Joel Wernick, Retired Phoebe Putney Health System President and CEO, Wins Prestigious Georgia Hospital Association W. Daniel Barker Leadership Award

ATLANTA – At its annual summer meeting, the Georgia Hospital Association (GHA) presented its prestigious W. Daniel Barker Leadership Award to Joel Wernick, retired president and CEO of Phoebe Putney Health System in Albany. Wernick was honored for his leadership of the health system and his dedication to increasing access to care for the Albany community.

Wernick began his tenure as president and CEO of Phoebe Putney Health System in 1988 and remained in this role for 30 years. During those three decades, he transformed a single community hospital with limited specialized services into a thriving regional health system that has expanded access to care for hundreds of thousands of Southwest Georgians and has services, technology and a workforce that rival those found in larger urban health systems.

Throughout his leadership of Phoebe, Wernick remained passionate about expanding access to primary and specialty care to the community to allow people to stay close to home for high-quality care. He was instrumental in developing a pipeline strategy to recruit physicians to the Albany area and to establish Phoebe as a regional hub for medical education and training future physicians. Since its inception 25 years ago, the Phoebe Family Medicine Residency has graduated 125 physician residents, with 60 percent of those still practicing in Georgia, most of whom are in Southwest Georgia. In 2005, the first campus of the Medical College of Georgia’s statewide education network was established at Phoebe. In 2011, the UGA College of Pharmacy opened its Southwest Georgia Clinical Campus at Phoebe. Finally, in 2017, Phoebe opened a modern housing community for the physician residents and medical and pharmacy students training at the health system.

In addition to his physician growth efforts, the health system itself has grown in many ways during Wernick’s leadership. In addition to the growth of the medical staff from 167 to 312, Wernick oversaw the formation of Phoebe Physician Group, which employs more than 175 physicians and 135 advanced practice providers. The system acquired a critical access hospital and helped rebuild a new Phoebe Sumter Medical Center when a tornado destroyed Sumter Regional Medical Center in 2007.
“Joel Wernick has left an indelible mark on Phoebe Putney Health System, the community it serves, and the entire state,” said GHA President and CEO Earl Rogers. “From helping grow the physician workforce in Georgia to ensuring the viability of the Phoebe hospital system, his efforts help guarantee that residents in southwest Georgia and surrounding communities will perpetually have access to high-quality care. He is a most-deserving recipient of this award.”

Wernick is actively involved in many local civic and economic development initiatives. He chairs the Southwest Georgia Alliance for Progress, a regional coalition to strengthen economic, educational and cultural infrastructures that support the Marine Corp Logistics Base of Albany. He has also served as a member of the University of Alabama at Birmingham adjunct faculty and is a member of the Albany Chamber of Commerce and the Albany Rotary Club.

About GHA
Founded in 1929, GHA serves more than 170 hospitals in Georgia and promotes the health and welfare of the public through the development of better hospital care for all Georgia’s citizens. The mission of GHA is to advance the health of individuals and communities by serving as the leading advocate for all Georgia hospitals and health care systems. GHA represents its members before the General Assembly and Congress, as well as state and federal regulatory agencies, and is an allied member of the American Hospital Association. For more information, please call 770-249-4500 or visit gha.org.

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