

SPRING 2024

Thrive

For Your **Whole** Life | Expanded care from Edgewater Health





Hello readers,

I'm so excited and appreciative that you're taking the time to read our latest edition of Thrive – our 50th Anniversary edition!

Dedicated to honoring and celebrating 50 years of Edgewater Health, this edition also promotes our upcoming 50th Anniversary Gala, scheduled for Saturday, June 1, at beautiful Duneland Falls. During the gala, we will recognize a number of different honorees, as well as enjoy live music, speakers, food, and more.

One of the awards being presented is for the late Dr. Okechi Nwabara, who spent decades improving and expanding healthcare services at Edgewater. Dr. Nwabara will be posthumously awarded the Spirit of Hope Award, a new honor that will be awarded to someone annually moving forward. Former NFL star and founder of startup Alkeme Health Ryan Mundy will be the celebrity keynote speaker during the event.

If you haven't yet, make sure to purchase tickets or become a sponsor at <https://edgewaterhealth.org/50th>. And a huge thank you to all those who have already stepped up to donate or become a sponsor of this gala. We could not host this event without your support!

In this edition, we also promote Edgewater's collaboration with My Brother's Keeper Alliance (MBK Alliance), an initiative funded by the Obama Foundation and committed to supporting boys and young men of color across the country. Local leaders have been working tirelessly to get this Northwest Indiana chapter off the ground and properly

certified with national. Edgewater is proud to officially serve as the Backbone Organization for our area's MBK Alliance group, which spans Lake County.

At Edgewater, we have many different affinity groups that all oversee different priorities and serve different needs. Don't miss the article where we highlight three of these groups – Ambassadors for Edgewater, the Women's Health Advisory Council, and First Ladies Initiative.

Finally, we go through some of the most important milestones in Edgewater's history, including our founding, the launch of the state of Indiana's first crisis-stabilization center, the introduction of physical healthcare for a more integrated healthcare approach, and so much more.

As we commemorate Edgewater's remarkable 50-year journey, let us not only celebrate our many past achievements but also embrace the limitless possibilities of our future. At this pivotal time, we reaffirm our commitment to innovation, compassion, and excellence. Together, let's envision the next 50 years as an opportunity to redefine our possibilities and continue our mission of empowering individuals to THRIVE. Here's to the legacy we've built and the bright horizons awaiting us ahead.

Sincerely yours,

Danita Johnson Woods



DR. DANITA JOHNSON WOODS
PRESIDENT AND CEO
EDGEWATER HEALTH



We have some exciting news to share!

We now have a new, main number at Edgewater Health!

844-4-Edgewater or simply dial **844-433-4392** to make an appointment or reach key people in our organization.



edgewater
health



JOIN US AT THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY GALA

Caring in the Key of Life

Edgewater Health proudly extends an invitation to the 50th Anniversary Gala, scheduled for Saturday, June 1, at Duneland Falls. The event promises an evening of gratitude, celebration, and collective commitment to integrated healthcare.

AN EVENING OF ELEGANCE

The festivities will commence with a reception at 6 pm, followed by dinner at 7 pm (Central time). Formal attire is required to attend. Shades of blue or gold are encouraged.

Entertainment will be provided by The Javon Watson Experience, R&B/Soul musician from Chicago.

HONORING REMARKABLE CONTRIBUTIONS

We'll pay tribute to a few local leaders who exemplify dedication and heartfelt compassion in everyday work. Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch, Kenneth J. Allen and Roosevelt Haywood III will each be honored with an award.

IN MEMORIAM: DR. OKECHI NWABARA

Among the honorees at the 50th Anniversary Gala will be the late Dr. Okechi N. Nwabara, who will be posthumously awarded the Spirit of Hope Award for his profound impact on Edgewater and the community. To support the Dr. Okechi N. Nwabara Spirit of Hope Fund, visit edgewaterhealth.org/hope

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: RYAN MUNDY

Former NFL superstar and founder of startup Alkeme Health, Ryan Mundy will be the celebrity keynote speaker. We will also present him with an award in recognition of his outstanding contributions.

YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

Your presence at this 50th Anniversary Gala honors our past and strengthens our commitment to future endeavors. By purchasing tickets, donating, or becoming a sponsor, you play a crucial role in sustaining Edgewater's mission of providing culturally competent, high-quality healthcare services to our community.

RESERVE YOUR PLACE TODAY

Join us in commemorating 50 years of compassionate care, as we embrace the promise of the next 50 years. Reserve your place at the 50th Anniversary Gala and be part of this celebration of resilience, dedication, and hope.

EDGEWATER HEALTH

50th Anniversary

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For information, or to purchase tickets, donate, or to become an official gala sponsor, visit edgewaterhealth.org/50th or call 219-885-4264, ext. 2312

50 Years of Excellence

The 50th Anniversary
Gala Speakers and Awardees



With the stage set for celebration and reflection amid Edgewater Health's 50th Anniversary anticipation is also brimming for its semi-centennial event: the 50th Anniversary Gala on Saturday, June 1, 2024.

The spotlight shines brightly on the Gala's honorees and celebrity keynote speaker, individuals who have left an indelible mark on the organization and surrounding community.



Ryan Mundy:

CELEBRITY KEYNOTE SPEAKER AND TRAILBLAZER AWARD

The Celebrity Keynote Speaker and recipient of Edgewater Health's Trailblazer Award, former NFL superstar Ryan Mundy embodies the spirit of innovation and resilience. Beyond his accomplishments on the football field as a former player for the Steelers, Giants, and Bears, Mundy's commitment to wellness and advocacy shines through his work as the Founder of Alkeme Health – a digital health platform that features content from Black practitioners and experts in wellness, psychology, and mindfulness.

Through Alkeme Health, he has leveraged his platform to amplify diverse voices in healthcare and promote holistic well-being.



Dr. Okechi Nnadozie Nwabara:

SPIRIT OF HOPE AWARD (POSTHUMOUS)

At the heart of the Gala stands the late Dr. Okechi N. Nwabara, a visionary and pillar of Edgewater's journey. One of the former Chief Medical Officers, Dr. Nwabara spearheaded the integration of primary care services into Edgewater's holistic approach to healthcare. His foresight laid the foundation for the organization's integration of behavioral and physical healthcare, a paradigm shift that revolutionized patient care in Northwest Indiana.

"Dr. Nwabara believed in treating the whole person, understanding that mental and physical health are interconnected," said Karen Bishop Morris, Chief Development Officer at Edgewater Health.

Dr. Nwabara's posthumous recognition with the inaugural Spirit of Hope Award speaks to his enduring influence and commitment to lifetime service. His dedication to healing, even amid the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, also reflects the essence of his legacy.



Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch:
LEADERSHIP AWARD

Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch is a tireless advocate for mental health and addiction services across the state of Indiana and beyond. Throughout her tenure, she has championed initiatives that enhance access to vital resources and support for individuals grappling with mental illness and addiction.

From advocating to expand the 988 Crisis Hotline and co-chairing the Indiana Mental Health Roundtable, to supporting landmark mental health legislation, Lt. Governor Crouch's leadership has been instrumental in fostering resilience and hope within many communities. Her commitment to public service embodies the spirit of the Gala's theme: Caring in the Key of Life.



Kenneth J. Allen:
HUMANITARIAN AWARD

As the founder and principal at Allen Law Group, Kenneth J. Allen's legal prowess is matched only by his deep-rooted commitment to his community. With a career spanning more than three decades, Allen has dedicated himself to advocating for individuals impacted by personal injury and wrongful death.

Beyond the courtroom, Allen's philanthropic endeavors have touched countless lives. His firmly established support of educators extends to community youth organizations and advocacy for child safety initiatives. His unwavering commitment to justice and compassion is not only a testament to his own life's work – it is the spirit of Edgewater Health.



Roosevelt Haywood III:
CIRCLE OF EXCELLENCE AWARD

Roosevelt Haywood III, President/CEO of Haywood and Fleming Associates, believes in the power of entrepreneurship and community stewardship. Through his insurance firm, Haywood has provided superior service to clients in Northwest Indiana and Chicago, and he has been a catalyst for positive change in the region.

From supporting local charities to empowering youth through education and mentorship programs, Haywood's commitment to service has greatly impacted the community. His recognition with the Circle of Excellence Award highlights his decades-long dedication to excellence in business and philanthropy, as well as community empowerment.



MBK Alliance Roundtable members pictured with Calumet High School students at public announcement of the MBK chapter in Lake County, Ind., on April 9, 2024.

Building Bridges

My Brother's Keeper Alliance

In the pursuit of equality and opportunity, My Brother's Keeper Alliance (MBK Alliance) stands at the forefront, funded by the Obama Foundation and dedicated to empowering boys and young men of color across the US. One of the newest formations is in the

Northwest Indiana (Lake County, Ind.) area. MBK Lake County, Ind., is working toward certification with the national group, supported and guided by local leaders.



BERNARD CARTER

Initiated by Lake County Prosecutor and Edgewater Health Board Member Bernard Carter, MBK Lake County, Ind., has the momentum and reach to change the game for youth in the region. Carter has a long history of being supportive and vocal on behalf of youth and families, so it's no surprise he would launch this initiative in his own backyard.

"This is a country in which anyone can excel. We want to show boys and young men of color they matter."

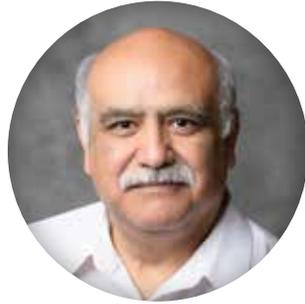
Edgewater Health serves as the Backbone Organization for the new chapter. Through collaboration and a commitment to population-level impact, MBK and Edgewater strive to uplift boys and young men of color in the area – one milestone at a time.

Understanding MBK Alliance

At its core, MBK Alliance is a beacon of hope, addressing the systemic barriers that hinder the progress of boys and young men of color of various ages and developmental stages. With six pivotal milestones guiding its path, MBK endeavors to ensure every individual:

1. Enters school ready to learn
2. Reads at grade level by the third grade
3. Graduates from high school
4. Completes post-secondary education or training
5. Becomes employed out of school
6. Remains safe from violent crime

"MBK Alliance is a national call to action, focused on building safe and supportive communities for boys and young men of color," said Jose (Lupe) Valtierra, Community Development Educator, Purdue Extension - Lake County, Edgewater Health Board Chair and MBK Alliance Co-Lead, Milestone 5, with Marcus Williams, Deputy Clerk at the Clerk of the Lake Circuit/Superior Courts. "Our aim is to tackle the underlying issues that impede success and provide a pathway to prosperity, from cradle to college and beyond."



JOSE LUPE VALTIERRA

He explained that MBK is not recreating the wheel – it's strengthening the spokes and serving a truly unique role: "We're bridging the gaps between different organizations that are out there doing important work like mentorship and literacy development, providing guidance, resources, and support to ensure their success. We can go in and help them collaborate, share ideas, streamline operations, and much more."

Edgewater Health's Role

As the dedicated Backbone Organization for MBK Lake County, Ind., Edgewater Health has a pivotal role in facilitating local efforts. Beyond providing oversight and fiscal management, Edgewater serves as a catalyst for change, leading initiatives aimed at addressing the community's unique needs. Through strategic partnerships and a steadfast commitment to progress, Edgewater can help keep MBK accountable and ensure successful outcomes.

The Journey of MBK

Since launching in 2014, MBK Alliance has served as a call to action for transformation and growth, fueled by a relentless pursuit of equity and justice. From national initiatives to local endeavors, its impact reverberates across communities, igniting change and inspiring action. As the Lake County, Ind., chapter begins to truly take shape, guided by a diverse group of leaders, the promise of a better tomorrow shines ever brighter.

Most recently, in April 2024, MBK Lake County, Ind., held a press conference to officially announce the chapter and its initiatives. In May 2024, the group hosted a Local Action Summit at Indiana University Northwest to increase awareness around MBK and its model, reviewing key sample indicators, gathering community stakeholder perspectives, and laying the groundwork for a Local Action Plan.

Making a Difference

The impact of MBK Alliance transcends statistics and metrics, touching the lives of countless individuals and families. By addressing systemic inequities and fostering collaboration, MBK Alliance and Edgewater Health can pave the way for a future where every child and young man of color has the chance to succeed. Through education, mentorship, community engagement, and more, these organizations empower the next generation, ensuring no dream is beyond reach.



DR. STEVE SIMPSON

"MBK Alliance represents a symbol of hope for communities. Through our collective efforts, we can dismantle systemic barriers and pave the way for a more powerful, inclusive future,"

shared Dr. Steve Simpson, retired Pediatrician, Board Member for the Gary Literacy Coalition, MBK Vice Chair and Lead, Milestones 1 and 2.

With MBK and Edgewater Health joining forces, the possibilities are limitless. The goal is for every person to thrive, regardless of their race, ethnicity, background, age, or any other factor. In the journey toward equity and justice, MBK and Edgewater lead the way, inspiring change and building bridges to a better tomorrow.

If you would like to be involved in MBK Alliance Lake County, Ind., as a community leader or partner, or if you know of families or youth that may benefit from MBK's services, contact Chief Development Officer Dr. Karen Bishop Morris at 219-885-2464, ext. 2333, or send an email to info@edgewaterhealth.org.



First Ladies Initiative Group
 1st Row L – R: Dr. Lashawn Whittaker, Dr. Danita Woods, LaTanya Woodson
 2nd Row L – R: Diane Craig, Sandra Campos, Yarjaira Ruiz, Deetra Armstrong, Jeanine Williams, Gloria Jean Eldridge, Susan Riddering, Quiana Davis, Tara Robertson

AFFINITY GROUPS

Empowering Communities, Enhancing Well-Being

As Edgewater Health celebrates its 50th Anniversary, the organization not only commemorates its own milestones but also its collaborations with many affinity groups. These groups, deeply intertwined with Edgewater’s mission, help to advance healthcare equity and holistic well-being in the region.

Ambassadors for Edgewater

Dr. Sharon Johnson Shirley, Superintendent of Lake Ridge New Tech Schools and Chair of Ambassadors for Edgewater, leads a group committed to amplifying Edgewater’s impact. Established in 2002, the Ambassadors serve as passionate advocates, promoting Edgewater’s initiatives and fostering community-health partnerships.

“Our mission is rooted in the belief that comprehensive healthcare is a fundamental right,” said Dr. Johnson Shirley.

The Ambassadors’ initiatives extend beyond conventional healthcare realms. They include raising awareness about mental and physical health integration, as well as education, community outreach, and more. The group’s support for events like the upcoming 50th Anniversary Gala underscore its commitment to advancing Edgewater’s mission of expanding healthcare access and awareness.



DR. SHARON JOHNSON SHIRLEY

Dr. Johnson Shirley shared: **“Through strategic partnerships and advocacy efforts, we endeavor to break down barriers to healthcare access and promote overall well-being.”**

First Ladies Initiative

Led by LaTanya Woodson, Director of Community Health Education at Edgewater, the First Ladies Initiative epitomizes a steadfast commitment to advancing health equity through collaborative efforts with community partners and healthcare providers. Launched in June 2023, the group targets the unmet health needs of marginalized populations, with a specific focus on mental health awareness and chronic disease prevention.

“We aim to empower individuals by providing them with the necessary tools and resources to take control of their health,” explained Woodson.

Educational sessions and community engagements serve as platforms for advocacy and education, facilitating dialogue and raising awareness about pressing health issues. First Ladies Initiative recently hosted *The Garage*, a stage play written by local author Michael A. Woods and directed by Mark Spencer. The group’s next project is a recognition program for the community’s unsung heroes. Such projects highlight a multifaceted approach to fostering integrated health and well-being.

Woodson emphasized: **“The First Ladies Initiative is a catalyst for change, bridging the gap between faith-based communities and healthcare services. By de-stigmatizing mental health concerns and promoting access to care, we strive to create a supportive environment where everyone can thrive.”**



LATANYA WOODSON

Women’s Health Advisory Council

The Edgewater Health Women’s Health Advisory Council (EHWHAC) prioritizes women’s and girls’ health across Northwest Indiana. Dr. Deborah McCullough specializes in Family Medicine and Women’s Health at Edgewater and serves as Chair of EHWHAC. She shared the importance of addressing health issues comprehensively and with consideration for this specific group.

“EHWHAC is a collaboration of community partners, physicians, and providers who are focused on improving the health and well-being of women and girls in Northwest Indiana,” explained Dr. McCullough.

Through advocacy, awareness campaigns, education, and trainings, this group seeks out funding and other resources to broaden conversations on the physical, mental, and socio-cultural issues that pose a risk to women’s and girls’ health. Dr. McCullough shared that the Women’s Health Advisory Council is specifically prioritizing maternal health throughout 2024.

“This year, we’re focusing on maternal health and the crisis of maternal mortality rates in communities of color,” she said. **“Women’s health is a priority for Edgewater and our community, and this work aligns with Edgewater’s mission of caring for the whole person.”**



DR. DEBORAH MCCULLOUGH

Fostering Healthier, Thriving Communities

As Edgewater enters its 50th year, the organization’s many affinity groups stand as a testament to its unwavering dedication to community empowerment and health. Through their efforts, these groups address immediate healthcare needs and lay the foundation for a future where every individual has the chance to lead a healthy, fulfilling life.

To learn more or to get involved with an affinity group, email info@edgewaterhealth.org, or contact Community Outreach Coordinator Sandra Campos at 219-885-4264, ext. 2808, or scampos@edgewaterhealth.org.

The Enduring Legacy of



edgewater health

Edgewater Health's 50th Anniversary is not merely a recognition of time passed – it's a celebration of compassion and dedication to community well-being. From humble beginnings as the Gary Community Mental Health Center to the evolution into Edgewater Health, the introduction of integrated health services, and more, we've spent the last five decades as an institution of hope and healing for the residents of Lake County and beyond.

Origins and Foundation

In 1968, Mayor Richard G. Hatcher convened a group of community leaders to discuss the need for mental healthcare and support for Gary residents. By 1974, early conversations had evolved, and the Gary Community Health Center received a 501(c)3 status. This laid the foundation for what would become Edgewater Health and marked the birth of an organization driven by a mission to provide accessible behavioral healthcare services to all, regardless of background or circumstance.



Expansion and Growth

Throughout the decades, Edgewater Health has continuously adapted and expanded services to meet evolving community needs. In 1980, the establishment of a new corporate office at 1100 W. 6th Avenue in Gary signaled a period of growth and organizational development, enabling Edgewater to reach more individuals in need of care.

Dr. Danita Johnson Woods, President and CEO

The hiring of Dr. Danita Johnson Woods as CEO in 1996 marked an important moment in Edgewater's history. She brought a wealth of experience and expertise and shattered ceilings as the first African American CEO of a certified community behavioral-health clinic or hospital in Indiana (CCBHC). Still today, she is the only African American woman CEO of a CCBHC in the state. Her hiring and enduring tenure remain strong points of pride for Edgewater and the community.



Commitment to Community

In 2002, a significant milestone was achieved with the creation of a philanthropic arm, underscoring Edgewater's commitment to fostering partnerships and community support. Ambassadors for Edgewater both bolstered resources and reinforced the ethos of collaboration and collective responsibility in addressing healthcare challenges.



Innovation in Crisis Care

The year 2015 marked a historic moment for Edgewater and the state of Indiana with the opening of the first crisis-stabilization center, a testament to its innovative approach to mental healthcare. The Rapid Access Center (RAC) provides a vital lifeline for individuals in acute distress, offering a safe space and comprehensive support during their time of need.

Mayor Richard Hatcher convenes community stakeholders

1968

Est. Corporate Office @ 1100 W. 6th Avenue 1993

1980

Permanent supportive housing

2014

Integration of primary care services

2016

New Location 5495 Broadway Merrillville

2023

1974

Gary Community Health Center receives 501 (c) 3 status

2002

Est. philanthropic arm

2015

1st Crisis Stabilization Center in the state of IN

2022

New Location 9855 Lincoln Plaza Way Cedar Lake
Launched My Brother's Keeper Lake County, IN

Integration of Services

Building upon this foundation of excellence, Edgewater continued to push boundaries in 2016 by integrating primary care services with behavioral health. This holistic approach not only addressed the interconnected nature of physical and mental wellness but also ensured comprehensive, coordinated care for every individual.

Opening of New Locations

Over the years, Edgewater has opened many new locations, expanding its services and the number of patients who can take advantage of them:

Griffith Clinic

This clinic offers primary care services and opened in 2016.

Cedar Lake Clinic

Opened in 2022, this clinic offers primary care services.

Merrillville Clinic

In 2023, the former University Park Clinic moved to Merrillville.

Call 844-4-Edgewater to make an appointment at one of these locations.

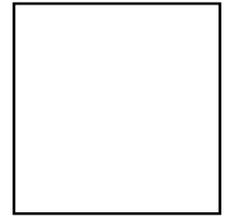
My Brother's Keeper Alliance

In 2023, Edgewater Health was designated the Backbone Organization for My Brother's Keeper Alliance (MBK) Lake County, Ind. In this role, Edgewater facilitates local efforts, providing oversight and fiscal management. Edgewater also fosters communication and collaboration among community stakeholders to ensure successful outcomes for boys and young men of color.

Looking Ahead

For 50 years, we have been a cornerstone of the community, a trusted partner in times of crisis, and a beacon of hope for those seeking healing and support. Together, let's raise a toast to the past, the present, and – especially – the future of Edgewater Health.





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