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AltaPointe merges with Cheaha Regional Mental Health Center

By: RON SIVAK | August 10, 2016

The merger of AltaPointe Health Systems and Cheaha Regional Mental Health Center became official this month, according to a news release, making AltaPointe the largest and most comprehensive behavioral health care provider in Alabama. This is the second such merger for AltaPointe, which in 2014 combined with Baldwin County Mental Health Center.

CRMHC, headquartered in Sylacauga, will now operate under the name and corporate umbrella of AltaPointe, which is headquartered in Mobile.

“AltaPointe began a new and exciting era this week,” Tuerk Schlesinger, AltaPointe CEO, said. “The southwest and central northeast regions of Alabama now have a better, broader-based system in place to provide additional, as well as more accessible, behavioral health care services.”

The merger came about in part because of decreased and stagnant funding for behavioral health care services. Major changes on the horizon for the behavioral health care industry that will require increased financial resources were also a catalyst.

The merger expanded AltaPointe’s service area (under Alabama Act 310) of Mobile, Washington and Baldwin counties to include Clay, Coosa, Randolph and Talladega counties. With this merger, AltaPointe will employ 1,450 and provide treatment to more than 30,000 individuals annually.

“AltaPointe welcomes its new employees, patients and partners in the Sylacauga region,” Schlesinger said. “Together, with our existing employees and partners, AltaPointe can achieve great things for individuals living with mental illness, substance abuse and developmental disability, who we serve. With an expanded system, we can respond more effectively to changes in health care.”

“This is not a merger like one might read about in the for-profit world,” Schlesinger said. “There was neither a buyout nor a downsizing, and there were no layoffs; in fact, there will be an expansion of services and an increase in the use of advanced technology.”

According to Cindy Atkinson, who served as CRMHC’s executive director before the merger, the center found itself searching for ways to provide services in the face of diminishing financial support.

“We believe joining forces with AltaPointe will build one single, stronger, more efficient organization that will withstand the changing health care environment and better serve our communities,” she said.

“Over a period of nearly two years, the AltaPointe and CRMHC boards of directors thoroughly investigated the needs of both organizations and recognized the wisdom of the merger,” Schlesinger said. “They were diligent, patient and understanding as we pored over the multitude of details required to bring about the merger.”

Atkinson, now the AltaPointe associate executive director of community

mental health for the Sylacauga region, went on to say the former CRMHC already has begun utilizing AltaPointe's resources. The merger gives the Sylacauga region access to AltaPointe's 25 full-time psychiatrists and 10 psychiatric certified registered nurse practitioners, who regularly use telepsychiatry to provide services remotely. Before the merger, CRMHC employed two part-time psychiatrists.

AltaPointe's unique educational and clinical collaboration with the University of South Alabama College of Medicine also benefits the Sylacauga region through the support of USA's psychiatry residents, who train at AltaPointe's facilities.

"AltaPointe benefits from the merger by being able to expand its centralized administrative system so that it can reallocate resources into services and grow stronger in scope," Schlesinger said.

Commercial real estate moves

Per a news release, Island House Hotel, a 161-room beachfront, full-service property in Orange Beach, has begun a comprehensive renovation following the summer season and will be converted to a DoubleTree by Hilton. The property is located at 26650 Perdido Beach Blvd.

Owned by Atlanta-based Hotel Equities, the holding company recently appointed Wesley Ludloff general manager of the hotel. Ludloff has responsibility and oversight for the operations, food and beverage, sales and marketing, and revenue management strategies of the property.

"We are delighted to bring one of our top general managers to this well-appointed, full-service, beachfront property," Joe Reardon, senior vice president of marketing and development for Hotel Equities, said. "The amenities include a newly developed 6,000-square-foot conference center that will accommodate up to 250 people, private beach access, a pool, a full-service restaurant and bar with room service options. This will be Hotel Equities' second DoubleTree opening in the summer of 2016."

The Mattress Store has leased 2,000 square feet of retail space at Bowdoin Place, located at 705 Highway 43 in Saraland. Stirling Properties leasing executive Nathan Handmacher represented the property owner.

Dallas, Texas-based Wingstop has leased 1,360 square feet of restaurant space at Westgate Pavilion Shopping Center at 7450 Airport Blvd. in Mobile, with an anticipated opening in November. Andrew Dickman, leasing executive with Stirling Properties, worked for the tenant. John Vallas with Vallas Realty represented the property owner. This marks the first Mobile-area location for the chicken wings chain restaurant.

Aloha Hospitality, parent company of local restaurateur Bob Baumhower — who owns and operates a family of eateries across the state including Baumhower's sports-themed restaurants; Dauphin's, a high-end eatery in downtown Mobile; and Bob's Victory Grill — has plans to open a new fast-casual, self-service themed established called "Wings U." Healthy selections such as quinoa, kale and brown rice will be offered along with traditional wing fare. The restaurant, which possibly will be situated in the Lower Dauphin area, will open in late 2016 or early 2017.

Druhan & Tyler Law Firm recently leased a 2,310-square-foot building at 1106 Dauphin St. in Mobile, with occupancy slated for this month. Justin Toomey, associate broker with Stirling Properties, represented the property owner. Niki Coker and Jay Roberds with NAI-Mobile worked for the tenant.

According to Marietta Urquhart with White-Spunner Realty, a 5,000-square-foot office site situated at 3224 Executive Park Circle in Mobile was purchased by a local accounting firm for $375,000.

A local investor has purchased a 6,844-square-foot self-storage facility located at 708 Lakeside Drive in Mobile. Angela McArthur, Stirling Properties broker associate, represented the buyer. Nathan Handmacher, Stirling Properties senior sales and leasing executive, represented the seller. Surety Land Title Inc. handled the title work.

Per M.J. Baxter & Associates, and working with the Merrill P. Thomas Co., seven lots on Schillinger Road off Airway Park Drive were acquired by the Mobile Airport Authority for $150,000.