

# THE SUN CHRONICLE

Attleboro-North Attleboro, Mass.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2014

\$1 newsstand



MIKE GEORGE / THE SUN CHRONICLE

Sturdy Memorial Hospital president and CEO Linda Shyavitz will officially hand over her duties to Dr. Bruce Auerbach, a longtime Sturdy physician and administrator, on Saturday.

## The end of an era

After nearly 30 years at Sturdy, Shyavitz to retire, Auerbach to take helm this week

BY GEORGE W. RHODES  
SUN CHRONICLE STAFF

**ATTLEBORO** — Something will soon happen at Sturdy Memorial Hospital that hasn't happened in almost 30 years.

A new president and CEO will take his seat in the first-floor, corner office next to the main door of the 100-year-old Park Street institution whose financial stability, medical reputation and physical plant has grown large under outgoing

**In my view, it's a natural progression in my career.**

— Dr. Bruce Auerbach

chief Linda Shyavitz.

Dr. Bruce Auerbach, 64, a physician and administrator at Sturdy for 26 years and currently its vice

SEE **STURDY**, PAGE A2 ►

# STURDY: Longtime president, CEO retiring

FROM PAGE A1

president, chief medical officer and medical director, will officially take the reins Saturday.

Auerbach says he aims to maintain Shyavitz's legacy and expand on it.

Shyavitz, who's led the hospital to unprecedented financial success, which in turn led to improvements in medical programs, investments in new specialties and new technology, as well as a bigger and more modern building, is retiring after 28 years and five months on the job.

Her departure and Auerbach's appointment were first announced in August, but the day is now here.

Some might think Auerbach is in the same position as the person who will eventually take over for a guy like New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady, a future Hall of Famer who led his team to new heights.

Replacing a legend can't be easy.

And in the world of hospital administration, Shyavitz's record of achievement that includes 28 consecutive years of budget surpluses — often \$10 million at a whack — certainly makes her a legend, and would surely put her in a hospital administrators hall of fame.

But Auerbach, who was recruited by Shyavitz to run Sturdy's emergency medical services just 1 1/2 years after her own arrival in 1985, said the job is one he's very familiar with after working closely with the boss for decades, and he's eager to assume the role.

"In my view, it's a natural progression in my career," Auerbach said. "Under Linda's tutelage and guidance over the years, I think I've gained significant insights into the role.

"I'm really looking forward to following in Linda's footsteps. It's an opportunity to continue the legacy that's been put in place, to continue to provide the services the community expects and to see where we may be able to expand them."

Auerbach said he and Shyavitz share administrative philosophies, including a team approach in running the hospital, which involves working closely with doctors, nurses and Sturdy's other professionals.

The basic aims will be the same.

Expenses have to be controlled and revenue needs to be enhanced.

Both are especially challenging in the rapidly changing health care industry, but both are essential, Auerbach said.

Above all, Sturdy needs to remain "a locally controlled, independent organization," he said.

Auerbach got his bachelor and medical degrees from Temple University in Philadelphia.

He chose emergency medicine as his specialty because it exposed him to a wide variety of medical problems and is fast-paced.

The choice has suited him well for the many roles he's taken on in his almost three decades at Sturdy, and there are no regrets, he said.

"I chose a more action-oriented field and I never looked back," Auerbach said.

He served his residency in emer-



MIKE GEORGE / THE SUN CHRONICLE

Sturdy Memorial Hospital's Dr. Bruce Auerbach will take over president and CEO duties from Linda Shyavitz this week. Shyavitz, who is retiring, held the role for 28 years.

gency medicine at Los Angeles County Medical Center, where he was immersed in the controlled chaos of a big city emergency room, where gunshot and knife wounds rolled into treatment rooms as often as kids with broken arms.

That experience has been invaluable, Auerbach said.

"I found it to be great preparation for the tasks I've taken on here," he said.

Beyond the challenge of making the right decisions at the right time in life-and-death situations, his duties as an emergency room doctor exposed Auerbach to almost every facet of hospital operations.

"It's a field that lets you learn more about what goes on in every aspect of the hospital because you're dealing with every department," he said. "You have to juggle many things at once. You have to learn how to apportion your time and keep a lot of balls in the air. It's been great for the role I'll be assuming."

The decision-making skills he learned as an emergency room doctor in L.A. and at Sturdy were gradually enhanced by membership on the hospital's budget committee, assignments to oversee the implementation new medical departments and the construction of millions of dollars worth of new facilities over the past 15 years.

He said the total experience has given him a deep knowledge base about every aspect of Sturdy, which celebrated its 100th birthday in 2013.

"It's been a growing and learning experience through the whole process," Auerbach said. "I think it's prepared me quite well."

For her part, Shyavitz says she is ready to move on to the next phase of her life.

And with the change just days away, there are no second thoughts.

"I'm very decisive. I'm not a second-thought kind of person," she said during an interview that included Auerbach and Sturdy board Chairman Tim O'Neill. "If I think a decision is good, I don't look back."

And for Shyavitz, retiring now, at 67, is the right decision.

If anyone knows how short life can be, it's a hospital administrator who oversees a facility where life and death is the stuff of daily work.

It's time to do the things she's had to sacrifice to make the hospital what it has become.

"Right now, I go all day and all night — and time is finite," she said. "I don't have time for all the things I need to do."

In an earlier Sun Chronicle report, she said there are books to read, traveling to be done and passions to pursue.

But, she won't ever be that far from what she describes as her "family" at Sturdy.

"I don't plan on dropping off the face of the Earth," Shyavitz said. "I won't have daily contact, but I plan to stay in touch on a regular basis. It's been a family for 28 years."

And as an added endorsement for the facility she loves, Shyavitz said she won't be going anywhere else for health care.

"I get my medical care here, and I will still get my medical care here," Shyavitz said.

O'Neill said the decision to select Auerbach wasn't difficult.

Continuity is crucial in a well-run operation, he said.

"What this place doesn't need is someone coming in and blowing it up," he said. "It's running just fine."

He and the board have great confidence in Auerbach, and the goal is clear.

"I've always believed the board of directors job is to put the right people in place to run the hospital. We've had that for 28 years, and we'll have that for the foreseeable future."

Shyavitz is also confident in Auerbach's abilities.

"This is a great community hospital, it's a great medical community," she said. "We've begun our second hundred years, and its going to be more of the same."

**GEORGE W. RHODES** can be reached at 508-236-0432, at [grhodes@thesunchronicle.com](mailto:grhodes@thesunchronicle.com) and on Twitter @SCAttleboro.