Admittedly, there was no shortage of anxiety as we initially banded together in the spring of 2020 to address a health emergency without modern precedent. But the way everyone stepped up to the challenge was something I’ll never forget.

One thing I love about the culture at Novant Health is people’s willingness to do whatever it takes to help care for our patients. Our physicians, nurses and staff operate like family. Even under the most stressful conditions, they are united by a feeling that we’re all in this together.

The highlight of 2021 for me personally was having a chance, at long last, to administer vaccines for children ages 5 to 11. This came as a huge relief after an excruciating wait for adequate testing and approval.

One thing I love about the culture at Novant Health is people’s willingness to do whatever it takes to help care for our patients. Our physicians, nurses and staff operate like family. Even under the most stressful conditions, they are united by a feeling that we’re all in this together.

The new Blume Family Playground, for example, is a covered outside area that allows children a stimulating place to escape the often-scary confines of hospital rooms and clinical spaces. Also, thanks to the generosity of the Comly family, we opened Caroline’s Corner. This is a respite space for families that combines kitchen, living room and adjacent laundry facilities, along with on-site support from Ronald McDonald House volunteers. Due to the continuing support of our donors, many additional enhancements are planned for 2022.

Despite the stigma of being a pandemic year, 2021 was a year I’ll long remember, and I’ll cherish the inspirational work of my colleagues. In the pages that follow, you’ll read some remarkable stories about remarkable people doing remarkable things. Because of their dedication and your support, our community is truly blessed.

Stephanie Appling, MPH
Senior director
Novant Health Women’s & Children’s Institute
Hemby Children’s Hospital by the numbers.

We are grateful to have your support every step of the way. To make an impact today, visit NovantHealth.org/SupportHemby.

The Blume Family Playground, a handicapped-accessible children’s playground at the Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital campus.
Learn the history of Hemby Children’s Hospital’s name.

Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital is well known nationwide for its remarkable care. Less well known, perhaps, is the story of how the hospital got its name.

The act of philanthropy that established the hospital was an expression of gratitude for the team of nurses and doctors whose extraordinary compassion and care helped a family during a critical time. The family in question was that of Sandy Hemby Burnett, whose 10-month-old daughter Ashlan was diagnosed with neuroblastoma in 1978.

At that time, Burnett explains, treating the neuroblastoma was challenging, and successful outcomes were rare.” She felt fortunate that Ashlan’s two pediatric surgeons at Novant Health Presbyterian Medical Center, James Hamilton, MD, and Duncan Morton, MD, had experience with childhood cancers. Their personal interest in the case proved beneficial as Burnett investigated treatment options.

Burnett says the number one blessing of all, however, was the emotional support she received from pediatric head nurse Emma Gupton. Although the family lost Ashlan after only a few months of hospitalization, Gupton turned out to be “an angel that God placed in the right place at the right time,” Burnett says. “She was there for us giving daily hugs and words of comfort every step of our journey.”

Burnett is not sure how she would have survived the loss without Gupton’s help, not only during but after Ashlan’s hospitalization. The two went on to become lifelong friends. “I considered her my second mom,” Burnett says, “and our children referred to her as Grandmother Gupton.”

Gupton’s longstanding dream was for Presbyterian Medical Center to have a distinct children’s hospital, rather than simply an assortment of pediatric services. The Burnett family’s generous lead gift enabled the hospital to open in 1995 and allowed Gupton’s dream to become a reality.

The gift was provided through the Alex Hemby Foundation, which was managed at the time by Burnett’s parents, Torrence Hemby Jr. and Hilda Wiseman Hemby. Burnett says her parents had a compelling interest in children’s health. “They really wanted to bring more specialty services to Charlotte,” Burnett says, “so families dealing with serious illnesses would not have to travel elsewhere for care.”

“Torence was ‘Torry’ Eli Hemby, Jr. and his wife, Hilda Wiseman Hemby, left their mark on the Queen City in many ways during their lives, but perhaps most impactful has been the heartfelt generosity they bestowed upon children facing significant illness in our community.”

For decades, the children of Charlotte have had warriors on their side fighting to ensure they have access to the best healthcare possible. The Hemby family has been a leader in this fight and built a lasting legacy that will continue to impact children for generations to come.

The Hemby Family
A legacy of love

When their granddaughter, Ashlan Hemby Burnett, was diagnosed with a rare form of pediatric cancer and passed away shortly after her first birthday, Torrey and Hilda turned their philanthropic focus toward fighting pediatric illness, specifically childhood cancer. With an overwhelmingly generous gift from the Hemby family, Hemby Children’s Hospital now stands as a recognized leader in pediatric healthcare.

Today, Torney and Hilda’s family carry on the tradition of philanthropy and supporting the needs of critically ill children. Theirs is truly a legacy of love, and Novant Health will be forever grateful.

Our world-class pediatric subspecialists have expertise in the following areas:

- Allergy and immunology
- Anesthesia
- Cardiology
- Critical care
- Developmental pediatric and behavioral health
- Emergency medicine
- Endocrinology
- Epilepsy
- Gastroenterology
- General surgery
- Hematology and oncology
- Hospitalist service
- Infectious disease
- Neonatal medicine
- Nephrology
- Neurology and sleep medicine
- Neurosurgery
- Orthopedics
- Psychiatry
- Pulmonology
- Sports medicine

A dream come true

“Torence and Presbyterian in 1940: I said we would one day have a children’s hospital. That dream became true. We now have a sustainable place where we can provide the loving, caring family-centered environment in which children respond so well. It’s truly a dream come true.”

Emma Gupton, RN
Clinical Director of Pediatrics
Presbyterian-Hosptial, Year-6
In Loving Memory of Ashlan Hemby Burnett’s
passive angel
Our youngest patients now have access to more pediatric neurology services.

Introducing Novant Health Center for Pediatric Development.

Sasidharan Taravath, MD, moved from Novant Health New Hanover Regional Medical Center in Wilmington to Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital in 2021 to lead the expansion of pediatric neurology services.

Throughout his career, Dr. Taravath has cultivated a loyal following among patients. He tells the story of a patient he once treated in West Virginia for Tourette syndrome. Later, the patient’s son developed the same condition. Convinced no other neurologist could provide the same level of care, the man tracked down Dr. Taravath in North Carolina and brought his son to Charlotte for treatment.

The working atmosphere at Hemby Children’s Hospital has been a real bonus for him and his team members. “A lot of people comment about the collegiality here,” he said, “and those comments are true.”

Dr. Taravath is working hard to ensure neurology services will always be sufficient to meet community needs.

According to James DuRant, MD, Novant Health Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics medical director, the new 15,000 square-foot Novant Health Center for Pediatric Development was designed to provide everything these children need under one roof. Dr. DuRant said the consolidation of services in one location means less travel time for patients and increased communication between providers. The center can serve a larger number of patients, conduct more screenings for childhood trauma and better coordinate family support services.

The multidisciplinary clinic serves patients suffering from adverse childhood experiences, along with patients with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorders or development delays frequently associated with premature birth. Patients have access to remarkable care in audiology, pediatric neurology, neurosurgery and psychiatry, as well as physical, occupational and speech therapy.

Staff positions include a licensed clinical social worker, board-certified pediatric physicians, board-certified pediatric nurses, a child life specialist and clinical representatives from all the hospital’s pediatric subspecialties. Community partners with a presence at the new center include Thompson Child & Family Focus and ABS Kids.

“Our programs have been specifically designed to dovetail with other early intervention programs already operating in the region. We know early intervention improves outcomes and whenever we provide care for one child, we know we’re supporting everyone in that child’s family. The new center gives us an opportunity to impact at least two generations with every child we support,” said Dr. DuRant.

We are grateful to have your support every step of the way. To make an impact today, visit NovantHealth.org/SupportHemby.
Families in the Lake Norman and Huntersville communities will soon have access to pediatric emergency services close to home.

Martin Truex Jr. Foundation and Novant Health broke ground Oct. 8, 2021, on a 5,000-square-foot children's emergency services center within Novant Health Huntersville Medical Center to better meet the needs of the fast-growing community.

The $2.4 million investment, made possible through the Martin Truex Jr. Foundation and other generous contributors, will bring specialized emergency care to thousands of children and teens in the Lake Norman and Huntersville area who currently have limited access to nearby services.

“There is a real need for pediatric emergency care in the Lake Norman area, and we are fortunate to have the support of many donors and the NASCAR community to make this dream a reality,” Truex Jr. said.

The new child-friendly emergency services space will include nine private treatment rooms, a triage room, advanced medical equipment specifically designed to treat children, a family consultation room, a treatment room for minor emergencies and sleep chairs for late-night emergencies.

The space will also have a NASCAR-themed, family-friendly waiting room with specialized artwork using bold colors, blurred speed images and dynamic designs at eye level for children. The artwork will bring a sense of driver recognition and connection to a space that can be frightening to most children.

Mike Riley, president and chief operating officer of Huntersville Medical Center, stressed the importance of the partnership in bringing the space to life.

“It’s important for children to be treated by physicians trained in pediatric emergency care in an environment designed with kids in mind,” Riley said. “Our tiniest residents should have access to this specialized care close to home.”

The Martin Truex Jr. Foundation’s donation was a part of a group effort that saw gifts from many donors who, together, will bring care to the children of the community.

In addition to the principal gift the Martin Truex Jr. Foundation made through Novant Health Presbyterian Medical Center Foundation, other top supporters include Auto-Owners Insurance; Ryan Blaney Family Foundation; Brad Keselowski’s Checkered Flag Foundation; Vincent, Lisa and Vinny Daley; Gene Haas Foundation; Joe Gibbs Racing, Denny Hamlin Foundation; Daniel and Traci Hughes; Kasey Kahne Foundation; Haven Kiley Foundation; Dennis and Mary Lehman; Joey Logano Foundation; Metrolina Greenhouses; Evernham Family-Racing for a Reason Foundation; Tyler Reddick; Sokal Media Group; James R. Vannoy & Sons Construction Co Inc.; and the Jerry & Frances Warsky Foundation.

Novant Health Huntersville Medical Center Martin Truex Jr. Foundation Children’s Emergency Services is set to open in the summer of 2022.
Pediatric endocrinology partners with UNC School of Medicine.

Every healthcare organization needs medical professionals who are not only good clinicians but good “system thinkers” who can visualize the best ways to enhance efficiency and expand access to vital services. Navin Bhojwani, MD, fulfills this role at Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital.

Dr. Bhojwani spearheaded an initiative to leverage Novant Health’s relationship with the UNC School of Medicine. Hemby Children’s Hospital providers now can partner with pediatric endocrinologists in Chapel Hill as they deliver care.

“One thing we discovered during COVID-19,” he said, “was a larger number of patients with new endocrinological conditions requiring immediate attention. We have been able to accommodate demand by having our team of providers collaborate with UNC’s experts.”

Technological advances during 2021 improved both the effectiveness of telemedicine and public acceptance. “Telemedicine has evolved to be a great tool to connect with patients while providing a near bedside experience,” he said. “Patients and families have adapted very quickly to this new way of connecting with their providers.”

Pediatric endocrinology patients have benefited because telemedicine enables remote monitoring of type 1 diabetes. “Our success in helping patients who need remote access to limited subspecialty care is just another example of thinking outside the box to meet the needs of our patients,” he said. “Being able to implement solutions like our pediatric endocrinology expanded coverage is what excites me about being at Novant Health. Our commitment to the care of our patients starts with ‘yes’ and then often requires thoughtful innovation to make the ‘yes’ a reality.”

NICU expands with your help.

Currently, the 38-bed NICU provides continuous care delivered by board-certified neonatologists, pediatricians, respiratory therapists, neonatal nurse practitioners, nutritionists, early intervention coordinators, physical therapists, occupational therapists, social workers, pharmacists, audiologists, discharge planning nurses, speech therapists and child life specialists.

An expansion is underway to ensure more babies have access to lifesaving care in the NICU at Hemby Children’s Hospital. Through your generous contributions, the facility is expanding its NICU to increase capacity and accommodate a nearly 30% increase in babies served over the past three years. Our $5 million fundraising goal to support this expansion will fund 12 new beds, as well as physician sleep rooms, family restrooms and a dedicated lactation space for mothers. The project is expected to break ground early next year.

If you would like to help fund this expansion, please contact Amy McKinney at Amy.McKinney@NovantHealth.org.

We are grateful to have your support every step of the way. To make an impact today, visit NovantHealth.org/SupportHemby.

NICU by the numbers

- NICU admissions: 841 – 15% decrease (Total 854 admissions in 2020)
- NICU ADC: 59 – 8.9% increase (ADC 54 in 2020)
- ALOS: 25.66 days – 10.3% increase (ALOS 23.7 days in 2020)
- Admission rate: 13.1% – 4.5% decrease (13.7% in 2020)
- Pediatric NBN service admissions: 5,425 – 2.2% increase (compared to 5,307 in 2020)
The St. Jude Affiliate Clinic at Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital provides remarkable care to kids fighting cancer.

If you ask Jessica Bell, MD, what sets St. Jude Affiliate Clinic at Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital apart from similar facilities, she’s quick to highlight the clinic’s “home-like atmosphere.” She and her team members have always taken great pains, she said, to provide as much comfort as possible to families coping with serious illness.

Between 2020 and 2021, the clinic experienced a 20% increase in new patients, translating to more than 1,000 patient visits per year. Adding seven new exam rooms in 2020 allowed for more privacy and infection prevention during the pandemic.

Since her arrival at the clinic in 2008, Dr. Bell has seen consistent improvements in outcomes, especially for patients with more complex illnesses. “Cancer treatments are more nuanced today than ever before,” she said. “A multidisciplinary approach has become routine. Our specialists work as a team, and their collaborations lead to much better treatment plans.”

Other big improvements in cancer care involve immunotherapies, genetics and clinical trials. “Specialists now can harvest a patient’s white blood cells to effectively reengineer those cells, and then reinject them,” she said. “The resulting ability of the immune system to fight cancer has changed the landscape in cancer care. In addition, scientists are using molecular genomics to develop drugs that can target even a very particular genetic mutation. This type of therapy didn’t even exist when I was in training.”

Dr. Bell said advancements in research and the expansion of clinical trials have made a dramatic difference in treating high-risk leukemias and late-stage neuroblastomas. “The survival rate for patients with a high-risk neuroblastoma were about 1 in 3 when I first started practicing, she said. “Now, survival rates are in the 80% range.”

Hemby Children’s Hospital’s collaboration with St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital has also been a game changer, Dr. Bell noted. St. Jude is the only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center devoted solely to children. “This designation has particular significance in the world of oncology, signifying the highest possible level of sophistication of research and patient care,” she said.

The affiliation allows the clinic to continue doing all the things it does well, while easily transferring cases that need additional care beyond our walls. “The clinic’s referral network also includes other top-tier cancer centers in the Carolinas and around the country. “We have total flexibility,” she said, “to send patients to facilities that have capabilities we don’t have. No matter the diagnosis, we do what’s best for the patient.”

When asked what she likes best about her work, Dr. Bell said it’s the team itself. “The team members who work here at Novant Health are uniquely passionate about what they do. We approach every patient fully confident we can make a difference.”
Meet our remarkable team members.

Meet remarkable physician: Catherine Ohmstede, MD

One of the things that makes Catherine Ohmstede, MD, such an outstanding physician is her willingness to meet people where they are. She pays careful attention not only to patients’ medical symptoms but to their significant life experiences as well. “In order to truly understand my patients’ needs,” she said, “I have to know their stories.”

Dr. Ohmstede saw a marked increase in behavioral health issues among young people through listening to patients in 2021. “Many kids were fearful they might infect their grandparents. Many suffered badly from the absence of social activities. Others, tragically, were forced to experience grief at an early age, due to the loss of a parent or close relative.”

“Many kids were fearful they might infect their grandparents. Many suffered badly from the absence of social activities. Others, tragically, were forced to experience grief at an early age, due to the loss of a parent or close relative.”

Fortunately, she added, children tend to be resilient. “I remain optimistic most of them will bounce back better when all of this is behind us.”

To Dr. Ohmstede, caring for patients means supporting their families, too. She often provides life coaching to parents. “My goal is to help every parent find joy and acceptance in fulfilling that role,” she said. “To be effective caregivers, parents need to first take care of themselves and pay attention to things like nutrition, exercise and sleep.”

Dr. Ohmstede has enjoyed watching Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital grow along with the community. This includes the addition of new physical facilities, many made possible by private philanthropy, as well as the growth in new specialties.

When asked to name a nurse who personified the culture of caring at Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital during 2021, top leaders point to Morgan Hunt, RN, BSN, CPN.

Hunt, a nurse manager who’d been overseeing pediatric care, the pediatric ICU and child life for three years, was aware of the fear that was gripping some staff members as COVID-19 conditions worsened during the year. “I let them know I’d never knowingly put them in danger,” she said, “and they responded to that.”

Throughout the year, several of the hospital’s physicians, nurses and staff were redeployed to COVID-19 treatment units for adults. “Our team members responded to this situation like true professionals,” Hunt said. “They knew they needed to step up. Their reaction was to dig in, not to run away.”

The staff’s response to COVID-19 is something Hunt will always be proud of, but she’s quick to point out other noteworthy achievements during 2021. One was the opening of the new, covered outdoor Blume Family Playground. Another was the opening of Caroline’s Corner, a family respite room created in partnership with the Ronald McDonald House of Charlotte and the Comly family.

Hunt is grateful to work for an organization whose corporate culture is so nurturing. “I have nurses who have been here for 30, even 40 years,” she said. “They stay because the working environment has a family feel rather than a business feel. Everybody knows everyone else and it’s incredibly valuable!”

Meet remarkable nurse: Morgan Hunt, RN, BSN, CPN

Meet remarkable physician: Catherine Ohmstede, MD
Meet remarkable team member: Erica Smith, M.Ed.

Erica A. Smith, M.Ed., is a certified child life specialist, certified therapeutic recreation specialist, a certified educator of infant massage and a certified infant massage instructor. It would be hard to imagine anyone better equipped to handle the challenges that confront children in hospital settings.

Her role includes using play techniques to help kids prepare for upcoming medical procedures, remaining attuned to children’s ever-changing emotional needs and helping family members learn about all procedures and what to expect if the procedures require anesthesia.

One project Smith particularly enjoyed during 2021 was a cosmetic makeover of the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine. “The MRI machine is huge and often overwhelming at first glance,” she said. “The sounds are loud. The environment is sterile, and there’s nothing kid-friendly about it.”

Smith and the MRI team set about creating a mural, with the look and feel of an aquarium, to make the MRI area more inviting. She said the project is a perfect example of the benefits that can be achieved when philanthropic support is available to underwrite needed improvements.

“This gift made possible by generous donations through Novant Health Foundation was the best investment ever,” she said. “Now, when we take a 5-year-old in for an MRI, we see their eyes light up. We see excitement and smiles instead of fear. What a difference this has made. It’s truly magical.”

Meet remarkable team member: Gracie Davis

Gracie Davis is dedicated to maintaining meticulously clean neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) isolettes for babies at Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital. She has been a Novant Health environmental services team member for three decades and has a long-standing reputation for doing excellent work. For the past couple of years, she has worked on cleaning and maintaining NICU isolettes.

Isolettes are clear, enclosed cribs that create a warm and sanitary environment for infants. They are essential in caring for premature babies who cannot maintain body heat on their own. Davis’ primary responsibility is to clean and prep them to hold babies.

“Gracie Davis is a true gem,” said one of her managers. “It’s a sign they are getting strong and able to move out of the incubators and are one step closer to going home with their families.”

Whichever job she has, Davis is dedicated to ensuring every baby is safe in my isolettes.”

Gracie Davis

“IT’s a good thing when I have a lot of work to do. When I walk into the room and see a lot of isolettes, I think, ‘Oh my gosh, the babies are getting better,’” Davis said. “It’s a sign they are getting strong and able to move out of the incubators and are one step closer to going home with their families.”

Whether it be her managers, the nurses and doctors on her floor or the babies in the isolettes, everyone who spends time in the NICU at Hemby Children’s Hospital knows they can count on Davis and her dedication to her job.

“I take a lot of pride in what I do,” Davis said. “I think about if one of the babies in the NICU was my grandchild and how I would want them to be cared for. There are no shortcuts with my job, and I am confident every baby will be safe in my isolettes.”
Meet our Hemby Heroes.

Meet Alix Young, miracle baby No. 3.

Alix Young was born at just 23 weeks and six days, giving her parents the baby girl they’d hoped for when they decided to try for a third child. But her journey home wasn’t an easy one — she spent four long months in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

Alix’s mom, April, gave birth through an emergency C-section after going to the doctor with high blood pressure. “They let me hold her inside of the incubator, and it didn’t register to me that she was 1 pound, 6 ounces. Her eyes weren’t open. She was just this frail body, a shadow of bones and a little bit of skin,” April said. “Now when I look at her and I look back at pictures, I just cry. It’s hard for me to envision that that’s where she was, even though we’ve come so far.”

The journey wasn’t easy. In the NICU, Alix had two blood transfusions. She was on oxygen for three months and two weeks.

“There were many times when I would burst into tears,” April said. “Our support team was top tier, which is so important at a time when you’re so isolated. It’s a lot on you, mentally and emotionally, and they absolutely understand that. They are so patient and kind and with all your questions. You can just tell they genuinely love what they do.”

Alix came home from the NICU on Aug. 27, her due date, and she’s doing “phenomenal.”

“She’s about 10 pounds now. She’s smiling. She is very feisty. She likes to be held all the time when she’s awake. She sleeps through the night. She’s drinking 6-ounce bottles,” April said. “She’s doing amazingly well.”

Meet Grygorii Bakhmach, cancer survivor.

The Bakhmach family had just moved to Charlotte from Ukraine in 2020 when their son, Grygorii, was diagnosed with stage 3 Burkitt’s lymphoma. He immediately began a treatment plan that included four cycles of chemotherapy. Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital became his home while he fought childhood cancer.

Nataliia Bakhmach knew her son was in good hands when they entered the doors of Hemby Children’s Hospital.

“We immediately had confidence in the care he was receiving. His doctors were always ahead of the game,” Nataliia said.

In addition to excellent medical treatment, the family was blown away by the personal care they received at the hospital during their most trying time. On one of his hardest days of treatment, Grygorii had a spinal procedure scheduled and was feeling anxious and afraid. His doctor knew what might comfort him. She brought a “magic light” into his room that projected snowflakes to help him visualize a beautiful winter day in Ukraine.

“It made him feel at home,” Nataliia said.

Grygorii’s treatments went well. He returned to school, and his hair grew back. “After this experience, it’s easy to distinguish what is important,” Nataliia said. “The ability to hug my child and see him healthy. It’s such a blessing.”

Meet Sawyer Long, the tiny warrior.

When Sawyer Long was 4 weeks old, he was diagnosed with infantile fibrosarcoma, a rare cancer of the soft tissues. In his first few months of life, he has faced more obstacles than many do in a lifetime. During their most trying time, the team at Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital felt like family to his parents, Kinsey and Jeremy Long.

“We believe God led us to Hemby for a reason. We were able to be a priority and focus because it is a smaller hospital. The nurses would even argue over who got to care for Sawyer each day,” Kinsey said. “We just felt safe there.”

After his first few treatments, Sawyer’s tumor shrunk dramatically. He is now home with his parents, and they administer his medication daily. At his last check-in appointment, the tumor had shrunk 85% from its original size.
Meet Emmalee Brown, a miracle 7 years in the making.

During her 123-day stint in the NICU at Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital, Emmalee Brown earned a reputation for strength and a nickname: “pretty tough cream puff.”

After seven years of fertility treatments and heartbreaking losses, Ashley Brown made it to 23 weeks pregnant with Emmalee before she went into labor. “They had to do an emergency C-section,” Ashley said. “I asked them to do everything they could to save my daughter. And that’s exactly what they did.”

During the first month and half in the NICU, Emmalee was doing great. She came off the ventilator and was on low oxygen support. But then she contracted a serious infection, a rare strain of strep.

“She was so tiny. The infection was ravaging her body. She barely had a pulse. She barely had any blood pressure,” Ashley recalled. “All the doctors told us, ‘It doesn’t look good, but we’re going to do everything we can.’”

Once again, they did.

The team was able to alleviate the worst-case scenario. However, Emmalee lost seven toes and brain damage caused cerebral palsy. But before Emmalee was discharged, her medical team had already scheduled appointments with occupational and physical therapists to ensure she has the best chance of success as she continues to grow.

“The nurses were so caring. They made sure I was taking care of myself because they let me know they were taking care of Emmalee. They would remind me to eat. They would offer me a room to sleep in if I needed to rest,” Ashley said. “Although it was a traumatic experience, it was a really beautiful experience, as well, just to see the compassion from everyone and from my family.”

The team at Hemby Children’s Hospital also provided support in other ways, in the form of gas gift cards to cover travel to and from the hospital, food vouchers for the cafeteria and a social worker who helped them get coverage for medical expenses and other services.

When Emmalee recovered from her strep infection, a doctor gave her the nickname “pretty tough cream puff” — one that continues to define Emmalee’s life as a happy, babbling 1-year-old.

“I miss walking onto that floor, seeing the pictures of those beautiful babies, hearing the lullaby being played after every baby born,” Ashley said. “Most of all, I miss seeing those smiling faces greeting me, saying, ‘Hi Mrs. Brown! Emmalee has been doing so great today!’ I will forever be grateful for my experience at Hemby.”

Meet Palmer Goforth, cancer survivor.

In December 2020, Brittany and Parley Goforth’s world was turned upside down. Their 7-year-old son, Palmer, was diagnosed with stage 3B lymphoma. He was immediately admitted to Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital for treatment.

“It’s extremely scary because this particular cancer is so aggressive. There is no time to waste,” Brittany said. “After the diagnosis, everything moved so fast. But every provider had confidence in the treatment plan.”

Thankfully, with the love of family and friends, and the team at Hemby Children’s Hospital by their side, Palmer was able to fight and overcome childhood cancer.

“The providers were incredible,” Brittany said. “But it goes far beyond great doctors. Food service, housekeeping, child life specialists, the chaplain, the radiologist — each of them was not just kind but invested in Palmer’s journey.”

A child life specialist helped the Goforths explain Palmer’s illness to him by illustrating what was happening to his cells using playdough.

“Hemby has wonderful nurses. It is the best place to go if you are sick,” Palmer said. “It is the best hospital for children because of the nurses and everyone. They saved my life. That’s all.”

Meet Gabriel Pitman, feisty 10-year-old born at 24 weeks.

Gabriel Pitman is 10 years old. He’s happy and curious — “flat-out nosy,” his mother, Stephanie Pitman said with a laugh — and going all the time.

He is also a fighter. He was born at 24 weeks and 2 days, weighing 1 pound and 14 ounces, and spent the following 180 days in the NICU at Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital. His journey has been far from easy — it is also far from over.

Stephanie is grateful for how far Gabe has come and for the care he has received over the years.

“Hemby Children’s Hospital provides care and understanding we haven’t found anywhere else. It’s our home away from home, and we love them dearly. There are so many neonatologists, pediatricians and nurses who have provided care that literally saved his life, on more than one occasion,” Stephanie said. “He was a very sick and fragile baby, and today he is a feisty, opinionated 10-year-old because of the care he received. We will always be grateful for that.”
Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital had numerous opportunities during 2021 to continue its collaboration with individuals and organizations interested in enhancing the quality of its care and the growth of its programs.

Kendra Scott backs team member recognition.

Kendra Scott, a jewelry store at SouthPark Mall, continued a relationship with Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital first established in 2019. The partnership began when the retailer provided lunch to members of the pediatric intensive care unit staff, in appreciation for care provided to the child of a Kendra Scott employee.

As part of its ongoing “Kendra Cares” philanthropic effort, employees have returned to the hospital on numerous occasions since then to provide stress-relieving activities for patients and caregivers alike. Typical activities include hands-on opportunities to create jewelry out of store-supplied components. The retailer also provides gifts of jewelry in association with Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

Kendra Scott partnered with Parmalee, a country music band with North Carolina roots, to honor front-line nurses for their efforts during the pandemic. One Hemby Children’s Hospital nurse received a jewelry gift and a surprise Zoom call and personal salute from the band.

Smile buttons help to personalize staff.

Recognizing that masking requirements were disrupting the normal intimacy of staff-patient interactions, Pat Myers with Mojo Studios of Davidson donated his time and talent to photograph hospital staff members. Team members then received “smile buttons” to pin on to their uniforms while on duty. The pins allowed patients to enjoy a full facial view of caregivers whose faces are now normally hidden behind masks.

Jeep enthusiasts conduct toy drive.

In July 2021 the Lake Norman JeepStyle Jeep Club hosted a “Christmas in July” toy drive. The timing allowed the child life team to replenish toy supplies mid-year. The club also provided a $500 cash donation.
These GO Karts are not for driving.

Gamers Outreach donated portable video game kiosks designed specifically for hospital rooms, known as GO Karts. “During hospitalization, kids lose access to friends, school and moments that typically define childhood. Our goal is to restore a sense of joy and normalcy in their lives,” a representative of Gamers Outreach said. “By donating this equipment and software, we have a chance to help children’s hospitals provide stress-relieving activities along with high quality care.”

Miss Mecklenburg County honors team members.

Miss Mecklenburg County, Sophia Kellstrom, conducted a statewide social media campaign in March of 2021 recognizing Hemby Children’s Hospital. The event drew national attention and was held in conjunction with a drive to provide gift items for patients. Kellstrom said it was an honor to recognize the hospital’s exceptional work treating COVID-19 patients. She also expressed admiration for the hospital’s success in treating patients with other serious conditions during a time of COVID-19 related restrictions. “The physicians, nurses and staff,” she said, “are to be commended for their extraordinary efforts to serve our community under some of the most difficult imaginable circumstances.”

Radiothon raises $91,765.

On Dec. 2, 2021, Beasley Media Group hosted the annual Secret Santa Radiothon benefitting Hemby Children’s Hospital. Local radio stations featured patient stories, team member interviews and updates on new programs and services. Listeners donated a total of $91,765 throughout the day.

Cannon School wraps up its annual wrap-in.

Faculty, staff and students from Cannon School in Concord hosted their annual “Project Wrap-In” again in 2021. The project provides wrapped presents to several nonprofit organizations, including Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital. The presents are used in the hospital’s “Christmas store” each holiday season. Child life specialists maintain the store so that families and visitors can select and distribute presents to children hospitalized over the holidays.

A representative of Cannon School described this program as one of Cannon’s favorite traditions “because it marries the school’s core values and dedication to community service with the annual holiday spirit.”

Charlotte soccer athletes collect unwrapped toys.

In September 2021, players, coaches and staff of the Charlotte Independence professional soccer team collected toys for Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital patients. The toys were gathered as part of the club’s annual “Goalkeeper Wars,” in which players from different teams challenge one another to collect the most toys.

Goalkeeper Austin Pack said the toys would be distributed throughout the year, to help celebrate birthdays, holidays or successes while undergoing challenging medical procedures. Child life specialist Erica Smith said the toys were particularly appreciated during 2021, since regular visits and support programs were disrupted throughout the year by COVID-19 restrictions. “We are thankful,” she said, “for our partnership with the team. They are very dedicated to community service and have been most generous in supporting projects that uplift the spirits of our patients and families.”

Novant Health Charlotte Marathon attracts 6,000 runners.

Novant Health Charlotte Marathon brought more than 6,000 runners to the streets of the Queen City on Nov. 13 for an annual event whose proceeds benefit Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital. Since the partnership between Novant Health and the Charlotte Marathon began in 2013, members of the running community have collected nearly $250,000 to fund equipment and service enhancements at the hospital including $42,000 in 2021.
As 2021 got underway, the cruiser was beginning its 14th year of operations. Its mission of service to underprivileged neighborhoods did not change during those 14 years. However, the mission assumed much greater urgency as the effects of the pandemic continued to spread.

It was quickly apparent, for example, that Charlotte’s minority communities were suffering in disproportionate numbers. The cruiser, in response, took on a front-line role in the effort to ensure greater equity in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, free cloth masks, educational information and timely medical referrals.

The importance of another crucial mission was underscored by the pandemic: the need to protect children from conventional childhood diseases. Focusing on communities where vaccination rates were abnormally low, the cruiser’s care team helped thousands of children to receive protection from such ongoing threats such as polio, measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, chickenpox and whooping cough. The team also partnered with volunteer Novant Health Medical Group providers and community centers, clinics, schools and public health teams to provide health assessments at no charge.

Another key activity was addressing the social determinants of health, including things like food, housing, financial stability and ready access to a primary care physician. To address that need, Patricia Coleman, a social worker who is part of the cruiser team, provided more than 600 referrals, many for food assistance from Loaves & Fishes.

Given the scale of needs that still exist, Benton’s dream would be to have a whole fleet of cruisers. Until that happens, however, she’s proud to be part of the hospital’s longstanding commitment to improving access. She compares the Community Care Cruiser to the little engine that could. “We're just one 40-foot mobile unit,” she said, “but we’re cruising along doing the very best we can to make a difference for people in need.”

Thank you to those whose philanthropic support funds the work of the cruiser through Novant Health Foundation.

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Zeleka Benton, manager of community services in the greater Charlotte market, oversees the Novant Health Community Care Cruiser, a 40-foot mobile unit that provides on-site clinical care and support services to uninsured and underinsured patients.

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As the Hemby ambassador, I serve as an advocate for pediatrics, both within the Novant Health system and in the community at large. My mission, in a nutshell, is to ensure people everywhere are aware of the remarkable team and services at Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital.

My interest in children’s health stems back many years. I grew up in Pittsburgh and attended college at West Virginia Wesleyan, where I studied psychology. My goal at the time was to become a certified child life specialist, a career interest that ultimately resulted in personal and professional growth opportunities I could scarcely have imagined.

While in school, for example, I had a chance to volunteer at UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh, working on both the transplant and hematology oncology units. After graduating, I completed a practicum at MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Research Hospital in Houston. I then moved to Columbus, Ohio, to serve an internship at Nationwide Children’s Hospital.

The common element in all these experiences was learning how to bring a sense of control, comfort and familiarity into what was typically a very intimidating space for young people. I was, and still am, inspired by the resiliency and hope displayed by families adapting to sometimes unimaginable challenges.

One thing I particularly love about my role as Hemby ambassador is having a chance to spotlight the team members who provide remarkable care to our patients. Having worked at some of the nation’s best pediatric hospitals, I know the team members at Hemby Children’s Hospital match up with the very best. It’s an honor to tell their stories, share their achievements and let everyone know how blessed we are to have such extraordinary caregivers here in our own community.

Jessica Osborn, CCLS
Hemby ambassador
Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital
Our leadership.

Stephanie Appling, MPH
Senior director, Novant Health Women’s & Children’s Institute

Patricia Campbell, MSN, RN, C
System administrative executive, Novant Health Women’s & Children’s Institute

Melissa Caldwell, NNP
Director of neonatal services for the greater Charlotte market

L. Eugene Daugherty Jr, MD
Medical director, Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital

Scott Painter
Regional clinic manager

Keli Sadler, MHA, BSN, RN
Vice president, nursing market chief nursing officer, greater Charlotte market

Stephanie Appling, MPH
Senior director, Novant Health Women’s & Children’s Institute

Saad Ehtisham
President, Novant Health greater Charlotte market and Novant Health Presbyterian Medical Center

Jamie Feinour, MHA, MT(ASCP)
Chief operating officer, Novant Health Presbyterian Medical Center and president and chief operating officer, Novant Health Charlotte Orthopaedic Hospital

Sidney Fletcher, MD
Senior vice president, chief clinical officer, greater Charlotte market

Morgan Hunt, BSN, RN
Nurse manager, pediatrics and PICU

Amber Sullivan
Regional clinic manager

Catherine Ohmstede, MD
Market physician executive, Novant Health Women’s & Children’s Institute

Kelli Sadler, MHA, BSN, RN
Vice president, nursing market chief nursing officer, greater Charlotte market

Megan Kanable
Regional clinic manager

Lewis D. Lipscomb, MD
System physician executive, Novant Health Women’s & Children’s Institute

Catherine Ohmstede, MD
Market physician executive, Novant Health Women’s & Children’s Institute

Jessica Osborn, CCLS
Hemby ambassador

Phyllis Waddell, BSN, RNC-NIC
NICU nurse manager

Our 2021 superhero donors.

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- Michael C. Wiles and Kimberly N. Wiles

Our Superheroes support continued remarkable care for children throughout our community. To learn how you can bring hope to children and families through a pledge, please contact Amy McKinney at Amy.McKinney@NovantHealth.org.
About Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital.

Novant Health Hemby Children’s Hospital offers patients remarkable care, while offering parents peace of mind. From neonatal and pediatric intensive care to a wide variety of pediatric specialties, Hemby Children’s Hospital is small enough to give patients individualized attention, yet large enough to attract some of the most skilled experts in the region.

For more information, please visit NovantHealth.org/Hemby.

Contact Us.

If you would like to make a transformational gift, please contact Amy McKinney at Amy.McKinney@NovantHealth.org.

We are grateful to have your support every step of the way. To make an impact today, visit NovantHealth.org/SupportHemby.