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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Kids Alliance for Better Care Celebrates Coffee Regional Medical Center's  
Emergency Department as Part of the Pediatric Emergency Care Project**

**DOUGLAS** — The Coffee Regional Medical Center Emergency Department was recognized for its commitment to strengthening pediatric emergency care in Coffee County during a Dec. 10 ribbon-cutting ceremony. Coffee Regional was celebrated for reaching key milestones as a participating hospital in the Kids Alliance for Better Care (KidsABC). The alliance, [established in 2023](#), is a collaboration between [Mercer University School of Medicine \(MUSM\)](#), its [Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center \(GRHIC\)](#) and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (Children's).

Georgia rural hospitals face unique challenges in their ability to treat and keep pediatric patients in their communities, and KidsABC is focused on improving access to quality pediatric care.

Vicki Lewis, president and CEO of Coffee Regional shared, "The mission of Coffee Regional Medical Center is to provide exceptional care and wellness close to home. The KidsABC collaborative has provided our team with education, training, equipment and access to pediatric care protocols and practices that have helped our team meet our mission and care for the youngest and often most vulnerable members of our community. We are truly grateful to be part of this outstanding collaboration."

KidsABC helps participating hospitals, like Coffee Regional, acquire child-friendly equipment, complete pediatric-specific emergency care staff training and implement the latest protocols and policies for treating children with critical conditions, such as asthma and diabetic ketoacidosis.

"The apnea monitors funded by KidsABC have allowed us to keep pediatric patients requiring close respiratory monitoring at Coffee Regional Medical Center," said Lewis. "Transferring pediatric patients to another city for monitoring is difficult and stressful for both our pediatric patients and their families. Staying close to home for care is so important, and we are proud to be part of KidsABC and applaud their efforts to support pediatric care in rural communities."

Coffee Regional commemorated its KidsABC participation and completion of milestones with a ribbon cutting hosted by the Douglas-Coffee Chamber of Commerce and attended by hospital, Children's, MUSM and GRHIC representatives.

“Today marks a pivotal moment for kids in rural Georgia and in Coffee County,” said MUSM Dean Jean R. Sumner, M.D., FACP. “We are honored to recognize the ED staff for their dedication to pediatric care. Through emergency care training, expanding their skills and setting an expectation of excellence in all they do, they offer outstanding care for children. Children are not just tiny adults when it comes to the practice of emergency medicine. They require special care and appropriate equipment and tools to help keep their care here at home. Coffee Regional Medical Center has been a strong, committed KidsABC participant and has set the bar very high for pediatric care. We commend the efforts of the staff and leadership. They are making a difference in children’s lives and will continue to do so for years to come.”

“Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta congratulates Coffee Regional on achieving this milestone,” said Marc Welsh, Children’s V.P. of child advocacy and chief diversity officer. “The objectives of KidsABC align with Children’s vision to ‘Do Everything Possible to Make Anything Possible for Kids’. We want to ensure all the children of Georgia have access to quality health care and, by participating in KidsABC, hospitals like Coffee Regional are building capacity to serve even more kids in their own communities.”

KidsABC brings together a network of rural hospital emergency departments, pediatric offices, regional and state pediatric tertiary care hospitals and school systems to address the challenge of health care access, which many rural families face. KidsABC participants are equipped with the necessary tools, protocols, training and education, so families have access to subspecialty care, mental health care and emergency medical care in their hometowns.

Programs within KidsABC address the challenges of distance to specialty care and limited resources. KidsABC emphasizes the importance of early intervention in achieving positive outcomes. Children’s provided specialized pediatric clinical guidance to launch and sustain these programs.

**For More Information:**

KidsABC Initiatives: <https://den.mercer.edu/school-of-medicine-announces-community-partners-in-rural-pediatric-health-care-initiative/>

KidsABC Rural Hospital Emergency Department Collaborative Expansion: <https://den.mercer.edu/musm-and-grhic-expand-major-rural-pediatric-health-care-initiative-to-newly-selected-hospitals/>

**About Mercer University School of Medicine (Macon, Savannah and Columbus)**

Mercer University’s School of Medicine was established in 1982 to educate physicians and health professionals to meet the primary care and health care needs of rural and medically underserved areas of Georgia. Today, more than 60 percent of graduates currently practice in the state of Georgia, and of those, more than 80 percent are practicing in rural or medically underserved areas of Georgia. Mercer medical students benefit from a problem-based medical education program that provides early patient care experiences. Such an academic environment fosters the early development of clinical problem-solving and instills in each student an awareness of the place of the basic medical sciences in medical practice. The School opened additional four-year M.D. campuses in Savannah in 2008 and in Columbus in 2021, and a clinical campus in Valdosta in 2024. Following their second year, students participate in core clinical clerkships at the School’s primary teaching hospitals: Atrium Health Navicent The Medical Center and Piedmont Macon Medical Center in Macon; Memorial Health University

Medical Center in Savannah; Piedmont Columbus Regional Hospital and St. Francis Hospital in Columbus; and SGMC Health in Valdosta. The School also offers master's degrees in preclinical sciences and family therapy and Ph.D.s in biomedical sciences and rural health sciences.

### **About Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center**

In 2018, Georgia lawmakers dedicated special funds to establish a new Rural Health Innovation Center tasked with confronting the complex health care challenges and wellness disparities facing rural communities. Mercer University School of Medicine was awarded the grant funds in 2019 and formally established the Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center on its Macon campus. MUSM boasts a longstanding commitment to serving rural Georgia's health needs, with a mission to educate physicians dedicated to tackling the health challenges in rural Georgia. The Rural Health Innovation Center serves as a critical resource to rural communities to improve access and effectiveness of health care by offering research, collaboration, and training opportunities.

### **About Children's Healthcare of Atlanta**

As the only freestanding pediatric healthcare system in Georgia, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta is the trusted leader in caring for kids. The not-for-profit organization's mission is to make kids better today and healthier tomorrow through more than 60 pediatric specialties and programs, top healthcare professionals, and leading research and technology. Children's is one of the largest pediatric clinical care providers in the country, managing more than 1.1 million patient visits annually at three hospitals (Egleston, Scottish Rite and Hughes Spalding), Marcus Autism Center, the Center for Advanced Pediatrics, urgent care centers and neighborhood locations. Consistently ranked among the top children's hospitals by U.S. News & World Report, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta has impacted the lives of kids in Georgia, across the United States and around the world for more than 100 years thanks to generous support from the community.

### **About Coffee Regional Medical Center**

Coffee Regional Medical Center, Inc., is a non-profit, acute care 98-bed hospital in Douglas, Georgia. The current facility opened in July 1998, replacing the original building constructed in 1953. The 200,000-square-foot hospital is designed with inpatient adult and pediatric beds and expanded outpatient service areas, including interventional cardiology and hematology and oncology infusion services, to assure exceptional care and wellness close to home. The Medical Staff membership includes anesthesiology, bariatrics, cardiology, emergency medicine, ENT, family practice, general surgery, GI, hematology, internal medicine, interventional cardiology, nephrology, OB/GYN, oncology/hematology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, pain management, pathology, pediatrics, podiatry, pulmonology, radiology, urology, and wound care. Serving Coffee and surrounding counties since 1953, we have become an integral part of the fabric of our community and a major contributor to the economic health of Douglas, Georgia. To learn more, visit [www.coffeeregional.org/](http://www.coffeeregional.org/)

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*Photo Caption: Mercer University School of Medicine Student and Children's Rural Pediatric Scholar Tre Steel; Children's Affiliations Operations Director Pam Mason; Coffee Regional Assistant Director of ED Amy Rowell, RN; Coffee Regional Medical Director of Emergency Services*

*Mark Brulte, M.D.; Coffee Regional Director of Critical Care and Emergency Services Rachel Spivey, BSN, RN; Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center Director of Special Programs Chris Scoggins, DrPH, MPH; Coffee Regional President and CEO Vicki Lewis, MS, FACHE; Coffee Regional Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer Sue Lane Hughes, BSN, MBA; Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center Senior Rural Health Project Manager Kedrick Williams, DHA, MPH; Coffee Regional Pediatric Unit Nurse Manager Melissa Davis, BSN, RN; Coffee Regional Operations Vice President Bennett Floyd, MHA*