



News from LABORATORY ALLIANCE of Central New York, LLC



How Far We've Come: 1998-2017

By Anne Marie Mullin, CEO

At the close of this year, Laboratory Alliance will have been in business for 20 years. For those of us who have been here from the beginning, or for a majority of those two decades, it's been both a tremendous challenge and a labor of love. Few people are given the awesome opportunity in their

professional careers to help build a company from the ground level up. I, and a number of colleagues, past and present, have been grateful for the opportunity.

We can best see how far we have come by looking back to the beginning. Although the company was incorporated in January 1998, "the beginning" takes us back to late 1995. That was when the laboratory managers at St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center (Shirley Boyd), Crouse Hospital (Nancy Sniffen) and Community-General Hospital (Bob Groman) began talking with one another about the idea of a consolidated lab in response to the many overtures that the national reference labs were making to administration at each hospital. Shirley, Nancy and Bob felt certain that, by combining forces, a consolidated entity would be financially attractive. With the approval of the hospital CEO's, the Hospital Executive Council (HEC), headed by Ron Lagoe, became very involved. Besides looking at each hospital's potential contribution to such a company, the HEC secured funding in order to engage a consultant – Chi Laboratory Systems Inc. of Ann Arbor, Mich. – in a feasibility study in 1996. The favorable feasibility study led to the drafting of a financial analysis/business plan for the future company by Price Waterhouse Coopers.

Once the hospitals voted in favor of the company's creation and operating agreements were executed, an executive director (Gint Taoras) was hired in 1997. A finance director followed. Their offices were originally located within the downtown offices of the HEC. Following the recommendation of Chi Laboratory Systems to not locate a central (Core) laboratory within any one of the three owner hospitals, Shirley, Nancy, Bob and Ron Lagoe looked at various buildings. A great offer from the Metropolitan Development Association led to the purchase of a building in Electronics Business Park in Liverpool. Its close proximity to the three hospitals, the New York State Thruway and the Syracuse airport, along with the Park's designation as a New York State Empire Zone, made it the ideal location. The three hospitals invested a million dollars in the renovation and build-out of the present-day Operations Center – a building that had once served as the cafeteria and human resources offices of the former General Electric complex.

All the employees of the three hospital lab departments were offered employment with the new company if they so chose. Many remained in their technical positions as medical technologists, cytotechnologists, histotechnicians, transcriptionists, etc., while

others accepted newly created positions in Human Resources, Finance, Marketing, Information Systems and Customer Service. In total, the new company started with 224 employees on its first day, Jan. 1, 1998, with Shirley Boyd serving as director of operations, Nancy Sniffen as director of outreach and Bob Groman as director of human resources.

Reconstruction and set up of the Operations Center laboratory was completed in early 1999 and it was inspected by the New York State Department of Health in March 1999 and issued a permit. The footprints of the three hospital labs, in the meantime, were downsized. They became known as Rapid Response Laboratories (RRLs). Managers were hired for each of them. The Microbiology Department of each hospital lab was consolidated into the central (Core) lab in Liverpool. Each hospital's Cytology Department was also consolidated and it, initially, moved to the eighth floor of the former Physicians Office Building on the campus of St. Joseph's Hospital. Similarly, the Histology Departments were consolidated and, initially, relocated to 600 East Genesee Street. Later on, Cytology and Histology were moved into the Operations Center in Liverpool to unify our technical services under one roof and to reap more of the tax benefits of the Empire Zone.

Pathology service agreements were executed with the three owner hospital-based pathology practices and, from them, medical directors of each RRL were named. Michael O'Leary, M.D., who had once served for nearly 20 years as chief of pathology at Community-General Hospital, became the medical director of the Operations Center lab and later assumed the title as chief medical officer of the company. He retired at the end of 2015, having served for eight years as our CEO following the unexpected death of his predecessor, Frank Kearns, in early December 2007.

The significant growth of the company's community-based business (physician practices, long term care facilities, regional hospitals, etc.) and the concurrent need to dedicate as much floor space at the Operations Center to patient testing led to the establishment in February 2006 of our Corporate Offices on Buckley Road in Syracuse. Administration, Finance, Information Systems, Customer Service and Marketing are housed there.

Looking back, I can say that consolidating three hospital lab departments into one company was a success, although not without its share of speed bumps along the way. To borrow a lab phrase, "the experiment worked." Today, we employ about 410 people, run four NYS-licensed laboratories, operate 12 Patient Service Centers in three counties, drive over one million miles annually, collect blood specimens on more than 200,000 patients in our service centers, area nursing homes and in the homes of homebound patients and we perform approximately 10.7 million tests a year. To all my colleagues and affiliates, I say "thank you." Your dedication to excellence in laboratory medicine and your commitment to put the patient at the center of all we do has been the secret of our success. We've indeed come a long way!