

Sarah Bush Lincoln is the entity used when regional unity emerges in discussion in Coles County. It was Sarah Bush, led by Dick Lumpkin and Mel Lockard, that brought together small hospitals in Charleston and Mattoon to form a single Coles County-based health care organization.

That tells just a part of the story. Had SBL stopped there, it most certainly would no longer exist as SBL, just as the Mattoon and Charleston hospitals were on a path to something other than independence.

The Sarah Bush Lincoln story now broadens to encompass a sustainable 10-county footprint. Healthcare is integral to the success of any region. Sarah Bush success, then, plays a vital part to East Central Illinois life.

From my perch as a long-time newspaper reporter and publisher, I've wondered how the recent growth came together. How did this organization expand from \$300 million to \$550 million in six years? What can we learn from this?

I appreciate Jerry Esker spending an hour with me that's the basis for this post. It's longer than a typical blog, more than 1,900 words, and thus the bitly link that takes you to the story that I think will be of general interest.

In addition to Esker, I talked with Peter Bonutti and former SBL physician and administrator Ned Hoppin. Hoppin cites three turning points in the Sarah Bush history. The first is the formation of the hospital that led to its opening in 1977. Second, he said, is the development of the employed physician model, which allows healthcare providers to provide care while turning over the business end to administration.

Thirdly, Hoppin said former Sarah Bush Lincoln CEO Gary Barnett intentionally invested heavily in a radical organizational culture change that was implemented throughout the system. Even contractors were coached and expected to smile, to communicate and have pleasant interactions with those they encounter. A few people initially labeled it a bunch of hooey, Hoppin said, but over time it's become an accepted and expected part of being part of the SBL organization.

Now come the new opportunities that well position Sarah Bush Lincoln and the region it serves for the future. If Sarah Bush still was a single building in the

middle of a cornfield, it most certainly would not remain an independent stand-alone hospital. Organizations have to move forward with the world.

One thing that helped Jerry Esker is his understanding of the regional issues and opportunities. He's from Teutopolis and continues to have good relations with his roots. He's spent his professional career in Coles County. The appreciation for the regional sensitivities involved was important.

I've linked below a couple articles I used for reference. One is a short article on challenges in rural health care. Another is a story based on interviews with two nurses in Springfield, Mo., about the impact of treating coronavirus patients. I didn't spend much time with Esker on the coronavirus issue that's dominated healthcare for two-plus years. But looking at a pandemic from a health care provider perspective is something I think those of outside the industry should appreciate and find of interest. I found this an eye-opener article as to what it's like on the front lines of the coronavirus.

<https://sgfcitizen.org/health/springfield-nurses-shifted-careers-view-of-community/>

<https://www.aha.org/news/insights-and-analysis/2020-01-28-rural-health-care-big-challenges-require-big-solutions>

<https://www.aha.org/system/files/2019-02/rural-report-2019.pdf>

