

BeWell

SUMMER 25

A LAKEWOOD
HEALTH SYSTEM
PUBLICATION

“It feels
like
home.”

LAKEWOOD PATIENT
Brad Cantleberry

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MESSAGE FROM

Lisa Bjerga,

President & CEO
Lakewood
Health System



HOPE HAS A *New* HOME

There are moments in an organization's journey that feel truly transformational—when purpose, progress, and pride all come together. For Lakewood Health System, the opening of our new cancer center this fall is one of those moments. It represents more than a new building; it represents access, healing, and an unwavering commitment to our region. It represents hope.

And now, hope has a new home in Staples, Minnesota.

For nearly 90 years, Lakewood has been rooted in the belief that every person deserves access to outstanding primary care—care that is personal, local, and grounded in lasting relationships. That belief remains central to who we are today. In fact, our primary care foundation is what makes this next chapter possible. Because when cancer touches someone's life, it's often their family medicine provider who first listens, who first investigates, who first walks with them through the unknown.

The cancer center extends Lakewood's legacy of trusted care by offering greater access to advanced treatment, expertise, and support. Designed with patients in mind, it is

a place where innovation meets compassion—and healing begins close to home.

This project has been years in the making. It reflects the vision of many—providers, team members, donors, and community leaders—who believed rural patients shouldn't have to sacrifice quality for proximity. And I couldn't be prouder of how far we've come.

To everyone who played a role in making this dream a reality: thank you. Your belief in our mission is what fuels our progress.

To every patient who walks through our doors: know that you're not just entering a building—you're entering a place of belonging. A place built for you.

Together, we're proving rural healthcare can lead the way. And that yes, hope truly has a new home.

— Lisa Bjerga

President & CEO
Lakewood Health System

NEW PROVIDERS JOIN LAKEWOOD

VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO
READ THEIR FULL BIOS



**Levis
Apana, PMHNP**
Behavioral Health



**Frany
Dadhania, DO**
Rheumatologist



**Nathan
Dewey, MD**
Oncology—Internist
& Palliative Care



**Mattie
Ellenson, WHNP**
Women's Health



**Mitch
Fritz, PsyD**
Behavioral Health



**Rachel
Paryzek, PA-C**
Family Medicine



**Alexis
Willey, PMHNP**
Behavioral Health



Local Oncology Care, New Possibilities

Pictured left to right: The Lakewood oncology team including, Nathan Dewey, MD; Emily McGovern, MD; Wade Swenson, MD; Jessica Nybakken, AOCNP; Aquino Williams, MD (begins Sept. '25); and Mariah Nieman, FNP.

This fall, Lakewood Health System will open the doors to its new, state-of-the-art cancer center in Staples, Minnesota. But beyond the walls and technology, this center represents something much deeper: a new standard for how cancer care is delivered in rural communities.

At Lakewood, care doesn't start weeks after a referral—it starts right away. With short wait times, rapid scheduling, and all services under one roof, patients experience a level of access and coordination that's rare outside of a metro area. There's no need to travel far for exceptional treatment—Lakewood brings it all close to home.

The care team includes oncologists, Drs. Wade Swenson and Emily McGovern; palliative care specialist, Dr. Nathan Dewey; nurse practitioners, Jessica Nybakken, AOCNP, and Mariah Nieman, FNP; and two new additions this fall: oncologist/hematologist, Dr. Aquino Williams, and radiation oncologist, Dr. Sheilaine Mabanta. This collaborative, full-spectrum team ensures every patient receives timely, personalized care in one seamless location.

The new cancer center will house 14 infusion bays, radiation oncology services with a linear accelerator, in-house PET/CT imaging, and expanded clinic space for consults and exams. But what makes it truly special is the deeply personal, patient-first approach that defines Lakewood's culture.

"This cancer center is about bringing world-class care to where our patients live," said Dr. Swenson. "It means faster answers, familiar faces, and a team that truly knows you—not just as a patient, but as a person. That's the kind of care people in our communities deserve."

The Lakewood Cancer Center is more than a building – it's a promise that the very best cancer care doesn't have to be found in the city. It's here at home. And hope has a new home in central Minnesota.

It Feels Like Home.

When Brad Cantleberry was diagnosed with stage 4 large B-cell lymphoma in July 2024, his world shifted—but not in the way you might expect.

“I had come to the realization that this could be it,” Brad recalls. “Because tomorrow is not promised to any one of us. But from day one, I knew I was in the right place.”

His cancer journey started subtly. In late 2023, Brad began experiencing symptoms that felt like a lingering cold—persistent congestion, fatigue, and occasional shortness of breath. “I thought I was just dealing with something viral,” he said. “Nothing alarming at first.” But over the next couple of months, those symptoms grew more severe. He started losing weight and feeling run-down. Eventually, what began as a visit to Lakewood’s walk-in clinic led to a referral for further testing, including a biopsy.

The turning point came during a consultation with a pulmonologist in St. Cloud. “He looked at me and said, ‘This has a cancer flavor to it,’” Brad remembers. “But then he told me something I’ll never forget. He said, ‘You have one of the best cancer doctors in the entire Upper Midwest—just 25 minutes from your doorstep.’”

Brad with Lakewood oncologist, Dr. Wade Swenson.

That doctor was Dr. Wade Swenson, a medical oncologist at Lakewood Health System.

From the very beginning, Brad says his experience with Lakewood’s oncology team was personal, compassionate, and responsive. “I’m literally one person in Dr. Swenson’s care,” he said. “And yet, he makes me feel like I’m the only person in his care.”

While on vacation, Dr. Swenson took the time to review Brad’s results remotely—and the urgency was clear. He placed treatment orders immediately, ensuring Brad wouldn’t have to wait to begin care. That level of commitment meant the world to Brad and his family.

His nearly five-month chemotherapy regimen was intense. Along the way, he faced complications, including a bout of pancreatitis and critically low magnesium levels. But every



time, the Lakewood team was there—ready, responsive, and steady in their support. “They knew my name. They knew my story. And they knew how to care for me—not just treat me,” he said.

Brad’s ties to Lakewood go back more than three decades. He first became a patient in the early 90s under the care of Dr. Sarah Israelson and has continued his primary care relationship with Dr. Christine Albrecht, who also played a pivotal role in coordinating his care during cancer treatment. “It’s like being surrounded by family,” he said. “They know me, they care about me, and they fight for me.”

Throughout his journey, Brad relied heavily on his faith, his family, and the power of perspective. “Even in my hardest moments, I kept telling people, ‘Who’s got it better than me?’” he says with a smile. “And I was saying that long before I heard the word remission.”

Now in remission, Brad refers to his Lakewood team as “heaven-sent.” His voice cracks with emotion when he reflects on all he’s been through: “Of all the things you could ask for in this life—you could have all the money, all the toys, the best job—but none of it means anything without your health.”

And when asked to sum up what Lakewood has meant to him, his answer comes easily: ***“Regardless of diagnosis, regardless of outcome—it feels like home.”***

To anyone facing uncertainty, Brad offers this advice: “If you don’t know where to turn, pick up the phone and call Lakewood,” he says. “You’ll be home.”

Cancer care that feels like home starts here.
Call **218-894-8750** or visit **lakewoodhealthsystem.com**.



Brad and Lakewood oncology provider, Jessica Nybakken

Screening Smarter: Lakewood's New Era in Breast Imaging

Lakewood Health System is redefining what breast health looks like in rural Minnesota—with smarter technology, more advanced screening options, and expanded access to early detection tools for every woman.



**Less
squeeze.**
MORE EASE.

In July, Lakewood upgraded to the very latest Genius™ 3D Mammography system with the addition of SmartCurve™ technology and artificial intelligence–assisted image analysis. These enhancements offer a more comfortable, more accurate mammogram experience—especially for women with dense breast tissue.

SmartCurve™ technology uses a curved compression surface that mirrors the natural shape of the breast, significantly reducing discomfort without compromising image quality. Meanwhile, the AI-assisted software supports radiologists in interpreting images with even greater precision, helping to catch small changes earlier and reduce the chances of false positives or unnecessary callbacks.

And in August, Lakewood launched breast MRI services, further enhancing our diagnostic capabilities. Breast MRI is especially valuable for high-risk patients and those who require additional imaging following a mammogram. It's one of the most sensitive tools available for detecting breast cancer at its earliest stages.

By expanding both access and expertise, we're ensuring women across central Minnesota have the resources they need, close to home.

"When it comes to breast cancer, early detection truly makes all the difference," said Dr. Emily McGovern, Lakewood oncologist. "With these advanced tools, we're able to catch cancers sooner and with greater accuracy—giving women more options, more confidence, and ultimately, better outcomes."

Through collaboration between radiology, oncology, and primary care, we're not only improving detection—we're creating a comprehensive approach to breast health that puts patients first.

Get the clarity and comfort you deserve. Schedule your 3D mammogram today at Lakewood: 218-894-8465.



MOTION

Movement.
Balance.
Whole-Body Healing.

At **Lakewood Health System**, we believe your body is built for motion—strong, fluid, and free from limitation. That's why we've created **Lakewood Motion**, the region's most comprehensive offering of movement-based, musculoskeletal care.

Whether you're managing chronic pain, recovering from injury, or simply looking to move with more ease, our integrated team of experts is here to help. From orthopedic surgery and rehabilitation to chiropractic care, podiatry, osteopathic and regenerative medicine, massage therapy, and pain management, we work together to restore function, reduce discomfort, and keep your body in motion.

"What makes Lakewood Motion unique is how seamlessly we bring everything together—orthopedics, rehab, chiropractic, pain management, and more," said Josh Kempf, Doctor of Osteopathic & Regenerative Medicine. "It's a full spectrum of care, all in one place, designed to help patients move, heal, and get back to doing what they love."

Lakewood Motion is more than a service—it's a commitment to whole-body healing, so you can get back to doing what you love, with the freedom and confidence you deserve.

To find out more about Lakewood Motion care services, visit lakewoodhealthsystem.com or call 218-894-8259 to schedule.

Oncology Patient Fund Having an Impact

The Lakewood Oncology Patient Fund helps ease the financial burden for patients undergoing cancer treatment at Lakewood Health System—covering critical needs like travel, lodging, groceries, and utilities so patients can focus on healing.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our community, the Lakewood Foundation has already raised more than \$60,000 for this fund in 2025 alone, directly supporting patients and families right here in our region.



**GIVE
ORANGE**

If you'd like to make a difference in the lives of patients battling cancer in our region, scan the QR code or visit the Foundation page at lakewoodhealthsystem.com





Lakewood Health System
49725 County 83
Staples, MN 56479



POSTAL CUSTOMER

LAKEWOOD AGAIN NAMED A Top Workplace in Minnesota



Lakewood Health System has once again earned statewide recognition for being one of Minnesota's most outstanding employers.

For the sixth consecutive year, Lakewood was named one of the **Top 200 Workplaces in Minnesota by the Star Tribune**, based on employee feedback collected by Energage. The rankings reflect workplace engagement, culture, and overall satisfaction.



In addition, Lakewood was honored with the 2025 Exceptional Hospital Workplace Award from the Minnesota Hospital Association. This award celebrates organizations that go above and beyond to support team members and foster an environment of purpose, collaboration, and trust.

"We are honored to receive these recognitions," said Lisa Bjerga, President and CEO. "Our people are the heart of Lakewood. Their passion and dedication are what allow us to provide personalized care every day."

From the newest team members to those who have been here for decades, we celebrate every individual who makes Lakewood a place where great people want to work—and where great care begins.

Be part of something exceptional. Visit our careers page at lakewoodhealthsystem.com.



Some of Lakewood's newest team members completed their general orientation with a quick snap on the famous orange couch.