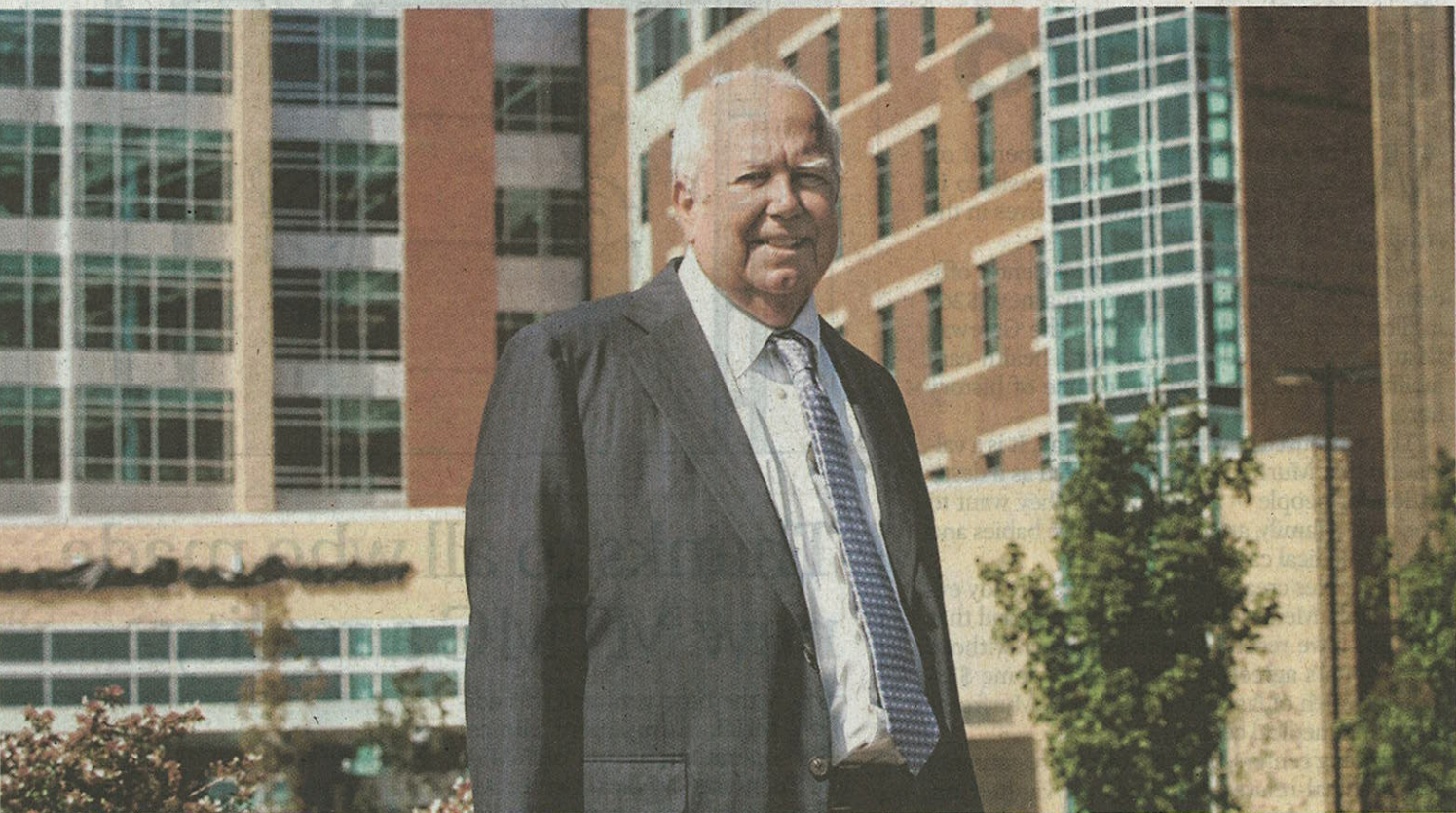


Murfree: Timing was perfect for hospital



JOHN A. GILLIS/DNJ

MTMC Board Chairman Matt Murfree stands outside the new Middle Tennessee Medical Center on Thursday, the product of several years of planning and negotiations with the city and hospital owners to get the \$267 million facility built.



JOHN A. GILLIS/DNJ

MTMC Board Chairman Matt Murfree discusses the development of the new Middle Tennessee Medical Center.

Board chair recounts early negotiations

BY SAM STOCKARD
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Bearing the name of this city and a descendant of three generations of doctors, Matt Murfree had his destiny lying in wait.

An attorney, he began serving on the Middle Tennessee Medical Center Board of Directors 34 years ago and negotiated the sale of the hospital to Baptist and St. Thomas hospitals in 1986. He also serves on the Christy-Houston Foundation, which was formed with the proceeds of the hospital's sale, and was instrumental in negotiating the land deal that led to construction of the new \$267 million Middle Tennessee Medical Center.

With the hospital opening Saturday, Murfree sat down with The DNJ last week to talk about his monumental occasion

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and the circumstances surrounding it.

Q: What made you decide to get involved in service on the hospital board of directors all those years ago?

Murfree: My father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all doctors in Murfreesboro, so it wasn't (that) I decided, the board asked me if I would come on. That was more than 34 years ago, and I've been on ever since.

Q: What sense of purpose do you have in serving on the board?

Murfree: As I say, with a medical background in my family since before the Civil War, my great-grandfather practiced medicine in the Civil War, I've always been very, very interested in the hospital.

Q: You've seen Middle Tennessee Medical Center go from a small community hospital, and, of course, you were born there, to now a rising regional medical facility. What will its impact be on Murfreesboro and Rutherford County?

Murfree: I think the new hospital is going to give us a major, major start in being a real regional hospital. I drove by the hospital the other day and there were cars from Warren County, cars from Manchester, McMinnville, Winchester, a lot of people coming here like years ago we went to Nashville. We (now) have specialists ... and I think a state-of-the-art, new hospital is going to attract a lot of people for lots of things, having babies, having heart operations.

Q: What will the hospital mean as far as a ripple effect for the area right around it?

Murfree: I think it's a major shot in the arm. The ripple effect ... when we closed on the land — I negotiated the purchase of the land for the hospital — there was no Medical Center Parkway, there was no interchange, there was no water, there was no sewer. And the powers that be in St. Thomas thought we'd lost our minds to buy something, but we had in our contract all that had to be built in a time certain, the interchange, the road, etc... But the city was having difficulty and when we paid, I think it was \$5.6 million, that gave the city a jump-start to put all the infrastructure in, so that and that alone opened up the area tremendously, and I think it's going to continue to boom out there.

Q: So the hospital land deal gave that whole project some credibility after the city bought that property, didn't it? (Murfreesboro bought about 300 acres from several property owners for \$12 million in 1997.)

Murfree: I don't know all the facts about this, but my recollection is that there was some kind of referendum where they said the city could not spend taxpayer money to develop it, so they were somewhat at a standstill ... We definitely gave them a jumpstart and Christy-Houston gave \$3 million for the purchase (of land). (The Christy-Houston Foun-

"It's the most exciting thing probably that's happened in my life, except my two children being born.."

Matt Murfree
MTMC board chairman

ation was formed in 1986 with proceeds from the sale of the hospital with a mission to improve the quality of life in Rutherford County with an emphasis on health care. The sale of the hospital brought \$47 million and the foundation has given away \$60 million-plus over the years with about \$80 million in its accounts, according to Murfree.)

Q: Was there anything special you had to ask for? How difficult were the negotiations to buy the land?

Murfree: It wasn't difficult. I worked with Susan McGannon (city attorney) and Roger Haley (former city manager), but there were a lot of issues to sort out, like how soon is the interchange going to open? How soon is the road going to be built? Because obviously we couldn't build something if we didn't have water, sewer, roads, interchanges, whatever. And there were a lot of negotiations about restrictive covenants, both on us and on the surrounding property. We had to negotiate all that, because they wanted to make sure we built what

they wanted there, and we wanted to make sure what was around us was appropriate. We negotiated the name of the road. That was part of the contract, and it was months of negotiations, and, of course, anything I negotiated I had to take to our board and the people at St. Thomas Hospital.

Q: What did the board have to do to persuade St. Thomas and Ascension, the owners, to invest in a new hospital here?

Murfree: They wanted to invest because both Baptist and St. Thomas had newer facilities, but, of course, they'd just built the modern addition to the hospital on Highland Avenue and they recently built the Bell Street (building). But the problem is we were running out of land, and were bounded on one side by the historic district and on the other side by a cemetery (Evergreen). So we really didn't have many places to go. Obviously, it was a big shot in the arm when Christy-Houston stepped up and said we'll give more than half of what you're paying for (the land). So that was a major selling point.

And, frankly, we really lucked out. Ascension, which owns the St. Thomas system, which is the biggest Catholic health-care entity in the United States, basically six months after we broke ground, stopped any capital developments because their stock portfolio had taken a hit. So the timing was just perfect that we got started, and, of course, once the contract was signed it was going to be built.

Q: So you all got in right under the gun, so

ABOUT MATT MURFREE

Who: Chairman Middle Medical Center Board of Directors, member of Christy-Houston Foundation

Background: Born at old Rutherford Hospital and raised in Murfreesboro

Age: 66

Education: Central High School Class of '62; earned bachelor's degree and law degree from Vanderbilt University

Career: Entered National Guard and started practicing law in Murfreesboro in 1970; Murfree & Murfree law firm

Family: Wife, Kitty; son Bricke Murfree, attorney in Murfree & Murfree; son Davis, works with Morgan Stanley in Washington, D.C.

Church: St. Paul's Episcopal

to speak.

Murfree: If we'd waited six months, there wouldn't be a hospital.

Q: You talked about it being a regional facility, but we still have a lot of people in Murfreesboro who travel to Nashville to go to Vanderbilt or Baptist or St. Thomas. Do you think the new hospital's going to build people's confidence to the point they won't go to Nashville as much for treatment and surgeries?

Murfree: I think that's the case. When I was growing up, you had general practitioners and surgeons, and that was about it. And now we have every specialty, neurosurgeons and cardiologists, just about every specialty and subspecialty. We are also, because of our new hospital, attracting lots of physicians that want to come here. For example, we didn't have a cardiologist here probably 10 years ago, and I think we have six now, and two of them with the St. Thomas system moved here from New Orleans after the hurricane and

established practices, and just decided this is the place I want to be.

Q: I'm sure you've been in the new hospital. What's your take on it just walking around?

Murfree: It's incredible, absolutely incredible. To start with, we have patient elevators, staff elevators and visitors elevators. Typically, when you go to the hospital, you ride up with someone who's come out of surgery and tubes are everywhere and they're on a dolly ... That won't be anymore. Everybody's separated. The rooms have a TV for the patient and a sitting area with a TV for a family member or parent and the sofa makes into a bed so a mother could sleep (there) or father.

We've got 250,000 more square feet. We have 61 more patient rooms and the shorter tower is built where we can add two more floors. ... We've got a 68-acre campus with a heliport, and we've got one medical office building completed. We've got one that's in the works, and we have two more we're planning on building. Those will be on the campus too.

Q: Being a descendant of Hardy Murfree (the man for whom the city is named) and your family being in the medical profession, how important is it to you to serve on the board for the community's welfare?

Murfree: It's very important. I wouldn't do it if it weren't important to me. And the Christy-Houston Foundation is very important to me.

Q: Do you feel the new hospital is just going to take Murfreesboro to a whole new level?

Murfreesboro: Absolutely. Absolutely. It's the most exciting thing probably that's happened in my life, except my two children being born.

— Sam Stockard, 615-278-5165

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