

County of Bamberg

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Trent Kinard, *Vice Chairman* – District #1
Sharon Hammond – District #2
Larry Haynes – District #3
Joe Guess, Jr. – District #4
Isaiah Odom – District #5
Evert Comer, Jr. – District #6
Clint Carter, *Chairman* – District #7



Joey R. Preston
Administrator
Rose R. Shepherd
Clerk to Council

Press Release

To: News Media

CC: Bamberg County Administration

From: Bamberg County Public Information Office

Date: August 12, 2018

Re: Bamberg and Neighboring Counties Win Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Award

Bamberg, South Carolina (August 2018) – On August 7, 2018 at the South Carolina Association of Counties Annual Conference, it was announced that Bamberg, Barnwell, Orangeburg, and Calhoun counties won the 2018 Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation for the Bamberg-Barnwell Regional Free-Standing Emergency Center that is currently under construction in Denmark, SC.

Bamberg and Barnwell counties are located in an area that is considered a Healthcare Desert. In 2012, Bamberg County lost its county hospital; Barnwell County's hospital closed in 2016. These hospital closures left the citizens of Bamberg and Barnwell Counties with no nearby access to emergency care and resulted in drive times of over 45 minutes for medical care for some residents. Desperate to provide access to quality healthcare to their citizens, Bamberg and Barnwell County Councils worked with local community leaders to find a viable solution.

Danny Black, President/CEO of Southern Carolina Alliance (SCA), and Graham Adams, CEO of the Office of Rural Health, worked with Bamberg and Barnwell County Councils to contact larger neighboring hospital providers in the hopes of creating a partnership to reopen the existing hospitals. After many discussions, the team concluded that updating the original hospitals was cost prohibitive, as each would need extensive work to meet current ADA, electrical, fire and other building codes in addition to equipping it with newer technology. After years of searching for a feasible solution, it became apparent to legislators that it was unlikely that any small rural county, like Bamberg and Barnwell, would have the ability to build and sustain a stand-alone, full-service hospital. Furthermore, larger hospital systems were not interested in building a new hospital or updating the old hospitals because of the financial risk.

Recognizing the dire healthcare situation in Bamberg and Barnwell Counties, Senator Brad Hutto, Senator John Matthews, Representative Lonnie Hosey and Representative Justin Bamberg contacted former SC Health and Human Services Director Christian Soura, Representative Ronald Smith (House Committee on Health Affairs Chairman), and Senator Thomas Alexander (Senate Committee on Health Chairman) to expand the search for a viable solution to the "healthcare desert" in the Greater

1234 NORTH STREET P.O. BOX 149 BAMBERG, SOUTH CAROLINA 29003

Phone: (803) 245-5191 Fax: (803) 245-3027

Salkehatchie region of the state. Although it didn't seem possible that in modern day America there could be an area that didn't have access to a hospital, this was the unfortunate reality in Bamberg and Barnwell counties.

After much research, discussion and unsuccessful attempts to attract a provider to the region, the idea of a standalone, 24-hour emergency center became the most viable solution. This concept quickly gained acceptance by the leadership team because of its scalability. The facility would begin as a free-standing emergency center but can later expand to allow for a broader medical campus and services. According to Senator Brad Hutto, "We were able to convince our colleagues that our citizens in Bamberg and Barnwell counties deserved to have readily accessible emergency healthcare. State officials recognized the wisdom of regional collaboration to solve this problem, and we were able to develop a plan to finance the new facility and it required a lot of hard work by many parties to make the plan a reality."

The infrastructure required to service the Bamberg-Barnwell Emergency Center will promote future economic growth in an area that previously had little to no utility infrastructure. Communication infrastructure provided by AT&T will enhance broadband/internet capabilities in the region which are increasingly necessary for today's educational and economic opportunities. Expansion of water, sewer and electrical infrastructure increases the likelihood of attracting other industries to the area. Bamberg and Barnwell Counties are designated Promise Zones; according to the federal government Promise Zone communities are "high poverty communities where the federal government partners with local leaders to increase economic activity, improve educational opportunities, leverage private investment, reduce violent crime, enhance public health and address other priorities identified by the community."

The Regional Medical Center's Barnwell-Bamberg Emergency Medical Center is a truly collaborative project, as it required the participation of multiple stakeholders to secure funding, land, provide infrastructure, and guarantee 24-hour staffing of medical professionals. The effort also creates a plan that can be modeled to other regions throughout the state and the nation that find themselves in similar Healthcare Deserts. Since 2010, three hospitals have closed in South Carolina: the two in Bamberg and Barnwell, along with Marlboro Park Hospital in Bennettsville. Rural hospital closures are occurring across the nation; since 2010, 85 hospitals across the country have closed their doors. Healthcare deserts are an unfortunate reality in South Carolina and many other states, and this project provides a replicable solution for other locations. "The regional emergency care facility is a multi-county project that required collaboration and cooperation across four counties and with multiple organizations. We are pleased that SouthernCarolina Alliance could play a role in helping to bring an innovative health care solution to Bamberg and Barnwell Counties, where our citizens will now have 24/7 emergency care for the first time in several years," stated Danny Black, SCA President/CEO. "We congratulate Bamberg, Barnwell, Orangeburg, and Calhoun counties on this statewide recognition."

Awarded annually since 1999 by the SCAC, The Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award highlights the growing need for regional partnerships, strategies, and solutions. Competition for this award is open to two or more political subdivisions that worked together on a project. In a highly competitive group of six other applicants, the three-judge panel selected the Bamberg-Barnwell Emergency Medical Center as the 2018 winner, as it is an innovative, scalable, replicable solution for a major healthcare challenge in rural communities. "I am proud of collaborative project between four counties, a municipality, a hospital, the local economic development team, and the state delegation," stated Joey Preston, Bamberg County Administrator. "The Barrett Lawrimore Regional Cooperation Award is highly competitive and there were many worthy applications this year. To win this esteemed

1234 NORTH STREET P.O. BOX 149 BAMBERG, SOUTH CAROLINA 29003

Phone: (803) 245-5191 Fax: (803) 245-3027

award demonstrates the importance of this Emergency Medical Center to our communities, and also highlights the necessity of partnerships to address healthcare challenges in South Carolina's rural counties."

###

For more information on this press release, email info@bambergcounty.sc.gov.



1234 NORTH STREET P.O. BOX 149 BAMBERG, SOUTH CAROLINA 29003
Phone: (803) 245-5191 Fax: (803) 245-3027