

CARING FOR THE 'WHOLE PERSON'

Meridian Health Services Expanding Impact

By Matt Ottinger

A Delaware County-based operation is quickly becoming a ubiquitous feature of Indiana's healthcare landscape, seeing notable growth across the state.

But Meridian Health Services is hardly a new endeavor. In fact, the company will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year.

Having begun with a focus on children's behavioral health, Meridian has since expanded to adult medical care, substance use disorder, rehab services (both inpatient and outpatient), primary care, family medicine, pediatrics, internal medicine, OB/GYN, dentistry and more.

During an online interview, President and CEO Seth Warren shares what he sees from his office as he observes the Muncie landscape, dotted by established and potential partner organizations.

"I can look out to my window right here and see (IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital)," he relays. "We're right in the shadow of IU Ball and that's awesome. One of the benefits is the relationship we've got with key healthcare providers and other organizations here in Muncie."

Meridian Health has roughly 60 locations in nearly 40 of Indiana's counties. Furthermore,

it employs about 1,200 overall with 459 of those in Delaware County, serving about 48,000 patients per year.

On the 'whole'

"What we talk about is the 'whole-person health,' Warren shares. "That we're meeting both the physical needs of patients with our physicians and our provider services in terms of the primary care. Plus, we continue to do the mental health services, so we have therapists and psychiatry and a number of services for that, and then we've got some social services."

Warren, who has an esteemed and extensive resume of executive experience leading hospitals, came to Meridian Health just over 18 months ago. For him, the draw of working in mental health and addiction was an impetus, and he reveals his own family has dealt with such challenges.

"A lot of what we do is identifying issues outside of the treatment plan that we've got that need services," he imparts. "So, we have some housing services in terms of group homes and we do some foster care placements for the state."

He concedes it can be a challenge as the healthcare field is experiencing shortages in not just nursing, but all provider areas.

"Healthcare is not an easy field," he asserts.

"It's 24/7, seven days a week, 365 days a year. It can be a taxing job. You do have people who are working holidays and they're missing kids' events. While it is a very rewarding profession at times – nursing and all the associated healthcare services – it can also be very taxing."

Helping the young and vulnerable

Some of Meridian Health's most engaging efforts are geared toward children in its communities. The Give Kids a Smile program, for instance, includes providing free dental exams, education and preventive services to children ages 1-14 in honor of National Children's Dental Health Month in February.

"Sometimes it's their first and only visit to a dentist, and we want to help identify those issues and build an ongoing relationship with them so they can get the care they need," Warren relays.

The company puts on a light show in Muncie during the Christmas season, he adds, and any donations received go to its Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) – a regional center located within its larger Suzanne Gresham Center.

"The (CAC) is one of note because it's for children who have suffered trauma, sometimes physical abuse, sexual abuse or have been a witness to severe trauma," Warren explains. "It's an opportunity where we work with law



Providing free dental care opportunities for kids as well as taking part in various give-back events illustrate how Meridian Health Services invests in its communities in Delaware County and beyond.

enforcement and the court systems to interview children and give them a safe space to meet with law enforcement and then to be able to get the therapy they need following these events.”

Warren says that helping provide general healthcare for children is a focus, evidenced by “partnerships with a number of school systems, where we provide nursing, therapy and in-school services.”

Among its other endeavors in the Muncie area is Fam Fest, a back-to-school event offering free health screenings, school physicals, vaccinations and other activities. Project SAFE also provides free health screenings and educates youth on the dangers of substance abuse. Additional activities outside of Delaware County include the Suicide Prevention & Awareness Walk in New Castle, Backyard BBQ in Anderson, City Fit fitness fair in Richmond, Halloween-themed Well-o-Ween health and wellness celebration in Elwood and more.

Having a ‘Ball,’ making an impact

The Ball name likely remains the most recognized name in Delaware County. The five Ball brothers were known industrialists and philanthropists who started Ball State University in 1918. Warren points to another Ball legacy as being a chief convener for organizations like his to help make maximum impact.

“The Ball Brothers Foundation is a huge asset to this community because they really do have Muncie’s and Delaware County’s best interests at heart,” he declares. “They’re (using) their funds and the relationships to really build the community.”

Warren adds, “As I’ve come to know, Muncie is a very proud community; (citizens are) very proud of what this community has to offer.”

Deep, caring roots

A major way Meridian Health serves its communities is by identifying needs. And the organization views other medical entities less as competitors, but more as potential partners in providing more comprehensive services.

Warren points to recent expansions in the organization’s dentistry operations as an example. Locales like Fort Wayne have benefited from Meridian Health’s focus on identifying needs and building on – or continuing – others’ operations.

“We’ve been doing this for a number of years,” he says. “My predecessor (longtime President/CEO Hank Milius, who retired in 2023) and the organization long before I came on board, we were doing some of this. We are seen as one of the organizations that these health systems reach out to and say, ‘Hey, would you be interested in partnering with us?’”

He adds, “It’s all of us coming together without ego or without trying to look out for each individual entity’s best interest and say, ‘What can we do together to meet the need?’”

Meridian Health Services is also the presenting sponsor of Ball State PBS’s *Health is Wealth* television show – a locally produced wellness program exploring health-related topics.

Warren believes the organization’s entrenched history as an anchor in the area is ultimately a catalyst for its ability to be a force for good.

“We have roots here and it’s enabled us to be a key community player,” he concludes. “If we were in Indianapolis or based in Fort Wayne or some of the other communities, we may sort of get lost just due to sheer size and scope, where here we have a large presence and are very tied into the community.”

RESOURCE: Seth Warren, Meridian Health Services, at www.meridianhs.org



Born in Indiana. Built for Indiana.

Boyce is a proud member of the Indiana State Chamber of Commerce and provides software and forms to over 1,200 Indiana schools, municipalities, libraries, and utilities.



www.boycesystems.com