

BARBARA WEAVER

“This feels like home.”

by Jessica Park

“**W**hen I first walked into Boone Hospital, I will never forget thinking ‘This feels like home.’” says Barbara Weaver, chairman emeritus of Boone Hospital Center’s board of trustees.

Barbara had been a nurse for 13 years at Children’s Mercy Hospital in Kansas City before she and her husband, Bruce Weaver, DO, a cardiac anesthesiologist at St. Luke’s Hospital, came to Columbia in 1978. Dr. Weaver joined Boone County Hospital’s new open-heart surgery program.

In late 1980, when Ira Hubbell, MD, decided not to run again for his seat on the Boone County Hospital board of trustees, Dr. Weaver suggested that Barbara run for office.

“I said ‘I don’t know anything about running for office!’”

But after meeting with the board chairman, Jack Estes, to discuss the role and responsibilities of trustees, she knew her experiences at Children’s Mercy made her a good fit for the office, and began her campaign. In 1981, campaigning in Boone County was done on a smaller scale than today.

“The first time I ran, I held little coffees and made a brochure. Nobody else had a brochure, except for me — I didn’t know if I was supposed to have one!” she says, laughing.

Barbara was one of nine people vying for three open board seats. Not only did she get elected, becoming the first woman on the board of trustees, but according to the April 8, 1981 *Columbia Daily Tribune*, Barbara Weaver received the most votes of any board candidate that year, including elected incumbents Marvin “Bunky” Wright and Charles Gibbens.

Her fellow trustees immediately welcomed her. “They were very supportive in helping me navigate what I needed to learn,” she says.

Shortly into her first term of office, in September 1981, the board of trustees made a significant decision to change Boone County Hospital’s name to Boone Hospital Center, to better reflect the growth and reach of its services.





Receiving the most votes of any candidate in the 1981 election, Barbara Weaver became the first woman on the board of trustees.

"We were no longer providing services only to Boone County," Barbara says. "And our equipment and services were more sophisticated than you'd expect in a county hospital. The open-heart program really came into being and opened the opportunity to expand technology in this institution. It was really a very exciting time."

In the early '80s, the hospital grew steadily, opening the Ann Street parking garage, acquiring its first CAT scanner and completing the helicopter pad, making it easier for Boone Hospital Center to provide health care to patients from all over mid-Missouri.

However, at the same time, the hospital's administrative costs were rising due to inflation and accompanying increases in salaries and benefits, while occupancy decreased due to competition from other Columbia hospitals. Questions about increased costs drew attention and criticism while, elsewhere in Missouri, county hospitals struggled or closed their doors.

Beginning in 1985, the board of trustees carefully explored the hospital's options for operations management over a period of nearly four years. After considering several approaches, the trustees voted in September 1987 to proceed with leasing the hospital facility and equipment to a group that would manage the hospital operations. After much discussion and negotiation, in May 1988, the board of trustees approved a 10-year lease with Christian Hospital in Saint Louis, which took effect on Sept. 1, 1988.

Under this new arrangement, Christian Hospital paid Boone County to lease the hospital facility while running the hospital operations and programs. The board of trustees would continue to make decisions to renew and oversee the lease, make purchases it deemed necessary for the hospital and keep control over the assets.

Even with the board's studied and prudent approach, the decision to lease the hospital provoked considerable debate in the community, and it heated up again after Christian Hospital merged with Barnes and Jewish Hospitals in 1993.

"Probably the most difficult times for me, particularly as chairman, were the discussions about the lease," Barbara says. "But that first lease with Christian Hospital was the right thing to do. It was a big step toward our success."

During the first year of its lease with Christian Hospital, the board of trustees purchased 24 acres located on the north side of Broadway from Boone Hospital Center for future expansion. It also purchased an MRI scanner, making BHC the first county hospital in the nation to offer MRI imaging.

Barbara says that the lease benefitted patients in other ways: "One thing that we didn't have when I became a trustee was a chaplain. As a county hospital, we didn't feel we could pay to hire a chaplain. The hospital auxiliary provided funds for us to hire Dick Millspaugh. When we became a leased hospital, we were able to get his salary into the budget. I think it's very significant that we're able to provide our patients with spiritual care."

In 1991, after Jack Estes departed from the board, Barbara



Barbara and her husband, Dr. Bruce Weaver, at a Boone Hospital Center employee picnic in the 1980s.

was selected as board chairman. During that time, the board developed an expansion plan that would double the size of the hospital over the next 20 years, including the opening of the south patient tower in 2011. In 1996, the community celebrated its first 75 years with the completion of the hospital's new campus north of Broadway.

"When we bought the land where the north campus is, that was a strategic move," she says. "[Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer] Randy Morrow was very perceptive about properties that we needed to acquire and had good relationships with our neighbors and helped us negotiate."

The board also purchased land in south Columbia from Boone Hospital volunteer Cletus Baurichter. Barbara says, "He was also a close friend of mine, and he came to me and said, 'You know, I sure would like to see the hospital have some of this land.'"

The purchase was made long before that part of the city began to grow, Barbara explains, "At first, when we bought the land,

there wasn't any need. This was for the future — you have to think of what's going to be needed 20 years from now."

Thinking decades ahead is a must given the considerable planning that goes into building a new facility.

"With the new patient tower, for example, there were so many things that had to be done. The

financing, the due diligence about researching needs, choosing the important players like the architect and contractor — all of these things take a long time."

But patience is rewarded: "The Healing Garden probably took 10 years. Now it's one of everybody's favorite places. Everything takes a long time — sometimes you just have to plant the idea and then eventually, it happens!"

Despite Boone Hospital Center's growth, Barbara says it still feels like home to her and many people in mid-Missouri.

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Top: BHC President Jim Sinek, Barbara Weaver and BJC Group President Sandra Van Trease; Above: Barbara with BHC Trustee Fred Parry

"We've been able to maintain our identity in a corporate world and I think that's really important," she says. "It's the culture here. No matter where you go in the hospital or who you talk to, there's this feeling that people care and that, when you walk in here, you're going to receive the very best care available. People still think of Boone Hospital Center as the county hospital — and it is!"

"When you think about it," says Fred Parry, board of trustees chairman, "It's an astonishing commitment to give more than 30 years of your life to an institution like Boone Hospital Center. To do it as a volunteer, though both good times and bad, makes the accomplishment even more impressive."

Barbara Weaver's service to Boone Hospital Center doesn't stop there; she also sat on the Christian Health Services board of directors. After Christian Hospital merged to form BJC, the board of trustees renegotiated the lease to include a seat on the BJC board, where she represented Boone Hospital Center from 2001 to 2008.

Barbara served on the Missouri Hospital Association board of directors in the early 2000s and was honored with the Missouri Hospital Association Distinguished Service Award in 2004.

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— Barbara Weaver*

She encouraged the MHA to develop a Governance Excellence Certificate program for hospital board members, which was implemented in 2011.

She was also on the regional policy board of the American Hospital Association and attended meetings in Washington, D.C. She says, "As trustees, we have to be aware of what's happening not only for the hospital and our community, but statewide and nationally."

When asked why she decided not to run again, Barbara says, "I thought it was time. I think people know when it's time to step back."

"It's bittersweet," she continues. "I think about the South Campus. I'm excited to see that land be used, but I'm not going to be there to be hands-on or have the opportunity to choose the landscaper, those kinds of things. It's sort of like I'm leaving something half-done, but that's OK. It's going to be wonderful."

Barbara is not retiring completely from public service. She will serve on a county Community Health Advisory Council, which will help decide how Boone Hospital Center's contributions to the county for health care that have been paid over the years — an amount totaling close to \$3 million — will be allocated, based on need.

She also plans to stay involved with her church, do more traveling, finish two quilts in progress and, she adds, smiling, "Just hang with my friends."

When asked what she sees in the future for Boone Hospital Center, Barbara says, "I think with our new strategic plan, once fully implemented, we will see the hospital continue to grow, not necessarily within the hospital walls but out in the community. That's where health care is going."

Along with the South Campus, Barbara points to the new Missouri Heart Center clinic in Macon, an extension of the service her husband helped found in 1978, as an example of that outreach.

Looking at all that Boone Hospital Center has accomplished since 1981, Barbara credits the other trustees she's had the privilege of serving with.

"We've done all right over the years," she says, smiling at the understatement. "It's not one person, but the whole board that really has made the difference. We may not always agree, and we don't, and that's OK! But we're able to reach a consensus and always keep in mind what's important — that our decisions benefit Boone Hospital and the people we serve." 🌿