Brooks Baker Takes Care Of Business

UAB Associate Vice President for Facilities Brooks H. Baker III, son of an English teacher, is a natural born storyteller, relating vivid lessons learned during boyhood on a 250-acre farm in rural Warrior, Alabama. All of the prolific writer’s articles contain references to farming. “It strikes such a deep core in me. It means never becoming self-satisfied or complaisant and having an intense sense of pleasure as you continually reach for a new goal…”

Baker recently completed a successful tenure as president of the Association of Higher Education Facility Officers (or APPA, since the organization was founded as the Association of Physical Plant Administrators in 1914). He came to UAB in 1979 as maintenance engineer, was promoted the next year to director of hospital maintenance, then to executive director of facilities management. In 1995, he became assistant vice president for operations and in 1997 also was named associate vice president for facilities.

“What drew me to UAB was the desire to live within driving distance and raise my family in the countryside,” Baker says. “I wanted my children to learn the lessons of the soil. I wanted them to work for what they have, to be able to live off the land.” So in 1979, leaving a prosperous job at Tuscaloosa’s Phifer Wire Products, he packed his family back to the farm and came aboard UAB.

“I was the toughest job at UAB was keeping our aging physical plant operating efficiently against a backdrop of tightening fiscal policy. The continuous need for facilities renewal and modernization is awesome and often hard to promote.” So, with the help of a carousel of slides with the cover of “The Decaying American Campus” as the introductory image, Baker moved through offices and conferences around UAB’s campus, “like a traveling salesman,” talking about facility renewal needs and the critical importance of heeding small signs of neglect. His goal: encouraging employees to report problems to him before they become worse.

“Farming the land — and working at UAB — have been a joy.”

Brooks Baker

Doctor’s Day Appreciation Luncheon

University Hospital will celebrate “National Doctor’s Day” with a physician-appreciation luncheon for the Medical Staff in the West Pavilion Atrium on April 19, sponsored by Hospital Administration. All physicians are invited to attend the event, which will be held from 11:30 AM to 2 PM.
DEFERRED MAINTENANCE

APPA and its publication, Facilities Manager, were founded to enhance the professionalism surrounding maintenance, protection, and promotion of quality educational facilities. Key factors include planning, design, and construction, as well as management of janitorial services, energy, grounds and landscaping, and maintenance of the facilities. In one of his first columns as president, Baker wrote: “Last weekend, I was driving on a two-lane road winding through the flatlands of LA (no, not Los Angeles, Lower Alabama), an area of our state called the Black Belt. I saw a stately old colonial home with enormous columns in front. Once the home of a well-to-do cotton farmer or cattleman, the house had a sagging roof and peeling paint.”

What’s the connection between a decrepit Southern farmhouse and higher education? Without care and funding, says Baker, deterioration and irreversible damage can take place at an astonishing pace. It took only a few years — not generations — for that old farmhouse to lose its paint and roof.

“Similarly, in Alabama, although we are fortunate to escape some of the more drastic higher education budget cuts, we have lately experienced diminishing budgets. All such cuts translate directly into reduced maintenance funds, a real balancing act to absorb while providing quality services to our customers — faculty, staff, students, and patients.”

In the face of tightening budgets for facilities operations, the Facilities Division has:

❖ Managed in-house design and construction projects up to $1 million in scope, overseen operational budgets of $80 million annually, and handled $400 million in construction and renovation over 7 years. Work is now underway on UAB’s new state-of-the-art 14-story biomedical research building, one of the university’s crown jewels, he says;
❖ Ensured that UAB’s cost of maintenance is now less than half what it was in the 1980s, when adjusted for inflation. “Our first approach, as we began to get squeezed, was to reduce management staff,” he remembers.

“That worked for several years, but we had to look for other ways to economize”;
❖ Next, they explored technological advances in housekeeping, maintenance, and other labor-intensive areas. “After cutting the fat, we began reluctantly reducing the level of services provided by facilities-related departments” — a common but often unsatisfactory approach;
❖ Code issues are now being explored as a means of “common-sense cost savings.” Here, APPA can be an advocate for items related to facilities design, construction, and operations, he says. Known for his expertise in fire safety and prevention, Baker, for instance, has lobbied the National Fire Protection Agency to remove overly burdensome “consensus codes,” resulting in millions of dollars of savings annually to health care and higher education;
❖ He authored — and promoted in Montgomery — owner-controlled insurance programs for state entities, saving the university millions of dollars and providing a safer construction environment for workers.
❖ And, career development for APPA members remains a major focus, particularly during periods of economic stress. In addition to founding an apprentice program at UAB for mechanics, plumbers, and electricians, each year, he champions professional development among facilities managers.

Baker knows the importance of higher education. In 1997, he earned a MBA, with honors, from Vanderbilt University. His “honor” was the Methuselah award — he was the oldest graduate in the Business School.

Eye Foundation Hospital Renovation Project

The first phase of a $10 million Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital construction and renovation project is nearing completion. As part of the master plan to update the entire facility, the current project features the addition of a seventh floor to the professional building, adding 20,726 square feet, and renovation of selected hospital areas.

“These renovations will allow us to increase needed space for faculty and medical staff and accommodate increased patient volumes with more efficiency,” says Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital President Raymond Butler, FACHE. “Scheduled for completion in May, the seventh floor of the professional building provides additional office space for ophthalmologists desiring to move into the facility, as well as space for expansion of the Ophthalmology Services Foundation.

“A few years ago, we renovated the hospital’s first floor. Now, we will renovate the second and third floors,” Butler continues. The second floor will feature expanded surgical services. Currently, the floor houses an inpatient unit, presurgical registration and holding, nine surgic-
cal suites, and recovery. The renovation also includes expansion of the postanesthesia care and preoperative care unit from 17 to 24 bays, addition of a presurgical assessment clinic, 24 intake rooms, a laboratory, and an updated nursing station and physician locker/lounge area.

“When developing the design, our goals were to improve patient flow, surgical safety and efficiency, and patient confidentiality, while offering better access and comfort for patients and their families,” Butler says.

Upgrades to the third floor include relocation of the inpatient unit from the second floor and the emergency department from the first floor. “The relocation consolidates all our 24-hour, 7-day-a-week clinical functions, which will improve operational efficiency, quality of care, and safety,” Butler explains. “We also are adding 20 private patient rooms, two of which will have family suites. Also included are three guest suites in a hotel-type design for patients requiring sitter care, but who do not meet hospital inpatient criteria.” The pharmacy, staff lounge and locker rooms, and staff offices also are located on this floor.

As with the most recent renovations, William Blackstock serves as architect and Brice Building is the general contractor. The seventh-floor addition is scheduled for completion in May, with hospital renovations continuing for approximately 24 months.

Trends Seminar at the National Press Club on April 13 in Washington, DC. He will discuss, “What Really Happens: the Open Access Experience at the Medical Library Association.” Also, Plutchak will speak at the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors annual meeting at the National Library of Medicine, Washington, DC, on May 2. His talk is “Impact of Electronic Scholarly Publishing on the Uniform Requirements for Manuscript Submission.”

Plutchak’s other presentations include invited engagements at the North Carolina Serials Conference, Chapel Hill, NC, “Point-Counterpoint on Open Access” on April 14, and the Special Libraries Association annual meeting in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, where he will speak on “Librarianship and the Digital Revolution in Scholarly Publishing,” on June 6.

E-prescribing — Not Far Away

Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Michael Leavitt announced new proposed regulations to support electronic prescriptions for Medicare, as the prescription drug benefit takes effect in January 2006. “These proposed e-prescription rules would set standards to help Medicare, physicians, and pharmacies take advantage of new technology that can improve the health care of seniors and persons with disabilities,” Secretary Leavitt says.

Electronic prescribing, or “e-prescribing,” enables a physician to transmit a prescription electronically to the patient’s pharmacy. It also enables physicians and pharmacies to obtain information about the patient’s eligibility and medication history from drug plans.

“We are committed to widespread use of e-prescribing as quickly as possible,” Mark B. McClellan, MD, PhD, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) administrator, says. “In issuing these proposed rules 7 months ahead of the Medicare Modernization Act’s (MMA) deadline, we are laying the foundation for having major e-prescribing standards in place when the Medicare drug benefit begins.”

The proposed regulations are an important part of MMA, signed into law by President Bush on December 8, 2003. As part of MMA, Medicare will require drug plans participating in the new prescription drug benefit to support electronic prescribing, but it will be voluntary for physicians and pharmacies.

HHS hopes the early establishment of standards and steps to encourage adoption of effective e-prescribing programs will make e-prescribing more attractive.

The HHS secretary says e-prescribing can improve patient safety and reduce avoidable health care costs by decreasing prescription errors due to hard-to-read

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According to numbers released on Match Day, March 17, coordinated by the National Resident Matching Program, graduating seniors at medical schools across America found out then where they will be doing their residency training and in what field. This year, more than 14,700 U.S. medical school seniors participated in Match Day, the highest total in 20 years.

**RECORD NUMBER OF NATIONWIDE APPLICANTS**

A total of 25,300 graduates of U.S. medical schools, foreign schools, and osteopathic schools participated in this year’s Match Day. As in previous years, U.S. medical school seniors enjoyed a higher success rate than other applicants; nearly 94% matched and more than 86% of those students were assigned to one of their top three choices.

Fifty-three percent of the 156 UAB graduates will conduct their residency training in one of the primary care fields: internal medicine, family practice, pediatrics, or obstetrics/gynecology. Graduates will serve residencies in 65 hospitals or medical centers in 28 states and the District of Columbia. “There is a great need for more primary care physicians in this country, particularly in the rural South and inner cities,” Kathleen Nelson, MD, medical school senior associate dean for students, says.

Twenty-one percent of UAB’s graduates will serve residencies in general surgery or a surgical subspecialty, with 25% serving in other specialties.

Seventy-two percent of the 2005 graduates will complete residency training in the Southeast, down slightly from 76% last year; of these, 46% will remain in Alabama, up from 42% a year ago.

“Young physicians tend to establish permanent practices in the same state or region where they received postgraduate training,” Dr. Nelson adds. “More residents remaining in-state translates into better health care and better access to health care for all Alabamians.”

The proposed rule was published in the February 4 Federal Register. Public comments were accepted through April 5. For more information, visit the CMS Web site at: www.cms.hhs.gov.