close to home.

"St. Clair was one of the first in the region to utilize this technology on a regular basis, and I started performing robotic-assisted surgery in 2012," says **Stephanie Shaw Brown, M.D.**, a partner at Advanced Women's Care of Pittsburgh. "In many non-cancerous situations, it's truly a great option for women to have."

St. Clair invested in the newest robot last year, and gynecologic surgical experts like Dr. Brown are using the most advanced technology offered anywhere: the da Vinci® Surgical System. Together with her highly trained physicians across the gynecology service line, St. Clair specialists like Dr. Brown are delivering surgical options for patients that result in less pain and faster recovery. "Robot-assisted surgery is a laparoscopic procedure, which means a much smaller incision and much less blood loss than an open-incision hysterectomy," she says. "The robot translates my hand movements in real time, with every bend and rotation under my complete control. The experience is seamless, and this technique allows us to be more precise, visualizing anatomy clearly and performing more complicated work."

### **This is advanced technology in well-trained hands.**

The state-of-the-art da Vinci Surgical System delivers real results for patients of St. Clair, including shorter hospital stays that can often be completed on an outpatient basis. Achieving this level of technical expertise demands intense training.

"The learning curve related to taking a major operation and making it less invasive is a serious commitment," Dr. Brown says. "There's a great deal of pride involved in acquiring new skills that can help us better serve patients in our community."



A graduate of Upper St. Clair High School, she earned her medical degree from the University of Louisville, performed her OB/GYN residency at the Medical College of Ohio, and spent several years in private practice in North Carolina. Robotic surgery would require still more experience as she made a concerted effort to return to her roots. "I trained for six months at institutions like Cleveland Clinic, observed surgeries in Michigan and here in Pittsburgh, and was proctored as I began to use the robot on my own," Dr. Brown says.

That level of training and experience creates assurance for every patient that Dr. Brown and the gynecologic surgical teams at St. Clair treat. The most advanced technology increases vision, precision, and control, enabling delicate and complex operations through a few tiny incisions.

"It's all about helping our patients understand that they're getting the very best care," Dr. Brown says. "As we personalize your treatment plan, we show you a video that breaks down the procedure on the da Vinci so you can see exactly how it works. That way it's more than saying, 'This is minimally invasive,' because you get a real understanding of how precise the robot is and how that leads directly to less pain and faster recovery—we want to get you back to your normal life in two weeks instead of six, and here's how that happens. Our goal is to create peace of mind for patients throughout the process." ■

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#### **STEPHANIE S. BROWN, M.D.**

Dr. Brown specializes in obstetrics and gynecology and is board-certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. She earned her medical degree at the University of Louisville School of Medicine and completed residency at the Medical College of Ohio Hospital. Dr. Brown practices with Advanced Women's Care of Pittsburgh and was named a Top Doctor by *Pittsburgh Magazine* in 2022. **To contact Dr. Brown, please call 724.941.1866.**

# AN EXERCISE IN TAKING BACK CONTROL

Physical and occupational therapists at St. Clair Health take pelvic floor therapy personally, building regimens that can prove life-changing for women at any stage of life.

“**P**eeing when I laugh or cough is something I never thought I’d have to deal with,” says Mara Bell, age 37. “I distinctly remember break room conversations with older co-workers discussing this problem and thinking to myself, ‘That will never happen to me.’ And then, after kids, it happened.” As an active and healthy person, Mara thought she could avoid the issue. She humbly admits now, “I was wrong.”

Maybe you’ve never heard of a pelvic floor. And maybe, sometimes, you experience urinary leakage. If you do, then maybe it doesn’t have to be an option for you because there’s a simple way to deal with it: Pelvic floor therapy.

**Lauren Cerqua, MPT**, Manager of Therapy Services at St. Clair Health, and her team are ready to help you get back the freedom to laugh without worry that you may be experiencing due to childbirth, the natural aging process, or other causes. Her team works with patients suffering from incontinence or other urinary and bowel

challenges, as well as managing pelvic pain.

“Pelvic floor therapy targets the muscles and ligaments that support the bowel and bladder structure,” Cerqua explains. “We work with women whose pelvis has changed, as well as abdominal muscles have separated from giving birth. Most pre- and post-natal patients experience some form

of incontinence, and they can really benefit from strengthening and coordinating their pelvic floor muscles.”

When a woman goes through childbirth, her pelvis changes as abdominal muscles are stretched and sometimes surgically cut. As the body heals, if those pelvic muscles are no longer strong enough to support the pressure in the intra-abdominal cavity while lifting, running, jumping—or even laughing, coughing, and sneezing—then that pressure can cause a leak.

## And the issue isn’t limited to pre- and post-natal women.

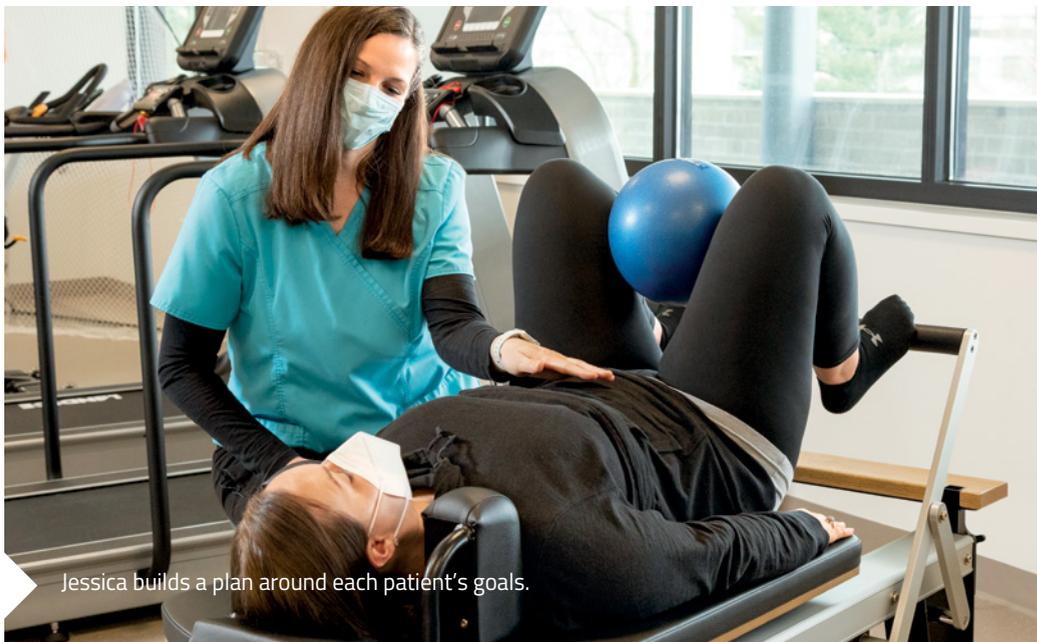
“When I was a fitness instructor,” recalls Cerqua, “it was amazing to me how many women needed to leave class to go to the restroom. Many would come back and resume exercising only to have to leave again, all so they didn’t experience a leakage. I’d be in front of the class wanting to yell out, ‘We have therapy for that and we can help you get through class!’ It’s definitely a goal

of mine: to be able to let women know there is help available.”

Leakage can also be a common part of aging. Many women experience incontinence issues later in life as the muscles that support the bladder weaken, sometimes causing a bladder or rectal prolapse. Pelvic floor therapy can be helpful for these issues. “My mom is 68,” says Cerqua. “She’s very active, and she just thinks it’s normal to constantly have urge and frequency issues. I always remind her, ‘Mom, you don’t have to live with this.’ And for patients out there wondering, we can often knock these types of problems out in six sessions or less.”

Many of the women who seek relief with pelvic floor therapy through the help of Cerqua’s team do so at the recommendation of **Amy B. Turner, D.O.**, who practices obstetrics and gynecology with Advanced Women’s Care of Pittsburgh. One such patient, Karen, age 70, had suffered a bladder prolapse. “Dr. Turner went over the options... from doing nothing to having surgery or trying therapy. She made it clear that it was my decision, and I chose therapy. I went twice a week for three months, and my therapist was Jessica Hammond. She was wonderful—so knowledgeable and always encouraging me. As I progressed, I could literally feel a big difference. At the same time, Jessica was able to measure the strength of my pelvic floor, and you could see a big difference as well.”

Dr. Turner makes a concerted effort to educate patients at early stages of their respective challenges, when their issues are more treatable with pelvic floor therapy, versus waiting until they might need surgery down the road. “During a patient’s annual wellness exam,” she says, “we



Jessica builds a plan around each patient’s goals.



Lauren leads the Therapy Services team.

discuss their urinary habits, any sexual dysfunction, or any other problems in that area. Also, sometimes during a six-week postpartum checkup we'll see leakage, incontinence, or patients feeling like everything is kind of 'dropping down below.' If they report any of those issues, pelvic floor therapy is definitely an option—and we've seen some great success with it improving their quality of life."

In addition to childbirth and aging, other triggers for pelvic floor disruption include weight gain and overuse of pelvic muscles, such as heavy lifting. Recent events have brought another cause to the forefront. "I've seen a lot of women during COVID," says Dr. Turner, "who instead of sitting in their usual office chair are now working at their dining room table or a makeshift office. They end up suffering severe pain and discomfort. Over the past two years I've referred many patients for pelvic floor therapy because of that—and they've experienced significant relief."

Choosing pelvic floor therapy at St. Clair is more than another exercise regimen. First, patients discuss any issues that could be related to their present issues and any medications that could be exacerbating the challenge. Then they compile a bladder and bowel diary for several days to sync their current status with their medical history.

"Our program is immersive, and we focus on listening to each patient's concerns while educating them to make sure they understand what's really going on. It's about building that relationship every time," says Cerqua. "We teach them about the anatomy of the pelvic floor, how the muscles work in relation to the diaphragm, and breathing. Then we work through the exercises together in order to strengthen the muscles or relax them if they're too tense or restricted. We use the latest equipment and techniques, including biofeedback and internal and external electrical stimulation."

For patients like Mara, who was struggling with urinary incontinence after giving birth to her third child in five years, those relationships are the key. "Welcoming me and my new baby, Jessica and her team made me feel comfortable in a very awkward situation. They were committed to getting me back to a higher quality of life," she says. One day, Mara asked Jessica why she chose to be a pelvic floor therapist due to the interesting nature of the job. "She explained that she had personally dealt with similar issues and realized the lack of care for women in this area. There is so much we need after our babies are born. Jessica



Pelvic floor therapy helps Mara get back to what matters most.

wanted to make a difference—and she definitely has with me."

Here, **Jessica Hammond, OTR/L**, weighs in with the kind of patient experience perspective that sets St. Clair apart. "I feel it's important to empower women to care for themselves and be an advocate for their own care. I really enjoy being a pelvic floor therapist—it's allowed me to connect with women and help them learn how their bodies really work, build a plan around each individual's goals, and improve their quality of life."

As for the therapy itself, Mara says, "The exercises I have been given are simple to do. They focus on strengthening my deep core and lower abdominal muscles. Movements include contracting or tightening my abdominal muscles while moving my legs in and out. I practice a 'happy baby' pose to stretch my pelvic muscles and breathing exercises encourage focused relaxation, allowing me to feel how my whole body should be working together. I thought the issue I was having was due to a weak pelvic floor. With Jessica's guidance, I learned that I was constantly holding my pelvic floor up instead of relaxing it—even when I thought I was relaxed. This meant that when I needed to tighten to prevent leakage, I had nowhere for those muscles to go."



#### **AMY B. TURNER, D.O.**

Dr. Turner specializes in obstetrics and gynecology and is board-certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. She graduated from Nova Southeastern University College of Osteopathic Medicine and completed residency at AHN West Penn Hospital. Dr. Turner practices with Advanced Women's Care of Pittsburgh and was named a Top Doctor by *Pittsburgh Magazine* in 2022. To contact Dr. Turner, please call 724.941.1866.



# ST. CLAIR HEALTH ROBINSON TOWNSHIP GRAND OPENING

New multispecialty suite delivers on the synergy of internal medicine, obstetric and gynecologic services, and other specialists—together in one place.

**A**t first glance, this is a story about expansion. Upon closer inspection, this is the intersection of primary and specialty care. An intimate setting where doctors know you by name and build personalized medicine around your needs.

“At its core, the St. Clair Health Robinson Township Multispecialty Suite was created to bring people together,” says **Beth Pittman, MBA**, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, St. Clair Medical Group. “One of the most important hallmarks for quality outpatient services is accessibility—we’re proud to be able to deliver expert care in this community.”

With a physical location that sits right in the heart of Robinson, St. Clair is delivering on a relentless commitment to the community that is years in the making. “Securing the best location for our patients was paramount in the decision-making process,” says Pittman. “And you can’t be more front and center than where we are now.”

In addition to the premium setting, Pittman is quick to point out that size and scalability were also key determining factors in the setup. “The OB/GYN space is larger than what we previously had, so certainly, we can serve more patients. Equally important is the flexibility within the space that will allow us to grow the team over time.”

Pittman’s point is a literal one: St. Clair built in a flex space in order to create the ability for specialists to rotate through the facility.

“We’re completely committed to expanding and adapting our services to the community’s needs,” she says. “And that’s always based on thorough study of both our service area and the respective services offered—we are continuously striving to match the health needs of our patients with the wide array of medical and surgical specialists that comprise St. Clair Medical Group. This allows us to pair patients with the best physicians for their personal care.”

The current offering is focused on Primary Care, with multiple groups of St. Clair experts coming together under one roof as part of a larger, multispecialty group. And right down the hall? OB/GYN services. “The idea is to be truly collaborative, so that if a patient comes in for a PCP checkup and expresses an obstetric or gynecologic concern, then there’s a St. Clair clinician in the same place who can see you more quickly,” Pittman says. “We were inspired by our visits to the Mayo Clinic campus and worked hard to bring clinical services together seamlessly for patients at this facility.”

Adds **Paul M. Zubritzky, M.D.**, who practices with St. Clair Medical Group OB/GYN, “St. Clair has an eye to the future, having the ability and desire to improve on health care delivery, making patients and providers equally happy, feeling cared for, and safe.”

Backed by the idea of meeting people where they are and going directly into their community in service of their health care needs, the St. Clair Health Robinson Township Multispecialty Suite also delivers for the staff. “The space is flooded with natural light—it’s a great work environment for the care teams. And that was really important because we have great employees who are so passionate about delivering this world-class health system to Robinson and its neighboring communities,” says Pittman.

And Pittman would know—she lives there, too.

“These are my neighbors! And there’s a tremendous sense of pride that comes from that. St. Clair has long been a quality leader delivering expert care from people who care—so bringing that same level of service to this new location is obviously exciting on a very personal level. And the very same feeling holds true when you walk into this beautiful space and see the excitement in everyone’s face,” she says. ■



**PAUL M. ZUBRITZKY, M.D.**  
ST. CLAIR MEDICAL GROUP  
OB/GYN



1 Robinson Plaza  
Suite 410  
Pittsburgh, PA 15205

# DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR STARS ON FAMILY BIRTH CENTER STAGE

**H**ow do you become what you've always known you wanted to be? When from the time you were five years old, you lined up your dolls like newborn babies in nursery row at the hospital—and that fascination leads you to become a bit of a bookworm who daydreams about reading bedtime stories to as many real babies as the room can hold? For **Shawndel R. Laughner, R.N., BSN, MHA**—and eighteen additional letters worth of certification—you become a labor and delivery nurse.

“I’ve got that ‘lifelong learner’ mentality, where I want to become the best version of myself and squeeze every ounce of potential out of my career,” she says.

And for the Richeyville, PA, native—who still lives in the farmhouse she grew up in—that relentless spirit comes from her father. “He was so motivated to provide for our family, and it really resonated with me that this is what you do: whatever it takes to set the stage for the next generation.”

Laughner stepped onto the Family Birth Center scene more than twenty years ago as a Registered Staff Nurse, after five years of private practice OB/GYN nursing service in Greenwich, CT. It was time to start her own family and move back home.

“More than coming back to the area, I wanted to find a place that shared my commitment to quality patient care, personal growth, and team development.

Being from here, I knew what St. Clair was all about—with the added bonus of working in a more intimate setting focused on personalized patient care,” she says.

As a labor and delivery nurse, Laughner’s role was all-encompassing—from personifying expertise at the moment of truth to being there for her patients through postpartum care—and she quickly came to relish the unpredictability of each day. “Labor is never as-planned, so you have to be able to adapt. And within the unexpected, you often have the very best days because those challenges that present in the spur of the moment create unique opportunities to build meaningful connections with patients. You’re helping them get through one of the hardest and most joyous events of their life at the same time.”

Laughner’s ability to adjust to ever-changing conditions infused her parallel capacity to challenge herself in even more new ways. While rising to the rank of Registered Nurse Coordinator she also served as the OB Clinical Educator. Went back to school and completed her master’s degree in health administration. And achieved not one or two, but four separate certifications that set her apart with a distinct set of skills: electronic fetal monitoring, inpatient obstetrical nursing, nurse management and leadership, and

obstetric neonatal quality and safety. She took on the central leadership role as Director of Women’s & Children’s Services in 2018.

“Throughout my journey at St. Clair, it’s been as important for me to set an example for the teams I’m leading as it is for my own daughter. I love every second and what it teaches me about myself. And just like my father motivated me by example, my effort is always focused on creating opportunities for others to take ownership of their own goals as they grow,” she says.

With a stated desire to help women throughout the community have the best health care experience they can possibly get, Laughner is proud of St. Clair’s commitment to support new moms and families through partnerships that extend a helping hand, validation, and empowerment during times of need.

“It’s more than delivering babies,” she says. “We’re building families here.” ■

Shawndel R. Laughner  
R.N., BSN, MHA



**Expert care from people who care.** It’s more than our tagline—it’s the relentless drive we bring to carry out our mission every single day. Interested in joining the team? Follow St. Clair Health Careers on Facebook and LinkedIn or visit [stclair.org](http://stclair.org).

# THE RETURN OF SUMMER SWING



In July, St. Clair Health Foundation held its 23rd Annual Summer Swing at St. Clair Country Club in Upper St. Clair. This year's "Beach Bash" themed event provided attendees with an opportunity to relax and savor the sights, sounds, and flavors of some popular American beaches.

Event co-chairs Beth Evron and Tricia Hammel, a dedicated event committee, valued sponsors, and attendees contributed in a variety of ways to make Summer Swing an outstanding success. More than \$340,000 was raised to support St. Clair Health's investment in the education and learning advancements of its future workforce. Proceeds will enable St. Clair to initiate the first phase of its new education infrastructure that will develop healthcare professionals who will provide world-class services for generations to come.

As St. Clair looks to the future, its aim is to become a major training site for healthcare professionals who will deliver the culture of caring and patient-first experiences your life demands. Expanding its educational offerings is a key strategy that will enable St. Clair to prepare the next generation of employees and create a talent pipeline—which will secure its future as a highly-honored institution that always puts the needs of its communities first.

Summer Swing continues to be St. Clair's largest fundraising effort to support critical programs that have a direct, positive impact on the lives of its patients and the communities it serves. For more information about next year's Summer Swing or to donate to the St. Clair Health Foundation, please call 412.942.2465 or visit [stclair.org/givingHC](http://stclair.org/givingHC).



D. Mark Meyers, PhD, Dean and Professor of Education School of Nursing, Education, and Human Studies Robert Morris University,  
David J. Dausey, PhD, Executive Vice President and Provost of Duquesne University,  
Dana Cook Baer, J.D., Provost and Professor, Criminal Justice Administration Waynesburg University,  
Amy Bunger, PhD, St. Clair Health VP and Chief Academic Officer.



Washington County Commissioners: Diana Irey Vaughan, Chair, and Nick Sherman.



Scott Holekamp, M.D. and Brett Perricelli, M.D.



Sarwat Ahmad, M.D. and Raye J. Budway, M.D.



SVP and Chief Medical Officer John Sullivan, M.D. with his wife Barbara Scavone, M.D.



John McDonald and the Mango Men entertained in the main ballroom.



Summer Swing event co-chair Tricia Hammel, Erica Koenig, Melissa Marion, St. Clair Health Foundation Board Chairman G. Alan Yeasted, M.D., Lindsay Meucci, and Summer Swing event co-chair Beth Evron.



Amazing 3D chalk art from Pittsburgh-based chalk artist Erik Greenawalt, "The Chalking Dad."



# WHEN EVERY MINUTE MATTERS

## New telestroke collaboration with Mayo Clinic enhances acute stroke care

**T**elestroke, also called stroke telemedicine, allows doctors with advanced training to communicate using modern technology in a concerted team effort to treat patients at another location.

The main advantage? Time and timing.

"This is a 24/7 service where patients can be evaluated in minutes," says **Maxim D. Hammer, M.D.**, Chief of Neurology who practices with St. Clair Medical Group. "A Mayo Clinic stroke specialist will be able to provide video consultation to any patient when an acute stroke is suspected in order to help guide treatment decisions."

The telestroke program is made possible through St. Clair's connection with Mayo Clinic. This month, St. Clair celebrates its six-year anniversary as a member of the Mayo Clinic Care Network, a relationship that entails everything from providing second opinions from a Mayo Clinic specialist or subspecialist to leveraging best practices, advancing programs, and working together to combat a global pandemic.

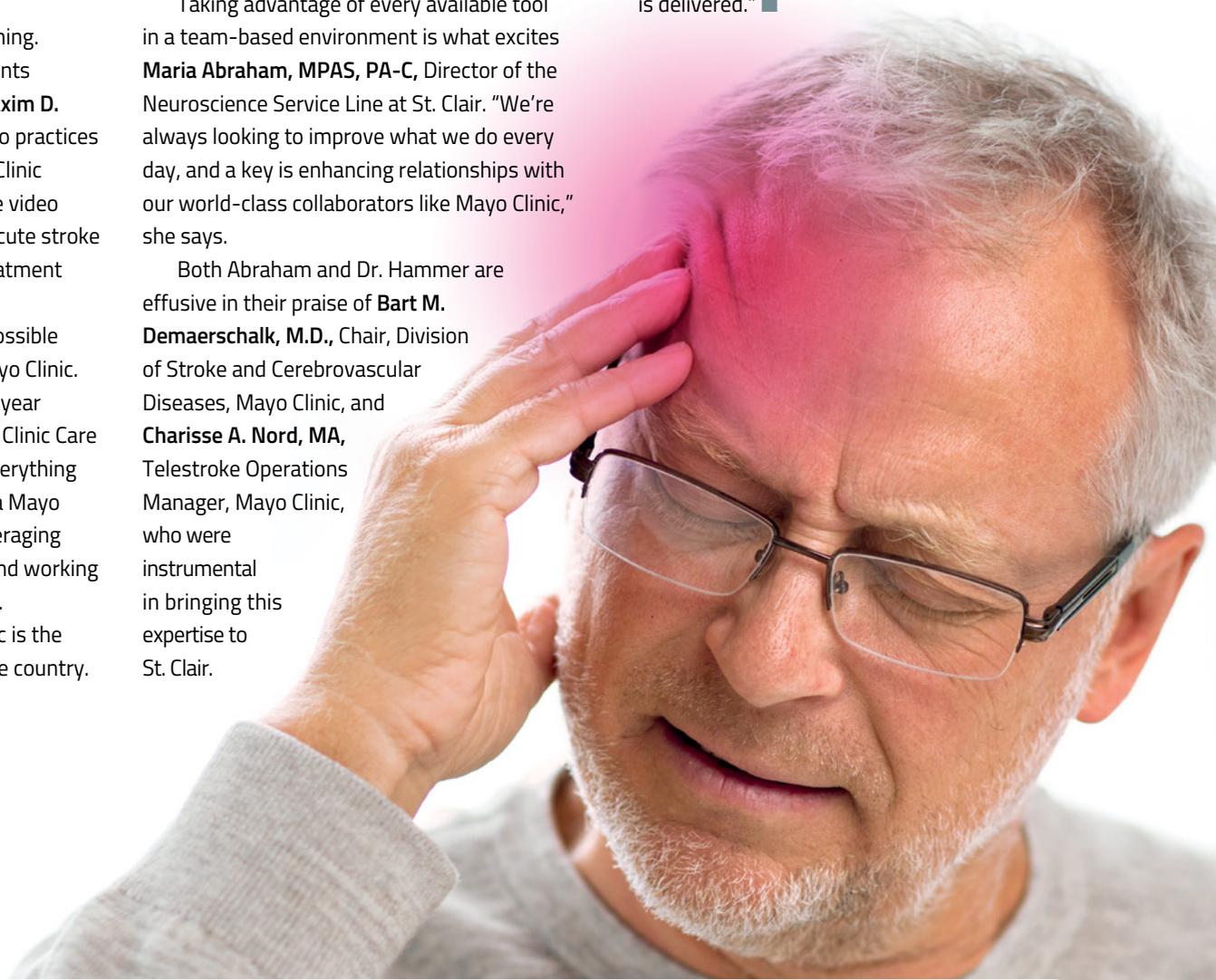
"We're excited because Mayo Clinic is the highest-rated healthcare system in the country.

The community will be well-served by receiving expert consultation from their doctors any time, day or night—and this will only enhance the quality of stroke care patients receive at St. Clair," says Dr. Hammer.

Taking advantage of every available tool in a team-based environment is what excites **Maria Abraham, MPAS, PA-C**, Director of the Neuroscience Service Line at St. Clair. "We're always looking to improve what we do every day, and a key is enhancing relationships with our world-class collaborators like Mayo Clinic," she says.

Both Abraham and Dr. Hammer are effusive in their praise of **Bart M. Demaerschalk, M.D.**, Chair, Division of Stroke and Cerebrovascular Diseases, Mayo Clinic, and **Charisse A. Nord, MA**, Telestroke Operations Manager, Mayo Clinic, who were instrumental in bringing this expertise to St. Clair.

"Every decision we make is designed to continuously improve treatment times for patients having a stroke," says Dr. Hammer. "We're very proud of working with Mayo Clinic because they're the model of how stroke care is delivered." ■



### **MAXIM D. HAMMER, M.D., MBA**

Dr. Hammer is board-certified in both neurology and vascular neurology. He earned his medical degree at Albany Medical College and completed a neurology residency at Cleveland Clinic, where he was elected chief resident. He also completed a vascular neurology fellowship at UPMC. Before joining St. Clair Health, he held numerous titles, including Vice Chairman, Clinical Affairs, Department of Neurology; Clinical Director of Neurology; and Director of Stroke Services at UPMC Mercy Hospital. Dr. Hammer also currently serves as an associate professor, Department of Neurology, at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. He practices with St. Clair Medical Group and was named a Top Doctor by *Pittsburgh Magazine* in 2022. **To contact Dr. Hammer, please call 412.942.6300.**



## A MESSAGE FROM MICHAEL J. FLANAGAN, PRESIDENT & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

# Culture of Continuous Improvement Leads St. Clair Health Forward

**L**eadership, at any level, is a privilege. Within an organization like St. Clair Health, that is especially true. Day in and day out, each and every team member gives relentless effort in service of our patients. I'm incredibly proud of the excellence of our frontline caregivers, who help make the communities we serve stronger and healthier.

The opportunity to lead this people-driven culture is truly an honor. I step into the role of President & CEO with tremendous gratitude and appreciation for St. Clair's longstanding stability of leadership over its 67-year history. James M. Collins shepherded unprecedented growth for our healthcare system over the past 15 years, and I share his vision and commitment to a culture of continuous improvement—we will continue to work diligently to achieve top decile performance in patient safety, quality, satisfaction, and value.

Serving as St. Clair's Senior Vice President & Chief Operating Officer for the past 15 years has provided me with a unique perspective of the critical responsibility our organization has for the health and well-being of patients throughout our communities. Our vital role became even more apparent with the emergence of a global pandemic, as St. Clair's team-based approach to

patient care continued to remain focused on providing **Expert care from people who care.**

That commitment to you and your family will never change.

St. Clair's future will continue to advance the expertise of our wide-reaching healthcare landscape. Our innovative mindset will build new clinical programs and recruit top-tier physicians and staff. Our collective investments in emerging technologies, education, and training will continue to deliver advanced care close to home. Our collaboration with Mayo Clinic will remain at the forefront of how St. Clair designs new ways to treat complex conditions—both in the hospital and in your home.

That pursuit of focused growth is how we keep delivering to meet your healthcare needs today, as well as tomorrow, so that you can always be at your personal best.

Our foundation is strong, and those who have the privilege to serve patients will continue to step in and step up—embracing the special, shared humanity that comes from treating every patient, partner, and person with compassion and respect at every step of their healthcare journey.

**Michael J. Flanagan** joined St. Clair Hospital in December 2006, becoming Chief Operating Officer in August 2007. He has 30 years of healthcare industry experience and previously served in roles at the Western Pennsylvania Hospital and Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield. He holds a bachelor's degree in Health Policy and Administration from Pennsylvania State University and a master's degree in Public Management, with a concentration in Health Systems, from Carnegie Mellon University.



To find a doctor, along with a full list of services and locations, visit [stclair.org](http://stclair.org).

# Compassionate care for all the seasons of a woman's life.

St. Clair Health offers a full complement of services, from personalized obstetric and gynecologic care to advanced treatment of complex disorders.

## INFANT CARE

Deliver 24/7, board-certified pediatricians who are ready to handle any pediatric emergencies.

## OBSTETRICS

Curate pre- and post-natal care for each patient to safely facilitate their desired experience.

## PRENATAL HEALTH

Educate patients on what we do—and why—ensuring physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

## GENETIC SCREENING

Review medical and family history with any necessary testing to help patients conceive.

## PRECONCEPTUAL COUNSELING

Understand each patient's childbearing goals and help facilitate their family plan.

## MENTAL HEALTH

Build strong relationships to increase patient communication about anxiety and depression.

## PATIENT WELLNESS

Enhance long-term total health with goals related to stress management, nutrition, and fitness.

## PREVENTATIVE CARE

Instill the importance of annual exams being much more than just a patient's baseline Pap smear.

## OB/GYN AFTER 40

Dial in patient care to meet the advancing needs and specific challenges women face as they age.

## MENOPAUSE

Communicate the wide-reaching, treatable factors that transitions in ovarian hormones can cause.

## CANCER CARE

Catch breast, cervical, uterine, and pelvic challenges earlier—the majority of which occur post-menopause.

