

# Health care shortage should be addressed

Earlier this year, the city of Madison spent a better part of a Saturday strategically planning for the municipality's future. We divided into groups focusing on different areas of the city. Transportation; Infrastructure; Cultural Amenities; Police and Fire; and Economic Development were among the primary focal points.

Our economic development committee analyzed the city's strengths and weaknesses and then prioritized the plan for future growth. Among our strengths included one of the best educational systems in the southern United States; a city that is safe; a city that shows well showcasing beautifully landscaped neighborhoods; and a proactive and stable political leadership. Our biggest concern and most glaring weakness came in the area of health care.

As a result, our highest priority was to do everything in our ability as a community to obtain a hospital with emergency services.

Fast forward to Nov. 18 when we applauded the news of St. Dominic's plans to build a \$121 million 71-bed hospital in Madison County. The statistics are embarrassing when 86 percent of our county's residents are leaving Madison County for healthcare. The current projections for 2025 are for every 1,000 residents, there would be available one half hospital bed. Under any evaluation, this is unsatisfactory. Quite often, we must compete with Rankin County for the shrinking number of Economic Development projects coming down the pike.

Consider the following: Rankin County has three licensed acute hospitals with 355 beds serving a population base of 143,000. Madison County has one hospital with 67 beds serving 90,000 citizens. Our 2025 population projection is 128,000, a 43 percent increase!

Madison County is one of the most underserved counties in the entire state for hospital care. This is a weakness we can no longer accept.

The Brookings Institution published a report categorizing the local economic impact of "Eds and Meds" and how policies to expand universities and hospitals affect metropol-



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itan economies. The report began with this declaration: "Economic development policymakers are increasingly looking to hospitals and universities as potential drivers of economic development in metropolitan areas, especially in central cities."

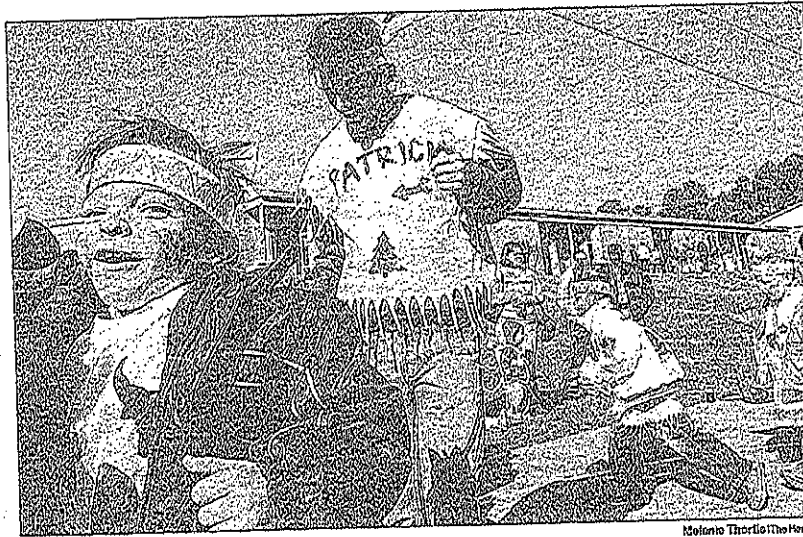
With Tulane University now in Madison's sights, we cannot ignore any longer our health care shortfalls. It is no secret that our mayor and city council want a satellite campus of Tulane with up to 5,000 students. With the current hospital facilities, it is difficult to make a case for expanded academic facilities. In this adversarial economy that we find ourselves engulfed, projects as Tulane's and St. Dominic's are far and few.

Should the St. Dominic's proposal be denied, here is what is at stake. Over the three years of construction, a \$10 million payroll each year would result from the \$18-\$20 per hour construction jobs. Once opened, the new hospital would expense \$8 million plus annually for the 351 projected staff. This is exclusive of physicians.

When you factor in the multiplier effect and the additional jobs created, the economic impact on Madison and Madison County is quite significant.

To insure the project is not denied, we the citizens of Madison and Madison County must have our voices heard. Petitions will be circulating throughout the community in addition to being able to sign a petition online at [www.mystdommadison.com](http://www.mystdommadison.com). It is difficult to project in this economy that a greater economic development opportunity will surface in 2010. The administrative hearing is scheduled for Feb. 3-17, 2010. This is one time wherein we can control our own destiny!

Steve Vassallo heads the Swedish-American Chamber of Commerce based in Madison.



Melania Theriot/The Herald

Austin Reimera dances around with mentor Patrick Wood and classmates at a 2008 Ann E. Smith Elementary School Thanksgiving picnic. Wood was volunteering at the school as part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Mentoring Program.

# Give thanks today and rest of the year

Editor's note: This column originally was published Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 27, 2008.

Give thanks. What a simple little two-word sentence, yet I submit that, if followed, it would change not only our personal lives, relationships and homes but the community around us.

Here in America, we have a day set aside for giving thanks — today, the last Thursday in November, Thanksgiving.

Yet how often do we give thanks? Do we take for granted the miracle of life, the air in our lungs, the loved ones we hold dear, the food on our tables, our homes, our churches, our health?

The answers are "yes" to the latter and "not nearly enough" to the first.

Take a deep breath. If you can do that, be thankful you are alive.

Most of us are fortunate enough to not worry too much over where our next meal is coming from. Indeed, my family has been known to complain when it is "leftover night." Yet in many places, there isn't enough food to go around once. So be thankful for leftovers.

Are there people in this world who you love? Are you loved, whether you



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deserve it or not? If so, be thankful.

And be thankful for the sometimes unpleasant evidence your loved ones are in your home. Dirty socks? Toothpaste in the sink? They were left by my kids, so I'll be thankful.

Look up. If you are now looking at a ceiling, that means you have a roof over your head, so give thanks.

You're reading this in today's edition of *The Madison County Herald*, which means that you are literate. That means someone took the time to teach you how to read. So be thankful for our schools and our teachers.

The *Herald* is published because we live in a country that values freedom of speech so much that it is the First Amendment of our Constitution. So when you get tired of reading opposing viewpoints and seeing letters to the editor debate issues back and forth, remember that you are blessed to be living in a free country and give thanks.

We also have freedom of religion in America, so when you enter the house of worship of your choice, include the

fact that you are free to worship as you choose in your prayer of thanks.

Often, we become truly thankful not when times are good but when the economy is shaky. If you have a job, be thankful for it. If you are searching for a job, be thankful in advance for opportunities.

Be thankful for the times when what you have is just enough. Be thankful for a full tank of gas, a week's worth of groceries, a warm home and a good community.

Be thankful for adversity. Ease isn't much of a teacher, but difficulty is. We cannot conquer challenges without becoming stronger individually and as a people. Adversity, in many ways, makes us who we are.

And be thankful for now, this very instant, for seconds linked together is what life is made of.

The list of things we are thankful for could stretch longer than I have ink and paper to cover. The thought for today, Thanksgiving Day, is that each of us has been blessed in some way, and for that blessing, we give thanks.

The *Herald* wishes you and yours the happiest of Thanksgivings.

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