

HEALTH & WELL-BEING @ISSUE

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION FALL/WINTER 2024

30

YEARS
ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATION



THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION
SYMPOSIUM



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN HEALTHCARE

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30

YEARS
ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATION



THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION SYMPOSIUM

An annual gathering around a topic of importance.



2024 FOCUS:

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN HEALTHCARE



KEYNOTE SPEAKER:
David Pogue



THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION

Working together for healthier communities

The Foundation Celebrates 30 Years

SYMPOSIUM EXPLORES ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Rapides Foundation celebrated its 30th Anniversary on Wednesday, September 4, with an event that highlighted its unique history and featured a keynote address from “CBS Sunday Morning” correspondent David Pogue that explored artificial intelligence on the healthcare landscape.

The annual Symposium held at the Holiday Inn Downtown Alexandria began with a “Grantee Showcase,” an open house where 36 current grant recipients displayed their work toward the Foundation’s mission of improving the health status of Central Louisiana.

Over the past 30 years, The Rapides Foundation has awarded 2,000 grants totaling \$239.9 million throughout its nine-parish service area of Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon and Winn parishes.

The annual Symposium recognizes the Foundation’s September 1, 1994, creation and provides information on a topic of importance to the Central Louisiana community. The creation was the result of a joint venture partnership between Rapides Regional Medical Center and HCA.

“In the beginning, our assets made for a significant foundation nationally, but an exceptional one in terms of endowment per capita here in Central Louisiana,” said Joe Rosier, who has served as President and CEO of the Foundation since its creation. “Initially, our grantmaking was responsive. But as a Foundation, we had to decide how to proceed, and that led us to strategic grantmaking

that is intentional, knowledge-based outcome oriented, and most importantly, aligned to our mission.”

Today, the Foundation owns 26 percent of the hospital and has grown its assets from \$140 million in 1994 to its current \$350 million to invest in the community. Under Rosier’s leadership, the Foundation has continually updated its funding strategies and initiatives to reflect expert advice,



Photo above: Valerie Aymond, Secretary for The Rapides Foundation's Board of Trustees, welcomed guests to the Foundation's 30th anniversary symposium. Photo on Page 2: "CBS Sunday Morning" Correspondent David Pogue delivered the keynote address.



issue-specific information and evidence-based research, while holding true to the Foundation's mission to improve the health status of Central Louisiana.

"We have the great fortune of having a resource of \$350 million to invest in the community. So, this is an opportunity to showcase some of the work we're supporting right now," Rosier said.

To highlight the Foundation's dual role as part owner of Rapides Regional Medical Center and as a health grantmaker, the 2024 Symposium topic was Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare.

"In 2024, nothing is more confusing, concerning or promising than AI," Pogue said, before entertaining the 350-member audience with examples of the things artificial intelligence does really well, along with several examples of what artificial intelligence does not do well at all.

Pogue, an Emmy-winning "CBS Sunday Morning" correspondent and "NOVA" host, is considered the go-to expert on disruptive tech and science in a fast-changing world.

"AI is not what you see in the movies," Pogue said. "What Hollywood likes to show you is general

artificial intelligence – it doesn't need to be taught. What we're talking about here is different. This is 'narrow AI,' and that means you teach the software to do one task really, really well."

That also means that the machine, or the software, ultimately teaches itself; but it's only as good as the content it's given.

The concern, Pogue said, is that AI could cause us to lose creative jobs, lose skills such as writing and art, lose the joy that goes along with creativity, question who owns the content created with AI, whether or not you can trust the content AI creates and how AI will affect education.

His advice, however, is not to panic.

"Every invention in human history has triggered the same hysteria you are feeling right now," Pogue said. "When steam trains began carrying humans, no one had ever moved at 50 miles per hour," which led experts to wonder whether the human body could handle such an extreme speed.

AI is a lot like a steam engine, a calculator, or a smart phone, Pogue said. It's a revolutionary invention that will change the way we work and live.

"Nowhere is AI more promising and more



Attendees at The Rapides Foundation's 2024 Symposium enjoyed a Grantee Showcase full of displays and information from programs across Central Louisiana.

exciting than in healthcare," Pogue said. "As far as I can tell, you have four major groups involved: the patients, providers, pharmacology companies and payors. And it's amazing to see the strides all of these have made with AI in just one year."

For instance, AI has accurately predicted 3D models of 200 million protein structures, which allows pharmaceutical companies to accelerate new drugs faster than ever before. And physicians are using AI to assist in early detection of cancer, Parkinson's disease, heart disease and more.

"Now, is this the launch of a new creative

renaissance? No one has any idea. It has only been one year, so it is way too early to tell," Pogue said. "Things are changing weekly. But AI plus humans will be better than anything humans can do on our own or anything AI can do alone."

The opportunity the Foundation has, Rosier said, is discovering how AI can benefit the healthcare community.

"We need to decide what the workforce needs to be able to work in an AI world," Rosier said. "And from there, help our local workforce develop those skill sets."



30 | YEARS ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION



2024 Foundation Grantees Showcase Their Projects

As part of The Rapides Foundation's 2024 Annual Symposium and 30th Anniversary, grant recipients from the Foundation's nine-parish service area were invited to participate in a pre-symposium "Grantee Showcase."

This open house event, highlighting 36 current grant recipients from throughout the Foundation's service area, gave Symposium attendees the chance to see work being done toward the Foundation's mission of improving the health status of Central Louisiana.

"The Showcase was an excellent opportunity to connect with other programs throughout the region to see what other organizations were engaged in – and get additional ideas to implement in Catahoula Parish," said Sondra Redmon, Project Director

of a Reconnecting Cenla Grant to the LaSalle Community Action Association in Catahoula Parish. "We also had an opportunity to share some of the strategies we have undertaken that resulted in successful employment for our young adults."

Attendees commented on the variety of projects on display during the Showcase, and how they hope to bring some of the same programs and opportunities to their own communities. The displays were categorized into projects representing the Foundation's three priority areas: Healthy People, Education and Healthy Communities.

"The Grantee Showcase was an opportunity to see firsthand the vast array of projects financially supported by The Rapides Foundation and the impact each is having on the lives of residents,"



The LaSalle Economic Development District, based in Jena, had a display for its #thrive project. Manning the display are, from left, Kim Aldrich, #thrive Art Instructor; Blake Phillips, LEDD Board Member; Jakki Richardson, LEDD Board Member and Jennifer DePriest, Director, Region 6 LaSTEM Center and #thrive Tech Instructor.

“The Grantee Showcase was not only a great networking opportunity with other grantees, but also a chance to hear a phenomenal speaker that educated us all on AI!”

– Cynthia Cockerham, Executive Director, Community Development, LaSalle Economic Development District

said Cynthia Cockerham, Ed.D, Executive Director of Community Development for the LaSalle Economic Development District. “I was able to meet and speak with project managers and staff or volunteers of some terrific projects impacting the quality of life in Central Louisiana.”

The LaSalle Economic Development District, based in Jena, currently manages a Substance and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Program Grant funded under the Foundation’s Healthy Behaviors Initiative.

“A comment that one of our attendees made was that she had no idea The Rapides Foundation funded such an impressive variety of projects in healthcare, community work and education throughout the region,” Cockerham said.

Attendees also discovered that programs focusing on healthcare and education don’t all look the same.

“I met a team who worked with youth to create a community garden. Their pictures were amazing and they even instructed youth in the long-lost art of making preserves and other bottled produce. I

even bought some!” Redmon said. “I also learned about some of the amazing initiatives that our program partners are engaged in. There is so much more available to residents than I realized.”



Sondra Redmon discusses her organization’s grant from The Rapides Foundation with an attendee during this year’s Grantee Showcase.





Foundation's Youth Volunteer Program Earns National Award

Youth Volunteer Corps (YVC) honored The Rapides Foundation with the prestigious 2024 Affiliate of the Year Award for its exceptional contributions to youth engagement, community service and youth empowerment. The honor was presented at the annual YVC Summit in Virginia Beach in October and accepted by Ashley Stewart, Director of Programs for The Rapides Foundation.

"Each year, we witness remarkable service experiences that not only change lives but also uplift communities, thanks to the dedication of our affiliates. Today, we recognize YVC Alexandria, an affiliate that has truly gone above and beyond in its commitment to youth engagement, service, and empowerment," said Danette Seffens, YVC's Affiliate Programs Manager, during the award ceremony.

The Foundation became a national affiliate of Youth Volunteer Corps in 2016 as part of its My Civic Life program, which provides Central Louisiana youth with service opportunities so they will become engaged in their communities and make volunteerism a lifelong habit. Service opportunities follow the evidence-based model developed by YVC and are offered in school-based YVC Clubs during the school year through the Youth Volunteer School District Grant.

The Foundation in 2023 began offering the Youth Volunteer Summer Service Grant to provide organizations with funds to implement community-based service opportunities during the summer months for youth ages 11 to 18.

The Affiliate of the Year Award "celebrates YVC Alexandria's transformative impact through innovative service-learning projects, strategic



**YOUTH
VOLUNTEER
CORPS**

The Foundation added summer volunteer opportunities for Central Louisiana youth, which earned it YVC's prestigious 2024 Affiliate of the Year Award. Ashley Stewart, Director of Programs for The Rapides Foundation, accepted the award in October 2024. Projects included food drives, recycling and cleanups.

community partnerships, and an unwavering dedication to nurturing the next generation of leaders."

Over the 2023-2024 program year, YVC Alexandria engaged youth from 17 high schools across four school districts, encouraging a culture of service that extends beyond the school year and into the summer months. "By logging nearly 2,000 additional youth service hours through intentional summer programming, they demonstrated the profound influence a single affiliate can have on a community," YVC announced in a news release.

Projects have included food drives, reading to young children, volunteering at nursing homes, sending packages to deployed service members and delivering chemo care packages to cancer patients. The Central Louisiana affiliate is a Gold Level YVC Affiliate, a designation that indicates exemplary status.





THE FISHER PROJECT

Virtual peer support for adults who are at

Fisher Project Available in Central Louisiana Parishes

In the last two decades, suicide rates have increased all over the country, but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, those rates are consistently higher in rural areas.

While experts continue to study the reasons behind this increase, The Rapides Foundation is working to address the issue as part of their Healthcare Access Initiative and with a three-year grant to the Louisiana Mental Health Association.

The \$198,110 grant will help bring The Fisher Project of the Louisiana Mental Health Association to nine Central Louisiana parishes served by The Rapides Foundation. Through this grant, The Fisher Project will have a part-time outreach professional based in Central Louisiana who will help connect community and healthcare organizations with program resources.

"Louisiana's suicide rate is higher than the national average, and we've seen mental health concerns increase considerably since the COVID-19 pandemic," said Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation. "This grant allows us to bring another layer of mental health support to Louisiana residents 18 and older who are at increased risk."

The program is a suicide prevention and recovery support program for those at increased risk for suicide. Supervised Peer Support Specialists provide prevention and evaluation tools as well as casework, helping clients address social determinates of health. All services are provided by Certified Peer Support Specialists under the supervision of a licensed Mental Health Clinician.

The Fisher Project has seen success with clients all over the state.



risk for suicide

The cost of all services are covered by the grant.

Eligible participants are:

- Ages 18 and above
- A resident of Central Louisiana
- Increased risk for suicide

Services are telephone based.

To refer someone or to enroll, call

The Fisher Project 225-960-6800

or email fisherproject@louisianamha.org

www.louisianamha.org

National Suicide Prevention Hotline-Dial 988.

or therapy and it is not an after-hours hotline. Instead, The Fisher Project is designed to promote empowerment and self-determination for clients while increasing access to suicide prevention services, education and resources. Clients enrolled in the program will be screened for suicide risk, receive ongoing assessments, transition care and discharge planning.

Peer Support Specialists help clients develop a safety plan and offer referrals to legal aid, physicians, therapists, food pantries and housings assistance as appropriate. As clients near the end of their six months in the program, they can be reassessed and, if necessary, stay in the program for an additional six months. If needed, clients can also re-enroll in The Fisher Project after they have been discharged.

While not a crisis service, The Fisher Project provides access to care in the gap between other medical and therapeutic interventions. It has consistently been shown to prevent hospital readmissions and reduce the risk of suicide. Referrals are made through the hospital discharge process, behavioral health professionals, family members or self-referral.

For more information about The Fisher Project, visit louisianamha.org/fisher-project/.

“The Fisher Project gave me a voice to express my feelings,” said one Fisher Project client. “The ability to be finally independent and being vocal in my mental health journey, practicing healthy boundaries and social connections gave me the ability to be myself. My peer specialist gave me information to set goals and balance work/life challenges along the way. I now have the ability to process daily life obstacles with skills, managing stressors of life that had often triggered a downward spiral.”

The Fisher Project will provide six months of virtual peer support to those 18 and older who are at an increased risk for suicide. The program is available at no cost to participants, and includes 14 scheduled calls with a peer counselor, with additional calls available as needed.

The program does not offer counseling





Central Louisiana Students Attend Annual Youth Summit on Healthy Behaviors

As part of its Healthy Behaviors Initiative, The Rapides Foundation once again invited area high school students to its annual Youth Summit on Healthy Behaviors to learn how to become advocates for healthy choices and policy change in their schools and communities.

The Summit, its 13th year, was held September 24–26, with students and teachers from seven Central Louisiana parishes attending the event at the Holiday Inn Downtown Alexandria. More than 150 students, teachers and staff attended the one-day event each day. All of the students were members of their schools' Youth Health Advocates clubs.

"We recognize that schools are an important part of most young people's lives and therefore provide a critical setting for many prevention and intervention efforts under our Healthy Behaviors Initiative," said Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation.

The Summit included youth advocacy

presentations, energizer breaks and breakout sessions to educate participants on the issues of tobacco prevention, substance and alcohol abuse prevention, and healthy eating and active living.

Serving as this year's featured speaker was Avoyelles Parish native Stanley Celestine Jr., an accomplished change agent and servant leader who became the youngest person elected to the Avoyelles Parish School Board in 2019. He also served on The Rapides Foundation's Youth Advisory Council during his junior and senior years of high school.

Celestine has worked with local and national organizations, successfully developing and scaling programs, building coalitions and shaping policy. His work has been recognized by Disney, Nickelodeon, BET, The New York Times and Huffington Post. He credits his life in Avoyelles Parish with providing him the tenacity and authenticity that fuel his strong values and unwavering commitment to service.

"Being here brings back a lot of memories for



Youth Summit members were energized with music and dance moves led by JiggAerobics (photo above). Keynote speaker Stanley Celestine (photo on Page 12) challenged students to make a difference in their communities.



HEALTHY BEHAVIORS



me," Celestine told students. "Some years ago, I was sitting here at this same Summit. It is a full circle moment for me."

During his keynote address, Celestine challenged students with stories of teenagers who first made a difference in their own communities and then made an impact on the world. He reminded students that the work they are doing to promote healthy behaviors among their peers, in their schools and in their own families will have far-reaching effects.

"The work you are doing is already making a difference," Celestine said "You don't have to wait until you are older to make an impact. Ask yourself, 'What kind of impact do I want to have?' And think about how the choices you make today will shape your school, your community and your own health years from now."

Summit attendees appreciated his message.

"I was really impressed by him in general and all he has accomplished," said Ellen Seubold, a sophomore from Elizabeth High School. "It was really inspiring to me and to the other students, too."

Additional breakout session topics and presenters during the Summit included:

- **Substance and Alcohol Misuse**

Prevention presented by Dominique Teasley and Jarvis Fountaine, who shared their lived experiences with substance use disorder. They are both in long-term recovery.

- **Healthy Eating/Active Living and Tobacco**

Prevention and Control sessions led by students from the Foundation's Youth Health Advocates program.

The students who led the Healthy Eating/Active Living and Tobacco Prevention and Control sessions were selected by submitting an online application through their teachers. They practiced their presentations beginning in August 2024, to ensure consistent and impactful delivery by all youth groups.



"With youth advocacy being a critical aspect and goal of the Summit, we believe that incorporating student leaders into the Summit's breakout sessions is absolutely necessary to the messaging," said Certified Health Education Specialist Jessica Shirley, who created the evidence-based presentations and worked with the students on their scripts and public speaking skills. "Youth presenters thoroughly enjoyed delivering the information to their peers and attendees responded positively to their efforts."

Austin Leblanc, a senior from the Louisiana School for the Agricultural Sciences in Avoyelles Parish, looks forward to taking the information he's learned during this year's Summit back to his school and community.

"Most teenagers might not listen to adults," LeBlanc said. "But our peers know how to talk to us, and they are able to convert the lessons we're trying to teach into a language we understand."

The Summit is part of the Foundation's Healthy Behaviors School District Partnership Grant. The goal of the grant is to provide students, staff and teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to make better and informed decisions that lead to healthier lives.

One of the goals of the Summit is to increase students' knowledge of healthy eating and active living, substance and alcohol misuse prevention, and tobacco prevention and control. In addition, the Summit is intended to present students with healthy strategies they can implement in their schools and communities.



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Expands to Central Louisiana



The Rapides Foundation's Board of Trustees awarded a \$120,000 grant to The Dollywood Foundation to bring the Imagination Library to Allen, Catahoula, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon and Winn parishes.

The Imagination Library inspires a love of reading by providing universal access to free, high-quality and age-appropriate books each month for children ages 0 to 5 years old.

"Our board welcomed the opportunity to fund a portion of the costs to bring the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to Central Louisiana parishes," said Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation. "The project aligns with our Education Initiative, which has a focus on School Readiness. Research shows children who enter kindergarten ready to learn are more likely to complete high school and go through their school careers without repeating a grade."

The Dollywood Foundation covers overhead costs and negotiates wholesale pricing for the books, while local community partners fund the cost of mailing and decided-upon wholesale book prices.

In addition to funding partners, each parish has a nonprofit partner that coordinates the book-giving program. Local Program Partners in Central Louisiana are the United Way of Southwest Louisiana, Allen Parish; Avoyelles Parish School District, Avoyelles Parish; United Way of Central Louisiana, Catahoula Parish; Grant Parish School Board, Grant Parish; United Way of Northwest Louisiana, Natchitoches Parish; Southwest Louisiana Area Health Education Center Foundation, Rapides and LaSalle parishes; Vernon Parish Head Start, Vernon Parish; and Pine Belt Multi-Purpose CAA, Winn Parish.

To register a child, visit the Imagination Library website or use the QR code.



Imagination Library



The Rapides Foundation continues a legacy of community healthcare initiated in 1903.

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