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IHA, ICAHN to Celebrate National Rural Health Day on Nov. 21

***Illinois' Small and Rural Hospitals Continue to Offer High-Quality Healthcare,
Provide Access and Drive Economic Development to Rural Communities***

NAPERVILLE – In recognition of National Rural Health Day on Nov. 21, the Illinois Health and Hospital Association (IHA) and Illinois Critical Access Hospital Network (ICAHN) are celebrating Illinois' rural hospital community for their tireless efforts to provide high-quality care to their patients and address healthcare challenges facing rural communities across the state. IHA and ICAHN also want to recognize the huge economic impact of small and rural hospitals, which drives neighborhood revitalization and attracts new businesses to their communities.

"Illinois' small and rural hospitals are vital to our state's healthcare system, providing local access to high-quality, affordable and equitable healthcare," IHA President and CEO A.J. Wilhelmi said. "Illinois' rural hospitals are also strong economic engines, often one of largest employers in the region, and play a major part in improving the communities they serve. IHA and ICAHN are proud to represent these hospitals and commend the hard work and dedication of our rural healthcare workers."

More than 1.6 million Illinoisans live in rural communities and rely on their local hospital as an important—and often only—source of healthcare. Illinois' rural hospitals are continuously identifying new ways to serve their patients, while also being proactive and strategic to recruit and retain a talented, rural workforce.

- At **Katherine Shaw Bethea Hospital (KSB) in Dixon**, a focus on workforce engagement and retention starts at the top. Leaders participate in rounding regularly, engaging their teams on what's working well and areas for improvement toward solving one of the top issues in healthcare: building a vibrant workforce in the face of talent shortages and hypercompetitive environments. Leaders also discuss how they can best support their teams in meeting workforce goals. KSB's approach to staffing goes beyond leadership. The rural health system has adopted a holistic approach with three key strategies— alignment, pipeline programs, and transparency and personal touch—that has led to a nearly 50% reduction in the vacancy rate between KSB's 2022 and 2023 fiscal years.
- Innovation is how **OSF HealthCare Saint Luke Medical Center in Kewanee** has worked to solve today's toughest healthcare challenges. With staffing shortages a persistent concern in healthcare, the hospital asked its Mission Partners to come up with new ideas around rural recruitment. The effort was part of a Trailblazer Challenge, which generated 25 ideas, mostly from Mission Partners on healthcare's front lines. OSF HealthCare leadership and the Jump Trading Simulation & Education Center supported their partners by providing the tools needed to turn innovative ideas into

viable solutions. OSF Saint Luke chose five concepts centered on developing a local talent pipeline to move forward: Project 1 - Camp Med; Project 2 - No Degree? No Problem; Project 3 - Student Volunteers and Hospital Helpers; Project 4 -OSF in the Classroom; and Project 5 - A Day in the Life of a Mission Partner.

- **Memorial Hospital and Hancock County Senior and Childcare Services:** After 20 years as a caregiver, raising four children of her own and caring for many others, Stacie McKay decided to turn an idea that had been floating in her mind for years into reality. She would become a nurse. “I made the decision to enroll but still had reservations about how I was going to be able to be financially secure while being successful as a student,” said McKay, the inpatient unit secretary at Memorial Hospital in Carthage. “I addressed my concerns with colleagues and that is when I learned about the Grow Our Own fund.” At the Critical Access Hospital, “growing our own” is a way a life. It’s also a way to address one of the biggest issues before hospital leaders: staffing shortages. McKay is one of several Memorial team members who’ve benefited from the program. “I am blessed to have a supportive family but without financial help, I would not be able to pursue my dream career,” she said. In 2022, the Memorial Hospital Foundation launched a “Grow Our Own Scholarship Campaign” to provide the financial support that staff need to pursue their dreams. To date, the program has raised more than \$300,000 for the fund.
- Teamwork is an essential part of being an employee at **Rochelle Community Hospital**. Its strategic plan relies on teamwork and utilizing the skills and creativity of managers to promote improved health services for patients, said hospital CEO Karen Tracy in a recent community newsletter. “Our employees are our greatest assets,” said Tracy, who had been part of Rochelle’s administrative team for 20 years before rising to CEO in 2023. “We have had a philosophy for a long time that we hire for fit. It’s important for us to have all staff working together for a common goal—to promote health and wellness in our community.” As staffing shortages have affected all hospitals, Rochelle Community Hospital has implemented several strategies to increase its rural healthcare workforce. This includes internships, job shadowing, local high school and college partnerships, creation of an endowment fund and providing training and conference opportunities through IHA and the ICAHN.

“OSF HealthCare Saint Luke Medical Center in Kewanee, Memorial Hospital in Carthage, and Rochelle Community Hospital are just three of 60 critical access and small, rural hospitals in our membership that are working every day to make their communities healthier. ICAHN is proud to partner with IHA to celebrate all the many accomplishments and innovations our member hospitals have created or enhanced to make rural healthcare even better,” said Tracy Warner, CRHCEO, ICAHN Executive Director.

Illinois has 86 small and rural hospitals, which includes 55 Critical Access Hospitals, and an annual economic impact of more than \$16 billion.

National Rural Health Day is an opportunity to bring attention to and honor the efforts of rural healthcare providers, communities, organizations, State Offices of Rural Health (SORH), and other stakeholders dedicated to addressing the unique healthcare needs of rural America. To learn more ways small and rural hospitals and health systems are building up their rural healthcare workforce, [click here](#), to access IHA’s small and rural backgrounder. For more information about National Rural Health Day, visit <https://www.powerofrural.org/>.

About IHA

The Illinois Health and Hospital Association, with offices in Chicago, Naperville, Springfield, and Washington, D.C., advocates for Illinois' more than 200 hospitals and nearly 40 health systems as they serve their patients and communities. IHA members provide a broad range of services—not just within their walls, but across the continuum of healthcare and in their communities. Reflecting the diversity of the state, IHA members consist of nonprofit, investor-owned and public hospitals in the following categories: community, safety net, rural, critical access, specialty, and teaching hospitals, including academic medical centers. For more information, see www.team-iha.org. Like IHA on [Facebook](#). Follow IHA on [X](#) (formally known as Twitter).

About ICAHN

Quite simply, the mission of our organization is – and always has been – to strengthen critical access and small, rural hospitals through collaboration. Better together, ICAHN and its 58 member hospitals make it their overarching goal to preserve access to rural healthcare while improving the vibrancy and viability of the communities served. ICAHN accomplishes this goal by:

- Ensuring appropriate funding and financial resources
- Continuing efforts to be a recognized resource on critical access hospitals and rural healthcare in Illinois
- Promoting efficient use of information technology services for the network and members alike
- Maintaining and further developing specific-type peer networks, activities, and listservs that promote hospital operational efficiencies and connectivity
- Offering ongoing educational opportunities and resources
- Developing and offering projects that are self-sustaining and which add value to the organization and its members
- Developing and offering shared services that offer value to members
- Establishing an institute that specializes in rural health population management

ICAHN is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 corporation established in 2003 and is governed by a nine-member board of directors. For more information, see <https://icahn.org>. Follow ICAHN on [Facebook](#).

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