

The Regional Alliance for Economic Development: Progressive Healthcare Helps Tri-Cities, Tennessee

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn., Jan. 19 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Reliable, modern healthcare is Tri-Cities, Tennessee's "ace in the hole" when it comes to future economic development and improved quality of life.

With 9,000 and 6,900 employees respectively, the impact of the two major healthcare systems here - [Mountain States Health Alliance](#) and [Wellmont Health System](#) - is substantial and expanding.

Both organizations have established a national reputation for excellence.

Mountain States Health Alliance's 14 hospitals include the Johnson City Medical Center, the first recipient in the state to have earned the Magnet Award for nursing excellence from the American Nurses Credentialing Center. JCMC is also the home to Niswonger Children's Hospital, which opened in 2009, and is one of six national affiliates of the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Currently under construction and slated for completion later this year is the \$122 million Franklin Woods Community Hospital. It aims to be the first care center in the region and one of just a handful of hospitals in the country to gain LEED certification, a recognition that the facility is an environmentally responsible and healthy workplace.

Wellmont Health System operates eight hospitals throughout the region, including the Holston Valley Medical Center in Kingsport, which independent healthcare rating group Health Grades recently ranked as the best in Tennessee and in the top 10 percent nationally in cardiology care. Holston Valley has twice been named one of America's Top 100 Heart Hospitals. Wellmont also has state of the art cancer facilities in Tennessee and Virginia. The seven cancer facilities, including the centers at Holston Valley and Bristol Regional, are recognized by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer as comprehensive providers of oncology care. Bristol Regional offers space-age cancer treatment in Cyberknife, a non-invasive alternative to surgery for the treatment of both cancerous and non-cancerous tumors anywhere on the body.

Tennessee has six Level 1 Trauma Centers, the highest level of state designation for trauma centers, which has a trauma surgeon on-site 24/7 and or ready at all times for trauma cases. Two of these centers are located in the Tri-Cities - one at Johnson City Medical Center, the other at Holston Valley Medical Center. The region also has the state's only Level 2 Trauma Center located at Bristol Regional Medical Hospital.

Such extensive regional facilities pay off in job creation and an improved quality of life, but they also support economic development.

"Having such outstanding healthcare helps the region retain existing industries and attract new employers," says Tom Ferguson, President and CEO of the Regional Alliance for Economic Development of Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. "We enjoy the healthcare advantages of a much more heavily populated area," says Ferguson.

Regional investments in new medical education programs are expanding the healthcare workforce and making the region more competitive. For example:

- East Tennessee State University's (ETSU) Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy will graduate its first inaugural class this May. Local businesses and professionals played a major role in the initiative for the College of Pharmacy by raising money to establish the school.
- U.S. News & World Report's 2010 "America's Best Graduate Schools" edition ranked ETSU's James H. Quillen College of Medicine seventh in the nation for rural medicine training and 17th for family medicine education.
- Kingsport, Tennessee's "Academic Village" - a downtown cluster of training institutions that includes Northeast State Community College's Division of Nursing and several health-related professional programs - won a \$100,000 Harvard Innovation in Government Award.
- Non-profit medical information network CareSpark provides a nationally-recognized model for improving health outcomes in rural communities and across state lines.

"Healthcare in the Tri-Cities is not only a major source of jobs but also a springboard for a bright economic future," said Ferguson, whose Regional Alliance promotes economic development in eight counties in Northeast Tennessee and two counties in Southwest Virginia.

Contact: Tom R. Ferguson, terguson@alliancetnva.com.

Media representation: Clark Miller Communications, www.clarkmillercommunications.com.

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