

Vital Signs

**October
is Breast
Cancer
Awareness
Month.**



Vital Signs

Vital Signs
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FALL EDITION | 2025

LETTER FROM THE CEO

As we continue our mission to bring compassionate, high-quality care closer to home, Kaweah Health is pleased to share several exciting developments that reflect our growing commitment to the people of Tulare County.

I’m very excited to announce Kaweah Health and Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency have collaborated on opening a child and adolescent crisis stabilization unit (CSU) using nearly \$5 million in grant funding to build the facility. Located near Oval Park, the CSU will provide crisis intervention services for children and youth under age 21, 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. It is scheduled to open in early November.

I’m also pleased to share that Kaweah Health Laboratory Patient Service Centers now offer appointment scheduling through our website. The centers are open to the public, and you can now book appointments in advance, check wait times, and complete registration online — streamlining the process and improving overall access to care.

Our Emergency Department continues to make great strides, improving wait times and implementing new protocols, even with record-breaking patient levels. In August, we saw a total volume of 8,923 patients — the largest patient volume since seeing 8,867 in December 2023. That’s about 290 people per day coming through our doors needing help. It is a privilege being able to serve the community when they need help the most.

Our dedication to exceptional patient care is also reflected in the national recognition of our services. U.S. News & World Report has recognized Kaweah Health as a High Performing Hospital in their 2025-2026 rankings for seven adult procedures and conditions, based on patient outcomes, patient satisfaction, availability of advanced technology, and nursing quality. Kaweah Health earned recognition for back surgery (spinal fusion), heart attack, heart bypass surgery, hip fracture, kidney failure, knee replacement, and stroke.

Also recognized was the Kaweah Health Dialysis Center, maintaining its five-star rating from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services for patient satisfaction. This rating is based on direct patient feedback about physician communication, staff interactions, educational support, and the overall comfort and cleanliness of the facility. It reflects the consistent quality and compassionate care provided to dialysis patients in our community.

Looking ahead, we’re excited to keep improving our healthcare services and growing our team of dedicated caregivers, all so we can fulfill what matters most to us: providing outstanding, heartfelt care to our neighbors throughout the region. Your ongoing trust means everything to us and helps Kaweah Health continue growing stronger for our community.



Gary Herbst
Chief Executive Officer of
Kaweah Health

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Oh Baby!

Labor and delivery unit is meeting the demands of growing families.



Leanna V. was the first girl born at Kaweah Health in 2025.

Bringing a new baby into the world is one of life's most precious moments, filled with anticipation, joy, and the promise of new beginnings. At Kaweah Health, we're honored to be part of so many families' birth stories, helping welcome thousands of babies each year into the Central Valley community.

Like many healthcare systems nationwide over the last year, Kaweah Health has been facing the challenges of an obstetrician and gynecologist (OB/GYN) shortage. As a result, the hospital has partnered with a dedicated group of providers to ensure comprehensive OB coverage in the labor and delivery unit.

The partnership goes a long way in making sure the dozen or so mothers who give birth each day can be assured these OB hospitalists — OBs who work exclusively on the labor and delivery unit — are ready to help them deliver their babies.

"Despite the broader shortage, our focus on sustained laborist coverage has delivered steady, reliable care for our patients," explains Rhonda Quiñones, Director of Maternal Child Health. "Having a dedicated OB hospitalist on site 24/7 not only supports safety for moms and newborns but also allows our community OB/GYN physicians to focus on outpatient care and avoid

burnout, ultimately benefiting the entire care team."

The labor and delivery and mother-baby teams at Kaweah Health know that a patient's birth story is a very special memory, so they try to make everything perfect for thousands of new mothers and their babies each year. At the heart of the community, these teams provide exceptional care in private labor and delivery rooms equipped with the latest technology. The specialized team includes obstetricians, registered nurses, anesthesiologists, and certified nurse midwives who work together to create individualized care plans for every mother's unique needs. In



New parents Garrett and Janelle Dunn proudly hold their newborn baby, Riley.

the case of more complicated pregnancies and deliveries, there are also maternal-fetal medicine physicians and neonatologists from Valley Children's Hospital on site to assist with those deliveries. The OB hospitalists working in labor and delivery provide dedicated on-site coverage, ensuring consistent, high-quality care while supporting both families and healthcare teams through smoother experiences. After delivery, mothers and newborns transition to the mother-baby unit for continued support as they begin their journey together. This seamless flow of care ensures that families receive the attention and comfort they need during these important first days.

The nationwide OB/GYN shortage stems from multiple factors, including growing demand for women's healthcare and an aging physician workforce. Yet solutions like Kaweah Health's demonstrate how hospitals can adapt to continue providing excellent care. In addition,

Kaweah Health continues to actively recruit OB/GYNs to the area and looks to add more in the coming months. **KH**



Looking for Support?

Learn more about Family Birthing Center tours, prepared childbirth classes, lactation services, support groups, and more at [KaweahHealth.org/Baby](https://www.kaweahhealth.org/Baby).

— “
We are proud to have a nationally recognized maternity care program.
” —



— **Rhonda Quiñones**,
Director of Maternal
Child Health



Determined Spirit

At 89, Delores Machado refused to let a broken neck slow her down.

Delores Machado works out in the Quail Park at Shannon Ranch gym. The gym and physical therapy helped her gain back her strength and independence.

When Delores Machado, 89, broke her neck in a car accident in May 2024, she was just happy to be alive. Then the reality of what her injury meant began to sink in.

“I had been living completely on my own,” Delores says. “But I broke my neck, I couldn’t live alone.”

After her accident, Delores went to Kaweah Health Medical Center for 10 days before being released to the Kaweah Health Rehabilitation Hospital for 13 days. When it was time for her to leave the rehab hospital, she needed to find somewhere she could maintain some independence while receiving continued care through ongoing therapy. Her family found that place at Quail Park at Shannon Ranch, where Kaweah Health Home Health therapists helped her continue her therapy, and Quail Park fitness instructor Ariel Gaspar helped her regain strength.

“From day one I walked into this place, they couldn’t have been any nicer,”

Delores says. “I can’t say enough about how nice all the people have been.”

Home health therapists assisted Delores with physical, occupational, and speech therapy right in her apartment. The goal of the home health therapists is to help patients be as independent and comfortable as possible at home while receiving the skilled medical attention they need in the place they feel safest.

Along with all the therapy, Delores also started using the gym and strength training classes at Quail Park. That is where Ariel came in and helped.

“Delores is one of the most determined people I’ve met in my personal training career,” Ariel says. “Although exercise wasn’t part of her daily routine prior to her accident, she now has learned to enjoy the process of building strength. She has worked very hard to build her body back up,

and I’m happy she allowed me to be part of her journey.”

When Delores moved into her Quail Park apartment in June she had a neck brace and needed a lot of assistance. She was able to remove the brace by Christmas thanks to all her work with her therapists and Ariel. Now she is back to living more independently, organizing trips to St. Anthony Retreat Center in Three Rivers and socializing with her new neighbors.

“I didn’t know what OT or PT meant, and then I had them coming in and out all the time,” Delores says. “My faith pulled me through and gave me the strength to keep up with all of it. Now, I still do exercises at least once per day.”

Delores says she is grateful to everyone at Kaweah Health and Quail Park who have made her recovery possible.

“The people who helped me and who prayed for me should get all the applause,” Delores says. ^{KH}



Future Doctors

Kaweah Health ImagineU exhibit inspires children.



ImagineU and Kaweah Health have teamed up to provide a fun way for children to explore healthcare careers with a mini hospital exhibit at the museum.

Featuring a child-sized doctor’s office, X-rays, and operating table, the new exhibit is a chance for children to play doctor or nurse and be inspired to consider a career in healthcare.

“We are excited to partner with Kaweah Health and have this exhibit which goes well with our mission to

foster creativity and critical thinking while encouraging exploration and innovation,” says Katy Young, ImagineU Executive Director.

Kaweah Health CEO Gary Herbst looks toward the future with this exhibit.

“We hope that through playing hospital, children fall in love with caring for each other and become the healthcare professionals of the future,” Herbst says.

Kaweah Health has more than 5,200 employees, and has job openings

Penelope Carrillo, 6, plays surgery with Rawhide mascot Tipper at the Kaweah Health ImagineU exhibit.

in a wide variety of roles. Learn more about Kaweah Health careers at [KawahHealth.org/Careers](https://www.kawahhealth.org/careers).

Kaweah Health’s interactive exhibit is available during the museum’s regular hours from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. ^{KH}



From left to right, Tina Saesee, Chelsea Guecho, Victoria Baerg, Cecilia Fleming, Jacqueline Montemayor, Brook Lee, and Jennica Ybarra make up Kaweah Health's skilled mammography team.

A Picture of Health

Early detection is your best defense.

When patients walk into Kaweah Health's Imaging and Breast Center, they find something that goes beyond advanced technology and clinical expertise — they find a team that truly sees them as people, not just patients.

Taking care of each patient begins the moment they arrive. Breast Center Educator Cecilia Fleming, RN, has spent several years at Kaweah Health, working in areas like the cardiac cath lab and medical-surgical units before

finding her calling in breast health. Her main job is to accompany patients, explaining each step and making sure they never feel alone in the process.

"Our patients know they aren't facing this journey alone," she says. "They have a team beside them. I remind them we are just going to take one step at a time."

Fleming brings something special to her role — a deep understanding of what it means to be on the receiving

end of medical care. She spent more than 13 years caring for her grandmother, learning firsthand how important patience and personalized attention can be. Then in 2024, Fleming experienced her own health challenge when a spinal cord injury left her temporarily paralyzed. Going through hospitalization and rehabilitation herself gave her a fresh perspective on what patients really need: clear communication, respect for their dignity, and someone who truly listens.

These experiences have shaped how Fleming approaches every interaction. She doesn't just educate — she advocates, treating each person with the same care she would want for her own family.

Behind every mammogram is a skilled technologist who combines technical precision with genuine warmth.



Olivia Rivera (above) celebrates ringing the bell after completing her breast cancer treatment.



Jacqueline Montemayor (left) is part of the skilled mammography team.

Dr. Thu Le, (below) interpreting radiologist, examines mammogram images.



The mammography team stays at the forefront of their field through continuous learning, regular reviews with radiologists, and strict adherence to California Department of Public Health standards. It's one of the most regulated areas in healthcare, and the team embraces that standard of excellence.

"We're always learning and growing," says Michelle Lorah, Kaweah Health Outpatient Imaging Services Manager. "That commitment to excellence means better care for everyone who walks through our doors."

After the mammograms are complete, Interpreting Radiologists Thu Le, MD and Douglas Blume, MD, work closely with the entire team to ensure patients get answers quickly and treatment plans that make sense for their unique situation. This collaboration means less waiting, less uncertainty, and more time focused on what matters most — patient health and peace of mind.

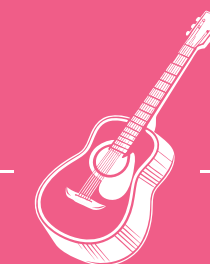
Looking ahead, Fleming will be launching a breast cancer support group where patients, families, and caregivers can share experiences and find encouragement together. It's another way Fleming is using her experience to help patients.

This personal touch adds to the Kaweah Health Breast Center's supportive atmosphere, assisting women through the screening process.

KH

DID YOU KNOW?

A doctor's order for a mammogram is like a prescription to a pharmacy — you can choose the facility where you feel most comfortable and where service is a priority.



Girls and Guitars

Join us for the 10th Annual Girls & Guitars event, brought to you by Kaweah Health and KJUG, benefiting the Kaweah Health Breast Center.

**Tuesday,
October 28, 2025 • 7 p.m.
Visalia Fox Theatre**

Learn more about the Kaweah Health Imaging & Breast Center at KaweahHealth.org/BreastCenter, or call the Breast Health Education Line at (559) 624-3253.



Kaweah Health CEO Gary Herbst talks with a patient about their care while visiting patient rooms throughout the hospital.

Personal Touch

Kaweah Health’s executives create patient connections beyond clinical care.

When Kaweah Health CEO Gary Herbst offered to marry a couple who had been together eight years but had never tied the knot, it wasn’t just small talk — it was exactly the kind of moment that’s transforming how patients experience their hospital stay. Earlier this year, Herbst and other members of the Kaweah Health Executive Team began making rounds in the hospital, visiting patients in their rooms to learn what they think of their stay and the care they’re receiving.

These personal connections add another dimension to the hospital’s patient experience efforts. “I love it. I’ve never talked to the head of the head,” says patient Andrew Celaya. “He is super cool.” Herbst talked with Andrew about the video games he plays and the music he listens to. When Andrew expressed confusion about why his doctor needed to consult with other physicians about his care, Herbst explained that Kaweah Health is a teaching hospital where resident doctors are paired with attending

physicians. Part of this includes discussing their patients and various treatments. Patient Frank Vadon was equally impressed to have the CEO visit him. “It is great to meet him,” Frank says. Beverly Crowley, Vadon’s girlfriend, said it was nice to speak with the CEO and know that any complaints would go directly to the top. The couple didn’t have complaints that day, but Herbst did offer to marry them, joking that like a ship captain, he should be able to officiate weddings.

The couple didn’t take him up on his offer but appreciated Herbst taking time to get to know them. Deborah Volosin, Director of Patient and Community Experience, explains meeting and visiting with patients not only gives them an opportunity to voice concerns directly to leadership, but also demonstrates a commitment to care that extends beyond clinical treatment. “When executives take the time to visit patients, it really connects our leadership team with what patients are going through,” Volosin says. “It creates this culture where everyone feels more comfortable talking with each other,

and we’re always looking for ways to improve. At the end of the day, it makes the care we provide safer and more personal.” Herbst admits the prospect of entering patient rooms was initially intimidating, but the interactions and personal connections with patients have made it something he now looks forward to. The rounds also give him an opportunity to express appreciation to patients and their families. “Thank you for letting us take care of you,” Herbst says as he leaves each room. KH

— “
At the end of the day, it makes the care we provide safer and more personal.
” —



— Deborah Volosin, Director of Patient and Community Experience, on hospital executives visiting patients



Smoke? Screen.

Catching lung cancer early will help save lives.

Ion, a robotic-assisted system, makes collecting samples for biopsy faster, safer, and more precise.

Lung cancer remains the leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S., but there is good news: when found early, it is far more treatable. That's why Kaweah Health has launched a new lung screening program — combining advanced imaging with compassionate, personalized guidance to help patients take control of their health.

Why Screening Matters

The lung program at Kaweah Health has been in development over the last year. It is a large program encompassing several specialty practices including Kaweah Health Imaging & Breast Center, medical and radiation oncology services at Kaweah Health Sequoia Regional Cancer Center, pulmonology, thoracic surgery, and endoscopy. Renee Lauck, Director of Imaging & Radiation Services has overseen the creation of this project from the start.

"It's astonishing, the level of expertise that has been formed within this

program. Our physicians and our RN nurse navigator manage each patient from initial review of potential cancers or lung complications to treatment and follow up," says Lauck. "We are extremely excited for the opportunity to serve our community in this capacity."

Often called a silent disease, lung cancer usually doesn't cause symptoms until it has advanced. A low-dose CT (LDCT) scan can change that story.

This quick, painless scan takes about 15 minutes and can detect small nodules in the lungs — sometimes years before they would appear on a standard chest X-ray. Finding these nodules early gives patients more treatment options and the best chance at survival.

Who Should Screen?

Most insurance plans cover lung cancer screening for adults ages 50–80 who have a history of smoking — even

if they quit years ago. But smoking isn't the only risk factor. Family history, environmental exposure, and even secondhand smoke can increase risk. Kaweah Health's program can help patients whose cases don't meet standard insurance requirements — like those who find nodules by accident during other medical tests.

A Nurse by Your Side

Navigating a possible cancer diagnosis can feel overwhelming. That's why Kaweah Health's Lung Screening Program includes the support of Pam Montgomery, RN, an oncology nurse navigator.

Montgomery has spent more than 15 years at Kaweah Health caring for patients with cancer. She has worked as a bedside oncology nurse, breast center nurse educator, radiology nurse, radiation oncology nurse, and now as an oncology nurse navigator. She's seen firsthand how much of a difference early detection can make.

"Lung cancer screening can feel overwhelming. My role is to walk alongside patients — from the first phone call through follow-up — so they always know what to expect," Montgomery says.

Cutting-Edge Technology

When lung nodules are found, the next step is often a biopsy — collecting a small sample to confirm whether the nodule is cancerous. Traditionally, this could be challenging and take weeks to arrange. Now, Kaweah Health is using a robotic-assisted system called Ion that makes the process faster, safer, and more precise.

Ion uses an ultra-thin, flexible catheter to reach the deepest parts of the lung. With advanced shape-sensing technology, physicians can guide the catheter directly to the nodule and hold it steady while a biopsy is taken. This accuracy can help shorten the time from screening to diagnosis by weeks. And when it comes to lung cancer, every week matters — research shows that survival improves the sooner a diagnosis is made.

"Having this technology at Kaweah Health means local patients can access care that is usually only found at major academic centers," Montgomery says.

Her commitment also comes from a personal place: Montgomery's brother passed away from late-stage lung cancer. That experience has given her an even stronger passion for helping patients and families facing the same disease. And as a lifetime member of the community, this work is deeply personal to her.

"This program is so important for the people of our region," she says. "It's about making sure our community has access to the best care possible, close to home."

In her role, Montgomery answers patient questions in simple, clear language and guides people through every step of the screening and follow-up process. She connects



Dr. Walter Gribben (above) is part of the comprehensive lung screening program along with Nurse Navigator Pam Montgomery (below).



patients with doctors, resources, and support services, and she also steps in when incidental findings occur, helping patients understand what comes next. Her goal is to make the process as easy and reassuring as possible.

Take the Next Step

If you think you may qualify, or if you're simply concerned about your risk, the first step is a conversation with your doctor. They can help determine whether screening is right for you and, if needed, connect you to Kaweah Health's Lung Screening Program. Learn more about lung cancer screening at KaweahHealth.org/Lung or call (559) 624-3111. **KH**

DID YOU KNOW?

- Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S.
- A low-dose CT scan takes just 15 minutes and is covered by most insurance for qualifying patients.
- Screening is recommended for adults ages 50–80 with a history of smoking.
- Family history, environmental exposures, and secondhand smoke also increase risk.



Introducing Schlene Peet, Chief Nursing Officer

enhancing the quality and efficiency of services provided across the organization. Her appointment represents a significant step forward in the organization's priority of creating excellence through education.

"I am honored to join Kaweah Health as Chief Nursing Officer and to work alongside such a dedicated team of healthcare professionals," Peet says. "I look forward to contributing to the organization's continued success and to advancing our shared commitment to providing exceptional care to every patient we serve."

Peet most recently served as interim CNO at Kaweah Health for several months, where she demonstrated exceptional leadership and operational expertise. Prior to joining

Kaweah Health, she served as CNO at Frisco Medical City in Frisco, Texas, where she successfully led transformative initiatives in care coordination, clinical operations, and workforce engagement.

A dedicated advocate for education and professional development, Peet is currently pursuing a juris doctorate in healthcare law while holding master's degrees in nursing, business administration, and health service administration. She is recognized throughout the industry for her ability to build collaborative teams and deliver measurable improvements in patient experience and health outcomes.

Schlene Peet, MSN, MBA, MHSA, EJD®, has been named Kaweah Health Chief Nursing Officer. Peet brings more than 20 years of health-care leadership experience and a distinguished track record of operational excellence, team development, and unwavering commitment to patient-centered care.

In her new position, Peet will play a pivotal role in advancing Kaweah Health's strategic goals while

Out and About



Rawhide Employee Night

Kaweah Health Employee Night at the Visalia Rawhide on Aug. 16 was filled with excitement and unforgettable moments.

The night kicked off with Pet Partner handler Tana Bennett throwing the ceremonial first pitch, followed by the National Anthem beautifully performed by Nicole Cloutier Hobbs, RN from our Neonatal ICU. Later, the Kaweah Choir brought the crowd together during the 7th Inning Stretch.



Senator Grove Honored

Senator Shannon Grove was recognized by the District Hospital Leadership Forum with the 2025 Health Care Champion Award.

Senator Grove met with District Hospital Leadership Forum Board President and Kaweah Health CEO Gary Herbst, Kaweah Health Chief Strategy Officer Marc Mertz, Kaweah Health Board President Mike Olmos (not pictured) and Executive Director of the District Hospital Leadership Forum, Ryan Witz.



Congressman Costa Visits

Congressman Jim Costa visited Kaweah Health, where he spent time with graduate medical education interns, residents, and fellows.

Congressman Costa spoke candidly about the challenges facing hospitals like Kaweah Health in the wake of recent legislation. He also shared thoughtful reflections on the importance of the medical profession and encouraged residents and fellows to continue serving in small communities.



The Kaweah Health Foundation Annual Golf Classic on August 1, 2025, was a tremendous success, and we want to acknowledge the support from so many community friends and the Kaweah Health family.

The tournament raised more than \$142,000 to benefit the Foundation's Tiny Feet, Big Steps campaign. This \$3 million, 3-year campaign will remodel both Kaweah Health Pediatrics and Surgical Short Stay units. In Pediatrics, these improvements, along with our valued partnership with Valley Children's Medical Group, ensure children can continue to receive life-saving treatment close to their families, reducing the added stress of travel. In the Surgical Short Stay unit, the expansion will allow less complex surgeries to be treated more efficiently, without the restriction of bed space. Patients in pain need treatment fast, and the new addition/renovation will help achieve this.

The next Annual Golf Classic will be held August 7, 2026. Tournament proceeds will continue to support the Tiny Feet, Big Steps campaign.



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And to the PARTICIPANTS and
VOLUNTEERS!

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of bringing
more to the table
for our Valley.



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STROKE



HIP FRACTURE



SPINAL FUSION



KNEE REPLACEMENT

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Kaweah Health
MORE THAN MEDICINE. LIFE.

[KaweahHealth.org](https://www.KaweahHealth.org)

