



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Georgia HEART Tax Credit Program Exceeds Expectations Signaling Strong Support for Rural Hospitals**

**Albany, Ga.** – Since its inception in 2017, the Georgia Rural Hospital Organization (RHO) tax credit initiative has improved the financial wellbeing of rural hospitals and health outcomes throughout the state. Georgia taxpayer contributions have enabled eligible rural hospitals to strengthen their ability to deliver preventive, critical, and emergency medical care.

Effective in 2023, legislators increased the program cap from \$60 million to \$75 million, and enthusiasm was evident as Georgia taxpayers applied for the entire \$75 million of available credits by mid-November. Through the Georgia HEART (Helping Enhance Access to Rural Treatment) Hospital Program, Georgia taxpayers have contributed an impressive \$367 million to eligible rural hospitals since 2017.

Within Phoebe Putney Health System, both Phoebe Sumter Medical Center and Phoebe Worth Medical Center are state-approved rural hospitals that qualify for the Georgia HEART program.

“Georgia HEART is an incredibly valuable resource, not just for our hospital, but for our entire community. The improvements we have been able to make at Phoebe Sumter because of contributions through this program have enhanced the care and services that are available to everyone in and around Sumter County,” said Carlyle Walton, Phoebe Sumter CEO.

Since the tax credit program began, Phoebe Sumter has received more than \$5 million in Georgia HEART contributions. Last year, the hospital used some of those funds to purchase its first robotic surgery system, and it has installed a new MRI machine in 2024 with support from the program.

So far, Phoebe Worth has spent more than \$4 million in Georgia HEART contributions to upgrade facilities, equipment and services. Late last year, Phoebe Worth opened its expanded and renovated emergency center – a project fully-funded through the tax credit program.

“We have a beautiful new ER that ensures we’ll be able to provide the quick, quality emergency care the people of this community deserve for years to come,” said Kim Gilman, Phoebe Worth CEO. “Without Georgia HEART, we would not have been able to complete all the projects that we have undertaken over the last several years – projects that have improved access to care and enhanced the level of service we can provide.”

Phoebe showed its commitment to advancing rural healthcare by recently hiring an administrator to oversee its Georgia HEART efforts and help more people in the region take advantage of the tax credit. “I was born and raised in rural southwest Georgia, and I appreciate how important access to quality healthcare is to our communities. Phoebe Worth and Phoebe Sumter are outstanding assets to the people of our region, and I am excited to help both hospitals expand their services,” said Todd Deariso, Phoebe Regional Rural Health Tax Credit Program Administrator.

The tax credit program allows taxpayers to direct their tax dollars to the qualifying rural hospital of their choice. When you give through Georgia HEART, you get a state tax credit for the full amount of your contribution up to a certain limit. That limit is \$5,000 for an individual filer and \$10,000 for a married couple filing jointly. Businesses can also participate and may be eligible to contribute up to 75% of their Georgia tax liability. There is an annual statewide tax credit limit, so you must apply to contribute.

Lisa Kelly, President of HEART, emphasized the program's impact and encouraged state lawmakers to make sure the program continues well into the future. “This one-of-a-kind, efficient mechanism for providing essential, direct funding for Georgia’s rural hospitals is invaluable throughout our state. The continuation of this impactful program beyond its current ‘sunset’ date of 2024 is crucial to the sustainability of our rural communities. Thank you to our legislature, in advance, for making this a priority for 2024,” she said.

Anyone interested in learning more about how they can support Phoebe Worth or Phoebe Sumter while benefiting from a Georgia Rural Hospital Organization tax credit can email Deariso at [mdeariso@phoebehealth.com](mailto:mdeariso@phoebehealth.com).

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**EDITOR’S NOTE: Attached photos show the da Vinci Xi surgical robotics system at a public demonstration at Phoebe Sumter, the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the expanded ER at Phoebe Worth and the waiting room of the new Phoebe Worth ER.**



