



Prostate screening key to survival

■ **Free screenings available to local men on June 26**

By **Dee Ann Campbell**
Sun-Advocate Editor

BUTLER – “Every man over 50 should do this at least once a year,” says Butler resident Murray Gibson. “It saved my life.”

It is a disease that will affect one out of every six men at some point in their lives, and more than 32,000 will die from it this year alone.

But for Gibson, those numbers are more than just statistics in a medical journal. They are reality – a reality that he faced some ten years ago. In 2000, he became one of the more than 217,000 men in the United States who are diagnosed with prostate cancer each year.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), prostate cancer is the 2nd leading cause of cancer-related deaths among men in the United States, and for Alabama men, the numbers are even more shocking.

The state has the 3rd highest rate of prostate cancer in the country.

But Gibson discovered the secret to fighting those statistics – early detection.

Statistics show that catching the disease early, through physical exams and blood tests, can mean a 95% survival rate, if the disease remains confined to the organ.

Unfortunately, the push for such measures – especially in the Black Belt areas of Alabama – has been lacking, until now.

In recent years, healthcare officials, physicians, and even legislators have been vocal about the need for early detection measures for breast and cervical cancer in women. Millions of dollars in funds, along with widespread information campaigns, have been made available to promote mammo-



Submitted photo
Dr. Thomas Moody is pictured with a patient during at prostate cancer screening clinic in Hale County.

“The only reason I got screened was because they told me I needed to get checked,” he said. “So I had it checked, and they found out I had a high PSA, too.”

Biopsies soon revealed that Gibson had prostate cancer, but the cancer was in its early stages, and it was treatable.

“I could have gone a long time and not known about it,” he said, “It probably would have spread, and I might not be here today.”

In response to the obvious need for action when it comes to prostate cancer in Alabama, Moody and his group set out about four years ago to address it. The Urology Center was instrumental in the push for coverage of prostate screenings by insurance carriers in the state. But their focus soon went beyond that – to reach out to men in areas where getting screened for cancer is difficult.

“Our center has a huge prostate cancer practice, and we are grateful for that,” he said. “But along with that blessing comes responsibility to help people in areas who cannot get help.”

Moody said that the Urology Centers opted to focus attention on the Black Belt areas of Alabama in particular, because of the high percentage of poverty-level residents and minorities.

“For lots of these guys, just getting to the doctor is a strain,” he explained. “They can’t get there because of transportation problems even when they are sick, so of course they would have problems getting there for screenings.”

The groups initially began their efforts in Marion and Perry counties, offering free physical exams and PSA tests.

In the early stages of the Centers efforts, funds for the screenings came solely from the group itself. Unlike the state’s ongoing efforts to promote cancer screenings for women, there was then no funding set aside for prostate screenings.

Over the past four years, however, Moody and his organization have secured other sources of funding, including donations from the Department of Public Health, grants from sources like the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA), and other donations. With more funding coming in, the group has been able to expand their outreach to other areas of the state.

“We’ve done about 1,700 PSAs through this,” Moody said. “This year, we are going

“Every man should do this at least once a year.”

-- Murray Gibson
Butler

into 10 counties.”

Dr. Moody and his team will be holding a screening clinic for Choctaw County men over the age of 40 at the Choctaw County Health Department on Saturday, June 26. From 10 a.m. until 2 p.m., healthcare professionals will offer free screenings, including physical exam and blood test for PSA. For those men whose screenings reveal potential problems, follow-up procedures will be recommended.

A variety of treatment options are now available for men with prostate cancer, including prostatectomy (the laparoscopic removal of the prostate gland), external radiation, hormonal therapy, and cryosurgery.

When Gibson was diagnosed, he opted to undergo ‘seed implant therapy’, a procedure that places radioactive ‘seeds’ into the prostate to irradiate the cancer from the inside. Gibson was told the therapy would keep the cancer at bay for about ten years.

“It worked,” he said. “Once I got over the side effects, I was fine.”

Throughout the past decade since his treatment, Gibson has continued to get regular screenings, and this week, after his PSA began to increase again, he is again undergoing treatment for his disease. This time, he opted for cryosurgery, which uses argon gas to freeze and destroy the cancer cells. The procedure promises quick results with fewer side effects.

It is the side effects of treatment, Moody said, that actually keep some men from seeking help. Common side effects can include altered urinary and bowel, erectile dysfunction, and the loss of fertility.

But Gibson says that getting screened, discovering the cancer early, and dealing with the side effects of treatment are much better options than the alternative.

“A lot of people die of prostate cancer,” he said. “They wait until it spreads, and then it’s too late. A lot of men just don’t want to know. But it’s wiser to get checked.”

About Prostate Cancer

- Over 217,730 new cases are expected this year-more than breast cancer.
- Prostate cancer is the second leading cause of male cancer related death in the United States.
- An estimated 32,050 men will die from prostate cancer this year.
- One in every six men will get prostate cancer sometime in their life.
- Every man age 40 or over should be screened annually.

grams and pap smears in an effort to reduce the numbers of women who die from cancer.

Yet when it comes to prostate cancer – a cancer that has now surpassed breast cancer in numbers of new cases – the push has been much less vocal, much less prominent, and not nearly as well-funded.

Today, the Urology Centers of Alabama is working with other healthcare entities to change that.

Working in partnership with local health departments, Dr. Thomas Moody and the Urology Centers are promoting prostate cancer screenings for men in rural areas – by taking the screenings to them.

Moody, who serves as president of the Urology Health Foundation in the state, has been specializing

his practice at the Birmingham-based Urology Centers, the largest such facility in the state.

He began his outreach to promote prostate screenings across the state when he became aware of the alarming numbers of prostate cancer deaths in Alabama.

“The national prostate cancer coalition graded the states, and Alabama got an ‘F,’” Moody said. “The percentage of men getting screened in Alabama has been low. Our death rate from prostate cancer is 3rd highest in the nation, and we believe it is related to the numbers of men who are not getting screened.”

According to Moody, regular screening for prostate cancer is crucial because the disease typically produces no symptoms until the cancer is in its more advanced stages. Later, symptoms include difficult or frequent urination, blood in the urine, and bone pain.

Gibson got his initial prostate screening after blood tests revealed that two of his brothers had elevated Prostate Specific Antigens (PSA), the antigen that is raised in the presence of cancer cells in the prostate gland.

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■ **CCREA**
From page 4B

The annual meeting of District VI of the Alabama Educational Retirees will be held July 21 at Alabama Southern Community College in Thomasville. Mr. Cleophas Stevens, District VI Director, will preside. Retiree attendance to this important meeting was urged.

There was a discussion on both state and local candidates seeking election and their views on education. We were especially interested in

both Democratic and Republican candidates for governor and their political platforms.

Ms. Ruby Nettles shared some of the highlights of her trip to the AEA convention. She said the meetings proved to be informative and interesting. Dr. Paul Hubbert was one of the keynote speakers who gives straight forward information and lets his listeners make their own decisions. Dr. Hubbert does not foresee any cost of living adjustment for retirees as of now. He stated that none of the Republican candidates for governor have shown very little interest in

pushing education statewide. Numerous reports were made to the 2,850 persons attending. It was noted that the benefits paid to those having PEEHIP insurance in Alabama are much higher than the benefits made to retirees in neighboring states.

It was voted and approved to send \$35 to help fund a project for underprivileged children in Mobile County.

Ms. Underhill stated that the September meeting will be at the Historical Museum in Gilbertown. The meeting was adjourned following this announcement.

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