LEGENDS
FROM THE HILL TO THE ATRIUM
A Tribute to the Men and Women Who Made It Happen

ISSUE 15
Celebrating 100 Years
Disruption. Think cell phones and land lines. Personal computers and typewriters. Online shopping and bricks-and-mortar stores. Disruptors think big. And they are not afraid of change as they innovate and forge a path toward empowerment.

In the early decades of the 1900s, forward-thinking leaders were disruptors in Middletown. Their fearless vision and commitment to empowering their fellow citizens made this area a better place to live. Middletown Hospital, now Atrium Medical Center, was born of this vision and energy.

Now, 100 years after its 1917 founding, the original 28-bed, seven-employee hospital has grown into a 328-bed regional medical center, one of Butler and Warren counties’ largest employers and the centerpiece of a 200-acre health and education campus.

In the Beginning

In 1909, Armco founder George M. Verity came before Middletown’s Businessmen’s Club with a proposition. In anticipation of building a second Armco plant in Middletown, Verity offered to invest in the city’s progress. Verity’s vision included building a public hospital where Middletonians could receive world-class medical care.

A 1910 train collision in West Middletown that injured 40 underscored the city’s pressing need for a fully functioning community hospital. After a ravaging flood in 1913 that killed 300 people, the non-profit Middletown Hospital Association was incorporated. After several years of raising funds to buy land, build the new hospital and purchase equipment, the new hospital finally opened on March 5, 1917. Pioneering physicians brought the newest medical advances to the new “hospital on the hill.”
In 1914, while the hospital was still a dream, George M. Verity’s daughter Sara organized a volunteer group of young women known as Daddy Verity’s Girls to raise funds and provide services for the needy. This group eventually became the Middletown Hospital Auxiliary and today, Atrium Auxiliary Middletown. Over the last century, the auxiliary has contributed more than $2.5 million to support equipment and technology at the hospital, and awarded more than $800,000 in scholarships to students pursuing education in health care.

Two other prominent members of Middletown’s industrial elite, Colin Gardner Sr. and his business partner George Harvey (Gardner-Harvey Paper Company), were staunch supporters of the city’s new hospital. They took the lead in securing land and raising funds. Situated on a hill east of the city, the site was a controversial choice at the time. Many thought it was too rural and too far away. But when the great flu pandemic hit in 1918, the city was ready. It soon became obvious, however, that a 28-bed hospital would not be enough to service the area.
Educating Our Caregivers

A new hospital would require nurses and other professionals to fulfill its healing mission. On February 24, 1924, less than a decade after the hospital’s opening, the Middletown Hospital School of Nursing accepted its first students into a three-year diploma program. The school graduated 479 nurses by the time it closed in 1972.

To meet the growing need for well-trained professionals, the hospital opened the School of Radiology Technology in 1967, advancing the science of imaging and graduating students until 1997. The School of Laboratory Technology opened in 1968 to meet a critical need, offering its classroom and clinical program until 1996.

In 2012, Greentree Health Science Academy opened on Atrium’s campus to train tomorrow’s caregivers.
Growth Spurts

By 1920, the “hospital on the hill” was no longer large enough for a city that had grown to 30,000 residents. The city launched a campaign to raise $1 million to finance the hospital’s 1923 expansion to 100 beds. Physicians welcomed the opportunity to care for more people in need.

As the country began to recover from the 1929 stock market crash, the hospital embarked on more expansion. Charles Hook, son-in-law of George M. Verity, led a campaign that raised more than $365,000 for a new addition that opened in 1938. It included modern operating rooms, new labs, more offices and a lobby. Space for 95 new beds brought capacity to 195.

In the 1940s, as war approached, local leaders and physicians joined the armed forces, and nurses enlisted in the Cadet Nurse Corps. Despite this upheaval, the hospital continued to improve its capabilities. The Middletown Auxiliary helped the hospital purchase a state-of-the-art, 220,000-volt X-ray machine to treat tumors. This machine pushed Middletown Hospital to the forefront in medical technology.
Prosperity cooled as Middletown Hospital, along with the rest of the world, struggled under the weight of World War II. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the hospital began facing new challenges. More and more patients were being admitted with heart problems, so the hospital purchased the most modern cardiac technology available — an EKG machine. The roots of the world-class heart center were planted with physicians such as Walter Roehll Jr., MD, taking a lead role. Over time, the hospital continued to enhance the heart program. A $2.7 million expansion brought capacity up to nearly 300 beds.

In the 1950s, the hospital board of directors made some changes in business operations. Bill Bowman, a professional hospital administrator, took over administration, a role that chiefs of staff and nursing directors had held previously. After Bowman's untimely death, Walter Mischley, newly hired as assistant administrator, assumed the top position. With him came James Elder, who was an assistant administrator and later became executive vice president. The two served at the helm of the hospital through the 1950s, '60s and '70s. They worked closely with the hospital's growing medical staff to stay on the leading edge of advanced care and technologies.
New Horizons

In the 1960s, Middletown Hospital began to emerge as a regional health care center. The hospital expanded again with a $3 million investment that included a new emergency room. Middletown Hospital became one of the first community hospitals in the nation to open a cardiac care unit and the second in the area to introduce cardiac rehabilitation.

The 1970s began an era of rapidly accelerating medical advances. Middletown Hospital was on the cutting edge. Expansion continued with the addition of radiology facilities, an intensive care unit, psychiatric unit, and, in anticipation of a developing trend, outpatient services. The hospital’s reputation for innovation grew as surgeons performed arthroscopic procedures and total hip replacement.

After Walter Mischley retired, James Flynn stepped in as hospital president and CEO. It was the early 1980s and the climate was ripe for change. To better reflect its scope of services and expertise, the hospital changed its name in 1983 to Middletown Regional Hospital. Services were modernized to include a Family Birth Center, same-day surgery, updated emergency and intensive care facilities and a comprehensive sports and workplace rehabilitation center.

In 1984, hospital board chair Wilbur Cohen, James Flynn and James Elder collaborated to start a foundation to raise funds for new services and technology. They recruited Richard Slagle, then an Armco executive, as the first board chair.
The Big Move
Douglas McNeill became president and CEO of Middletown Regional Hospital in 1991. His tenure brought more dramatic change to the “hospital on the hill” with additions that reflected the hospital’s rich legacy – including the Levey Digital Catheterization Lab (Ohio’s first), the Cohen Laser and Endoscopy Center, the Bidwell Surgery Center, McKnight Terrace Senior Living Community, the Diabetes Wellness Center and the Children’s Center.

The millennium brought even more growth and more dramatic change. The Miriam G. Knoll Heart Failure Center and the Wilbur and Mary Jean Cohen Women’s Center opened, emergency services expanded and the hospital became a Level III trauma center. But because the hospital was land-locked in a residential neighborhood, no more growth would be possible. The time for disruption had come again. Thus the seed for Atrium Medical Center was planted.

Hospital, civic and business leaders led by G. Robert Gage began to plan a new facility strategically located on a large campus where the hospital could grow and attract partners in health care, education and technology. The goal: to create a regional hospital accessible to all patients.
Buoyed by support from its new parent system, Premier Health, Atrium Medical Center opened in December 2007. The light-filled, patient-friendly facility brought open heart surgery to the region (thanks to Atrium Medical Center Foundation’s $5.1 million capital campaign), along with all-private rooms and 21st century conveniences. Today the 200-acre campus is also home to Greentree Health Science Academy, Atrium Family YMCA, Dayton Children’s Specialty Care Center, the Ann & Arthur Bidwell Surgery Center, Otterbein Neighborhood and Cincinnati Eye Institute.

Upon McNeill’s retirement, chief operating officer Carol Turner stepped into the role of president and CEO in 2011. During her tenure, the hospital purchased a daVinci® Surgical System with support from Atrium Auxiliary Middletown and the Foundation. The technology vastly improved physicians’ ability to perform less invasive surgeries for cancer and other diseases.
Under Turner’s watch, the hospital also launched a mobile mammography coach with 3-D scanning ability. This traveling technology, along with the hospital’s new facilities in Mason and Trenton, brings health care to people where they live, work and play.

In addition, Atrium and Premier Health became part of the MD Anderson Cancer Network®, a program of MD Anderson Cancer Center. The affiliation provides Premier Health physicians with access to MD Anderson’s world-renowned expertise, offering patients and their families enhanced cancer care close to home.

Michael R. Uhl, chief operating officer, succeeded Turner as Atrium’s new leader in 2017. This year, the hospital added a Senior Emergency Center to meet the unique needs of an aging population. The new Natural Beginnings Birth Center also opened, the first comprehensive natural birth center in Greater Cincinnati within an acute-care hospital. 2017 will see completion of the final segment of the hospital’s 1.3-mile walking trail loop, initiated with employee funding when the hospital opened. Scheduled to open in 2018 are new health centers in Liberty Township and Monroe.
Remarkable People

From the beginning, skilled, compassionate doctors, employees, volunteers and donors have been the heart of the hospital. By advocating for patients, continually learning new techniques, and introducing life-saving technology and procedures, exceptional physicians have changed lives, strengthened care and improved the community. Countless dedicated employees have chosen to serve their neighbors, sharing their talents and creating the personal feel that makes care at Atrium so special.

Selfless volunteers have supported the hospital even before it became reality. They serve in leadership roles on the board, interact with patients and work behind the scenes in ways too numerous to count. Thousands of donors, too, choose to make a difference by giving financially. One group, the Middletown Area Federation of Women's Clubs, has contributed more than $1 million to the hospital since 1920.

Ready for the Next Century of Caring

Never one to rest on its laurels, Atrium Medical Center continues to “disrupt,” always with the goal of being the destination of choice for health care in southwest Ohio. The hospital’s focus on preventive health and wellness for all will only accelerate in the years ahead. Atrium embarks on its next 100 years with a bow to its past and a promise for future innovation and excellence.
This article is the 15th in a series of profiles celebrating the 2017 centennial anniversary of Atrium Medical Center (formerly Middletown Hospital and Middletown Regional Hospital). The series honors the men and women whose civic-mindedness and genuine caring for others helped Greater Middletown grow and contributed to the first-class medical center the region boasts today.

Past Legends focused on:
- Paul Galeese, Issue 1; E.O. Bauer, MD, and John L. Bauer, MD, Issue 2;

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