



REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

Gerald Fitzgerald, left, stepped down as president and CEO of the Oakwood Healthcare System on Wednesday. His friend and colleague Brian Connolly, right, succeeded him. Fitzgerald is a 40-year administrator at Oakwood and will stay on as vice chairman until next year.

Oakwood aids region

Hospitals' expansion creates jobs

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As the auto industry retrenches, large metro Detroit hospital systems are filling some of the employment gaps in revitalizing Michigan's economy. One of the lesser-known examples is the growing Dearborn-based Oakwood Healthcare System.

Oakwood is poised to spend \$231 million on new or expanded programs in Troy, Canton, Dearborn, Trenton and Monroe.

"We are a major part of the economic revitalization of metro Detroit," said Gerald Fitzgerald, 67, a 40-year administrator at Oakwood.

Last week, Fitzgerald stepped aside as president and CEO of Oakwood, en route to retirement next year. Through June 2008, he will be the system's vice chairman, focused on spreading Oakwood's influence throughout the region.

"I'm going to do everything I can to be part of the recovery in the region," said Fitzgerald, who had served as Oakwood president since 1980 and began his Oakwood career



Oakwood Healthcare System archive photo

Fitzgerald, second from left, and Connolly look over documents during a presentation about an Oakwood hospital construction project in 1979.

as an assistant director.

He rose to become one of Michigan's most respected hospital administrators, playing a role in local economic development and statewide medical issues, including passage of medical malpractice reforms in the 1990s and creation of one of metro Detroit's federally funded health centers.

The reward for his leadership: nearly \$1 million a year in salary and bonuses.

Fitzgerald took Oakwood from a cluster of mostly small hospitals to a regional system in 35 Downriver

and western Wayne County communities. It has 9,700 employees and is Wayne County's second-largest employer operating outside of Detroit, next to Ford Motor Co.

Passing the torch

Fitzgerald helped groom and pick his successor, Brian Connolly. Peers and friends, Connolly, 57, once lived on Buckingham Street in Dearborn, as did Fitzgerald. Their children grew up together.

Brian Connolly

Age: 57

Resides: Dearborn and Port Huron; looking for a home.

Education: BA, Western Michigan University; MA in public health, University of Michigan.

Personal: Wife, Darcy; three grown children.

Salary: Declined to disclose.

Civic duties: Board of Trustees, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan.

Gerald Fitzgerald

Age: 67

Resides: Dearborn.

Personal: Married to Jan; two grown children and new twin grandchildren.

Education: Bachelor of science, University of Detroit; master's in hospital administration, University of Michigan.

Civic duties: Board chairman, Michigan Health & Hospital Association; Executive Committee, Greater Detroit Area Health Council's Board of Trustees.

