

Affinity Opens New Heart Center

By Robert Janek

It's common knowledge that in the event of a heart attack, time is of the essence — not only to save a life but also to save quality of life. For that reason, Affinity Medical Center in Massillon opened a brand new Heart Center in May for the Western Stark County communities.

Constructed on the first floor of the hospital, the new Heart Center boasts two cardiovascular operating rooms, two cardiac cath labs, and a nine-bed cardiac intensive care unit. Every room is spacious, all of the technology is state-of-the-art, and the staff is highly experienced.

“There’s a strong need for this here, and I really believe that what we’ve put together is a top notch program with the best team of

physicians, both cardiologists and cardiovascular surgeons, in the Canton and Massillon area,” said Ron Bierman, CEO of Affinity Medical Center. “They’re all very well known in this community and very well respected.”

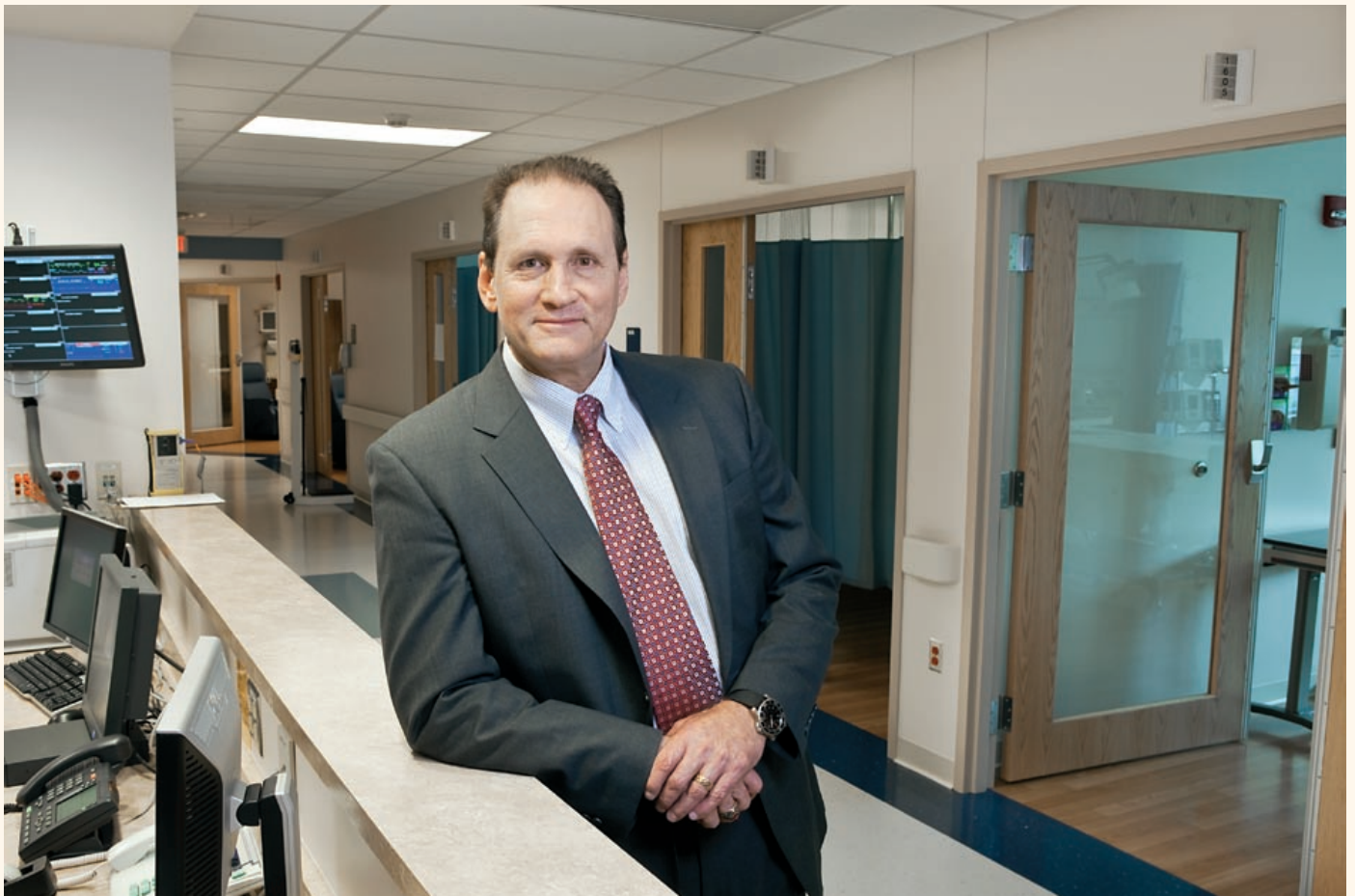
A READY-MADE PROGRAM

Mr. Bierman reports that Affinity has welcomed 14 highly trained and experienced nurses to staff the ORs, cath labs and ICU. All are Basic Life Support and Advanced Cardiac Life Support certified, and all have worked with these physicians in other area institutions. Their nursing experience totals more than 185 years, almost half of which was spent caring for heart surgery patients.

Antonios Chryssos, MD, FACS, FACC, (left) directs the new Heart Center at Affinity Medical Center in Massillon, where C. Gregory Conrad, MD, is chief Cardiac Anesthesiologist. The two doctors are shown in one of two state-of-the-art cardiovascular operating rooms located in the Heart Center.



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Ron Bierman, CEO of Affinity Medical Center, stops by the nurses' station in the Heart Center which boasts two cardiovascular operating rooms, two cardiac cath labs, and a nine-bed cardiac intensive care unit. Every room is spacious, all of the technology is state-of-the-art, and the staff is highly experienced.

“The physicians and nurses are longtime players in the community, so in essence what we’ve put together is a ready-made program. There was really no ramp up, because we’ve got all of the players and pieces that have worked together at other institutions, and they’ve chosen to be a part of our Affinity heart team,” he said.

Antonios Chryssos, MD, FACS, FACC, directs the new Heart Center. A former chairman of the Department of Surgery at Mercy Medical Center in Canton, Dr. Chryssos has more than 20 years of experience and was reportedly the first surgeon in Northeastern Ohio to perform single-vessel minimally invasive direct coronary artery bypass (MIDCAB) surgery. That was in 1996. Today, he’s successfully doing two and three vessel MIDCAB operations as well as minimally invasive aortic and mitral valve repairs and/or replacements.

“Ron Bierman and I along with my partner Dr. Mark Tawil and a number of cardiologists including Dr. George Seese from Stark Medical Group and Dr. Brian Simmons from Cardiology One began discussing the possibilities of creating a new heart program and a new heart center at Affinity last year. It was something we all were interested in pursuing,” said Dr. Chryssos. “A team comprised of Dr. John Current, of the Emergency Department at Affinity, Dr. Gregory Conrad, chief cardiac anesthesiologist, and Dr. Don Zimmerman, of internal

medicine and vice chief of staff, helped us get the program off the ground. They were instrumental.”

A PERFECT PLAN

With the help of an architect, they developed the plans for the center — a self-contained unit within one geographic area of the hospital which formerly was shell space. It was a winning concept. The ORs are just steps away from the cath labs and the cardiac ICU, and the Emergency Department is right around the corner. Best of all, there’s room to grow.

“We learned many, many years ago that the physical layout of a heart center is very important. Having everything — the cath lab, the OR, the ICU — in close proximity saves lives. Because in the end, the less time you spend transporting patients to and from these areas, the better,” said Dr. Chryssos. “So the physical layout of our center is perfect, and that’s a huge advantage.”

All of the rooms are noticeably larger than the norm, with wide double doors — even in the ICU — for easy maneuverability of patients’ beds, equipment, physicians and staff. Colorful paintings line the hallways opposite the ICU rooms, where natural light from windows aid in the healing process and stuffed armchairs offer family members a comfortable place to sit.

STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGY

“We have all of the state-of-the-art technology and equipment and specialized tools to perform all of the minimally-invasive cardiac surgeries,” said Dr. Chryssos, who pointed out that the Affinity Heart Center is now offering all these procedures as an option to its patients. “That will be the focus of the open heart program here — minimally invasive surgery, and we have a team of physicians, nurses and support staff dedicated to that.”

Unlike traditional open heart surgery, minimally invasive cardiac surgery is performed without “cracking” the sternum and with or without the use of a heart-lung bypass machine. Instead, the operation is performed through a tiny incision of approximately two inches on the left or right chest. The benefits for the patient include less pain, shorter length of stay in the ICU and in the hospital, and quicker return to normal activities.

“An operation like this takes a highly qualified team, and I’m blessed to have one here,” said Dr. Chryssos.

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EXPERIENCED TEAMMATES

The team includes Dr. Chryssos’ partner Dr. Mark Tawil who has more than 20 years of experience doing heart and vascular surgery, cardiac perfusionists, assistants, nurses and support staff with many years of experience. The cardiac anesthesia program is being headed up by Dr. Gregory Conrad who has 25 years of experience as a cardiac anesthesiologist.

“Our focus was to put together a program at Affinity with experienced people. It just so happens that some of these people we’ve worked successfully with in the past,” said Dr. Chryssos. “We have tremendous interaction with the cardiology groups. They help us take care of patients in and out of the operating rooms. And that helps especially in valve surgery where we need to have input in the OR to verify that everything is perfect before the patient leaves for the ICU.”

The organization of Affinity’s heart program, he explained, facilitates interaction among all physicians — the primary care



The Heart Center is a self-contained unit within one geographic area of Affinity Medical Center. The ORs are just steps away from the cath labs (one of which is shown here) and the cardiac ICU, and the Emergency Department is right around the corner. Best of all, there's room to grow.

physicians, all cardiology groups, the surgeons and the anesthesiologists. A committee comprised of the above provided input to hospital administration to assist with the design of the new Heart Center.

“We’re partners, teammates. And to that end I have to applaud Ron Bierman, the CEO, who has facilitated bringing all of the parts together and getting it off the ground so quickly,” Dr. Chryssos said.

Even before the Heart Center opened, Dr. Chryssos and his team were performing cardiac surgery at Affinity in a specially equipped OR.

“We’re psyched. We’ve already surpassed our wildest expectations,” he said. “I think we’re going to outgrow this facility the first year. And then we’ll expand. There’s room to do that.”

FUTURE PLANS

As for the future, plans are underway to add a minimally invasive vascular surgery program directed by Dr. Tawil. This will be part of the Heart Center. A team of professionals is currently being recruited to help make this a reality. The goal of the program is to provide the very best in cardiac care.

“That’s our responsibility, and we take that responsibility very seriously,” said Dr. Chryssos.

Both Mr. Bierman and Dr. Chryssos are admittedly very pleased with the response to Affinity’s new heart program. The medical and lay communities seem to have embraced it whole-heartedly (pun intended). The number of procedures, including surgeries and catheterizations, has already surpassed everyone’s expectations.

“I think everyone realizes this isn’t a start-up program. We have very experienced physicians and nurses and allied health professionals who were working together at other area hospitals and are now here,” said Mr. Bierman. “As Chryssos tells me, it’s so easy to do a case here because he’s surrounded by people he’s worked with for a long time.”

In the end, it’s the people that make the difference. The new facility and technology just enhance their efforts.

“What makes a heart program is not a building, it’s the people. Having the right people in the right place makes a huge difference, especially for those having a heart attack,” said Dr. Chryssos. “At Affinity Heart Center, we strive to provide excellence in cardiac care for those living in western Stark County ... to offer a heart program literally in this community’s back yard to save time and save lives.”

For more information, call 330-837-6863, or visit Affinity Medical Center’s website at www.AffinityMedicalCenter.com/heart. ■