

Mission, Mentoring & MAIN

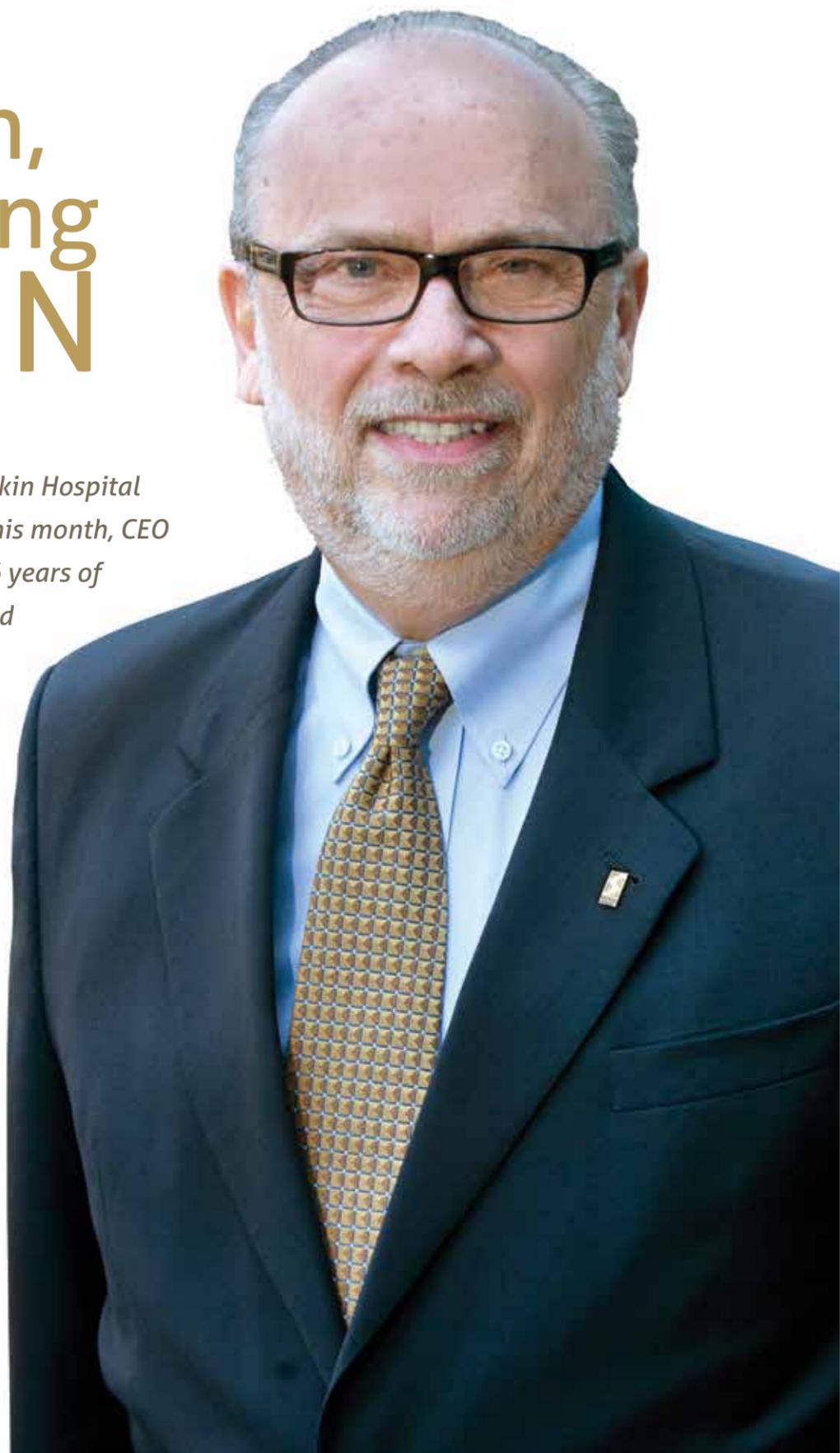
By Laura Childers

Upon his retirement from Siskin Hospital for Physical Rehabilitation this month, CEO Bob Main reflects back on 26 years of building Siskin Hospital—and the principles that served as a foundation for his leadership.

“The measure of who we are is what we do with what we have.”
-Vince Lombardi

Bob Main knows what it’s like to start from square one. When a headhunter recruited him to start Siskin Hospital for Physical Rehabilitation in 1987, he had no staff, no facility, and no plans to work with—just land valued at \$297,000 and Mose and Garrison Siskin’s dream of providing Chattanooga with a hospital dedicated to assisting those with disabilities.

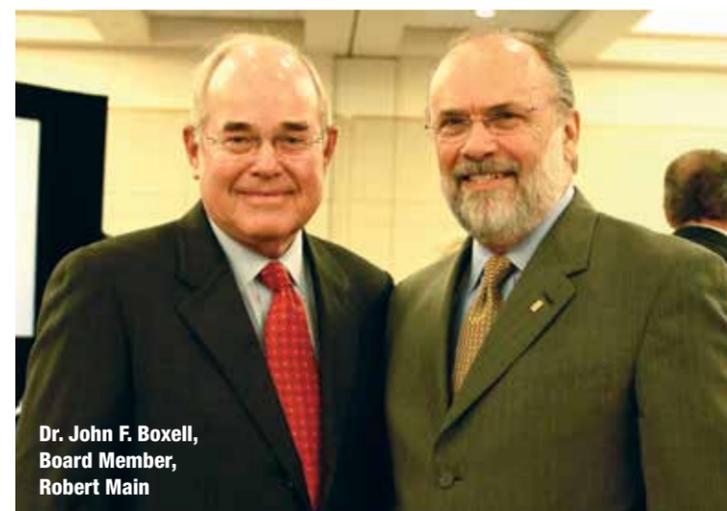
Fast-forward 26 years. Siskin Hospital operates out of a 109-bed inpatient rehabilitation facility in downtown Chattanooga and has nearly 400 employees. Between its downtown campus and offsite locations, the hospital offers more than 20 specialty programs and five levels of care.



Siskin Hospital Opening Day Speech 1990



Dr. Fred Obear, Board Member, Ruth Obear, Dr. Liz Kennedy, Thomas, Robert Main at Possibilities Luncheon



Dr. John F. Boxell, Board Member, Robert Main

“Chattanooga is fortunate to have someone like Bob Main as a CEO for 26 years. Bob is known for his dedication to his patients, his employees, and the community he serves. In a time where healthcare leadership frequently changes, he is the longest tenured healthcare CEO in Chattanooga and throughout much of the state. He is a true leader and champion of rehabilitation. Under his direction, Siskin Hospital has become a jewel to both Tennessee and to the nation.”

CRAIG BECKER
PRESIDENT, TENNESSEE HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

Main’s story is the classic “if you dream it, you can do it” narrative. Right?
Not exactly.

Behind Siskin Hospital’s success is a CEO who knows what it’s like to work for months, even years, waiting for results. A CEO and team marked by patience, perseverance, and grit—the same attitude required of the rehabilitation patients they serve.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

A few minutes on the phone with Main reveal he is kind—displaying a compassionate, but no-nonsense temperament well suited to any CEO, but particularly one charged with building a hospital from the ground up. He says that when he first got the call about the Chattanooga job, he was working at a rehab hospital in Chicago.

“All I knew about Chattanooga was that you drove past it going to Florida,” Main says. “I said, ‘No, thank you.’ In ’87, Chattanooga wasn’t like it is today. Quite different from Chicago.”

So what made him change his mind?
“It was the opportunity to develop a freestanding rehabilitation hospital that had a committed board of directors who wanted to make a difference in people’s lives. It was a big challenge.”

Main was Siskin Hospital’s only employee for the first 10 months, and he says there were times when he asked himself, “Why did I do this?” and “Are we going to be able to make it?”

But he stuck with it, encouraged by the passion for rehabilitation among area residents. The vision of building a rehabilitation hospital in the area had lived on in the minds and hearts of Chattanooga residents for generations.



Robert Main addresses attendees at Siskin Hospital's Possibilities Luncheon.

“Under Bob Main’s expert guidance, vision, integrity and service, Siskin Hospital has come to be known locally and nationally as a leader in the field of physical medicine and rehabilitation.”

BOB BEST
SISKIN HOSPITAL FOR
PHYSICAL REHABILITATION
BOARD CHAIRMAN

happening, and that was how we developed the idea. Now it has approximately 850 members. Half are former patients, disabled, or over the age of 65.”

TEAMWORK AND COMPASSION

When you ask Main about his career and he gives credit to others, it’s easy to think he’s just being modest. In actuality, it’s a crucial part of his philosophy. “The hallmark of rehabilitation is teamwork,” he says.

“We had tremendous support from the board of directors and community and we believed in assisting the disabled individual in reaching a life that is productive and satisfying,” Main says.

Three years later, Siskin Hospital had a staff, a building, and all of its necessary certifications and licensure. On February 15, 1990, it admitted its first patient: a below-the-knee amputee. The staff to patient ratio that day was 88:1.

SECRETS OF SUCCESS

There are lot of principles Main infused into the culture at Siskin Hospital to make it what it is today. Here’s a look at a few.

A CULTURE OF LISTENING

According to his colleagues, Main was always looking for ways to enhance care for patients. His method? Building an environment where the staff listened to the needs and concerns of patients, and the administration listened to the needs and concerns of staff.

He hosted a monthly Hospital Forum and “Breakfast with Bob” where employees

could discuss anything they wished. Additionally, he had regular appointments with smaller groups of staff members.

This emphasis on open communication led to the development of many specialized programs including the brain injury unit, a stroke unit, the lymphedema program, a balance and dizziness program, a driving evaluation program, and many other specialty programs.

“We didn’t believe in developing a program and saying ‘build it and they will come.’ We were interested in looking at the needs in the community, and meeting those needs in the most cost-effective manner,” Main says.

The Fitness Center at Siskin Hospital—a full-service adaptive exercise facility that is open to the public—was another development that came directly from conversations with patients and staff.

“When individuals completed outpatient therapy and went to area fitness programs, they would come back to us and say: ‘We don’t feel comfortable working out at other places. People stare at us,’” Main says. “We had focus groups to look at what was

Good care, Main contends, requires a holistic plan that involves both patients and their families. The objective is not just to improve physical and mental function; it’s to assist patients in returning to active lifestyles within the community.

Good treatment also requires compassion, Main says. To illustrate, he recounts a suggestion that came out of “Breakfast with Bob.”

“A staff member raised her hand and said she had noticed that many of our charity care patients were in need of clothes. Now Siskin Hospital has a clothes closet and staff members regularly donate sweats, pants, and shirts.”

Over the years, Siskin Hospital’s staff has contributed well over \$15,000 for its patient care fund. Now, if a patient needs something when they are discharged, Siskin Hospital’s staff has the resources available to continue serving those with unique needs.

HARD WORK AND A FOCUSED MISSION

Today, Main is Chattanooga’s longest tenured healthcare CEO. When his retirement goes into effect at the end of this month, he will have served the Chattanooga community for a total of 26 years. He’s won countless local, regional, and national awards, lobbied for rehabilitation care for the disabled, championed rehabilitation education, and led his organization through various hurdles presented by TennCare, Medicare, and private insurance companies.

He’s worked hard, but not just for the sake of working hard. To Main, it’s been a mission.

“The disabled population is the largest minority in the United States, and there’s so much they can do if given the opportunity,” Main says. “Their whole lives have been altered, and we’ve got a chance to help them rebuild their lifestyles.”

“You just can’t explain the feeling you get when you see a person wake up from a coma. Or see a person walk out of the hospital who has been told they’ll never walk again. It’s amazing what the human spirit can do when given the chance.”



Advanced care

UTC School of Nursing offers the following programs:

- Bachelor of Science in Nursing with Freshman and Traditional Admission options
- Gateway RN to BSN with Hybrid and Online options
- Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner with classes meeting only one day per week
- Master of Science in Nursing Nurse Anesthesia Concentration
- Doctor of Nursing Practice

THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE **UT**
CHATTANOOGA
www.UTC.edu/Nursing

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga is an equal employment opportunity/affirmative action/Title VI/Title IX/Section 504/ADA/ADEA institution.