

SantaFe HealthCare

Meeting Needs from the Beginning of Life to the End

By Chris Eversole

“SantaFe HealthCare” isn’t a household phrase in Gainesville, but its subsidiaries—Haven Hospice, The Village and AvMed Health Plans—are well known and highly regarded.

The organization is a major contributor to Florida’s economy—generating \$1.7 billion in annual revenue. SantaFe employs 1,900 people statewide. The Gainesville workforce totals 850, with 350 at AvMed, 250 at The Village and 300 at Haven Hospice. SantaFe’s roots go back to 1976. Alachua County government then owned Alachua General Hospital but had turned over its operation to a board of trustees. The hospital was self-sufficient, operating without any county tax dollars.

The board hired Edward Peddie as the AGH administrator. He orchestrated the conversion of the hospital to a not-for-profit organization independent of the county in 1978.

Under Peddie, the organization grew rapidly. The company bought hospitals in Starke, Lake City, Live Oak, Blountstown and Williston, and acquired a number of physician practices.

In 1982, the organization formed SantaFe HealthCare to serve as the parent organization for its activities.

In the subsequent decade, SantaFe expanded by: acquiring AvMed Health Plans, purchasing The Village, and developing what has become Haven Hospice.

Then, in the 1990s, SantaFe decided to sell its hospitals and medical practices and focus on its other businesses.

A LIFETIME OF CARING

Although the current SantaFe subsidiaries have different roles, the organization is united under the motto “a lifetime of caring,” says Kay Ayers, senior vice president for human resources. “We pride ourselves in covering Floridians in all stages of life—from infants to retirees to people at the end of life.”

SantaFe is a not-for-profit organization. “We don’t report to stockholders,” Ayers says. “We put our patients and members first and serve them to the best of our ability.”

Rather than stockholders, SantaFe’s executives report to a board of directors made up of community leaders. Scottie Butler, retired general counsel for the Florida Farm Bureau, chairs the board and has served on it since 1979.

“We’ve changed to some degree as circumstances have changed, but we have never wavered from our mission and desire to serve the people of Florida,” he says. “In a community that depends largely on government, our presence as a private organization helps stabilize the economy.”

Each SantaFe subsidiary has its own board of directors. Joe Dunlap, retired president of the Downtown Furniture Outlet and Chesnut Office Equipment, chairs AvMed’s board. James Poole, executive director of the Lake City

Chamber of Commerce, heads Haven Hospice’s board; and Leveda Brown, a retired teacher, social worker and former Alachua County commissioner, chairs The Village’s board.

SantaFe puts its earnings back into its programs, serving members and patients. In the past fiscal year, that investment totaled more than \$1.1 billion.

Its headquarters is in two buildings on the 170-acre healthcare park north of 39th Avenue and east of I-75. The park also includes the Haven Hospice headquarters, Shands Rehabilitation Hospital and Shands at Vista, a substance-abuse treatment center.

HAVEN HOSPICE STANDS OUT

Haven Hospice operates in 18 counties, with locations outside Gainesville including Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Lake City, Chiefland, Palatka and DeLand.

The hospice serves an average of 716 people a day and 4,400 people annually. Its role is to help people with life-limiting illnesses and their families.

Haven Hospice provides its program and services regardless of a client’s ability to pay. Its charity care in the past year totaled \$198,000.

The hospice is among the top 20 nationally in size. The Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce named it the Alachua County Nonprofit Business of the Year in 2009.

In 2008, Haven Hospice was one of only three organizations in the country, and the only hospice, selected for the prestigious Circle of Life Award, considered the nation’s highest honor in end-of-life care.

SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITIES

The Village is the largest of SantaFe’s senior living communities. It spans 140 acres along 83rd Street north of 23rd Avenue in Gainesville.

The Village recently added 170 apartments and 60 assisted living apartments, bringing its totals to 511 apartment homes and 126 assisted living apartments.

Among the residents is Hazel Walter, a retired administrator from the University of Mobile. She first became interested in The Village because of its attractive campus. Two other factors clinched her decision to become a resident—the energetic staff and the wide variety of activities available in The Village and in Gainesville.

Hazel is active in The Village’s drama group and a Bible study group. She also volunteers at the community’s store and serves on the Village’s board of directors.

SantaFe’s other senior living communities are Bayview Gardens in Clearwater, East Ridge Retirement Village in Cutler Bay and The Terraces at Bonita Springs.

AVMED HAS EXPANDED OFFERINGS

AvMed, which originally drew its name for its specialization in aviation medicine, was founded in 1969 to provide pre-flight physicals to pilots in the Miami area.

SantaFe purchased AvMed in 1986, when it had 80,000 members. Today, there are 320,000 members.

AvMed also has expanded its range of services. In the early days, it was strictly a health maintenance



Wendy Noon gives a massage during an AvMed employee wellness day at the SantaFe HealthCare headquarters.

organization. Like other HMO’s, AvMed tried to control health-care costs by emphasizing wellness and prevention and by requiring members to use doctors and healthcare facilities in its network.

AvMed’s products have continued to evolve as members’ needs have changed. AvMed still emphasizes wellness and prevention with a variety of programs that involve members and help them become educated healthcare consumers. Now it offers a variety of options for large and small businesses around the state, and was one of only two statewide plans that saw its group business grow in 2010.

“Everything we do is backed by our personalized, award-winning service,” Ayers says. “Our members can consult with one of AvMed’s Florida-based nurses and member service representatives 24/7.”

In 2010, AvMed received the highest overall member satisfaction rating among statewide medical plans in the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems, an independent survey of health plans.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMUNITY

The community benefits from SantaFe in many ways, Ayers says. It pays competitive salaries and provides its employees with a strong benefit package and has great working conditions, she says.

“We have a family atmosphere, with good benefits and many employee recognition programs,” she says.

SantaFe and its affiliates also support many local charities. “Working with the charities not only helps the community, but also it helps our employees develop leadership skills,” Ayers says.

“Our employees are dedicated to our mission of improving the health of the communities we serve and actively serving those communities where they work and live.” **TBR**