



## St. Mary's to create Center for Heart Vascular & Neurosciences

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Athens, Ga.** – St. Mary's Health Care System and its parent ministry, Trinity Health, today announced plans to expand St. Mary's Hospital's capacity for lifesaving treatment of stroke, heart attack, blood vessel disease and cancer through the creation of the 15,000-square-foot Center for Heart Vascular and Neurosciences (CHVN) at the Baxter Street campus.

The nearly \$35 million center will be constructed on top of the existing Emergency Department and Outpatient Surgical Center on the west side of the hospital. A groundbreaking ceremony is being planned for mid-June. Patient care will continue without interruption as construction progresses, although access to the hospital's western driveway may be restricted at times. The CHVN is expected to open in October 2027.

"As our area's population continues to grow, we must enhance access to vital services now and in the future," said Stonish Pierce, President and CEO of Trinity Health Georgia. "The team at Trinity Health agreed that our region needs better access to these critical services. This investment in our communities is vital for the continued health and well-being of those we serve."

In addition, Pierce said, "Medical science has advanced tremendously in recent years, and we can now do more than ever to protect and restore the health of people at risk of heart attack, stroke, aneurysm, cancer and many other conditions. This addition expands our capabilities in these life-saving specialties."

The new center will feature:

- The region's first 4D CT scanner. This technology will allow physicians to see the inside of the body in motion, such as observing the heart pump blood, lungs expand and contract with breathing, and the shift of tumors caused by breathing and blood flow. This capability enables higher precision for targeted treatments, fewer invasive procedures, faster decisions, and better patient outcomes.
- Expanded rapid-response stroke services. Because up to 2 million brain cells may die each minute in a stroke, rapid access to care is essential. The CHVN will help ensure specialists have 24/7/365 access to the technology needed to remove large-vessel blood clots that cause many of the worst strokes.
- A dedicated electrophysiology (EP) laboratory for the diagnosis and treatment of dangerous heart rhythm disorders. EP allows specialists to map the heart's electrical signals in real

time, making it possible to pinpoint the cause of irregular heart rhythms. EP can prevent sudden cardiac death, restore quality of life, and reduce the need for open-heart surgery.

“The CHVN will continue the growth of St. Mary’s Hospital as a thrombectomy-capable stroke center – the first to be designated as such in the state of Georgia,” said Whitney Barfield, St. Mary’s stroke coordinator. “The CHVN is the only facility in Athens that provides advanced neurovascular treatments in an emergency, for monitoring, and for elective procedures, which leads to stronger recoveries and healthier futures.”

“This expansion will double our capacity to detect and treat cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death and disability in our nation,” said Dr. Erick Avelar, St. Mary’s Chief of Cardiology. “It will enhance access to state-of-the-art facilities and technologies so that we can save more lives and improve quality of life for more people all across Northeast Georgia.”

The CHVN is part of the largest expansion project in St. Mary’s history, with a total investment of nearly \$100 million to improve access to care across the region. Already open are a \$3.5 million expansion of St. Mary’s Radiology Department and acquisition of a second MRI system, creation of the Center for Wound Healing at St. Mary’s Sacred Heart Hospital in Lavonia, St. Mary’s Community Pharmacy in Athens, and new St. Mary’s Medical Group practices on Malcom Bridge Road and Chase Street. Other components of the project are in development and will be shared with the community as planning continues.

For more information and progress updates, visit at [www.stmarys-health.org](http://www.stmarys-health.org).

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*A rendering by Earl Architects shows an exterior view of the St. Mary's Center for Heart Vascular and Neurosciences*