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## Long-time physician to retire at month's end

Dr. Gerard has cared for patients from birth to death

By DENNIS GEORGE PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

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Dr. Paul Gerard III will retire Oct. 1 after serving the Hardin County community for more than 45 years.

DENNIS GEORGE / Paxton Media Group

### OPEN HOUSE

An open house to honor Dr. Paul Gerard on his retirement from Baptist Health Medical Group hosted by his family is from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday at the House on Helm, 238 Helm St., Elizabethtown. RSVP to [jackiegerard@me.com](mailto:jackiegerard@me.com).

There are generations of Hardin County residents who have known only one doctor in their lifetime.

That is about to change.

Dr. Paul Gerard, who has been known to deliver a baby and care for them throughout their life until death, is retiring after practicing medicine in Elizabethtown for more than 45 years.

With that also comes the loss of another physician who made house calls, accepted food and vegetables in exchange for his fee and practiced his trade with a personal touch.

"I just made a house call yesterday and I made one last week," Gerard said Thursday. "I feel like sometimes it is easier for me to go see some of my older patients than it is for them to come see me."

For many years, Gerard also would leave his office after a long day and take time to visit patients in the hospital or a nursing home.

"I stopped going to the hospital about two years ago when the computer system was so complicated that I was going to have to get into the computer at 2 o'clock in the morning," he said. "I could barely do the computer at 10 o'clock in the morning much less than 2 o'clock in the morning."

The use of a computer in his family practice slowed him down, Gerard said. Instead of seeing 25 patients in a day, he was only able to see 17.

He still took the time to give each patient as much time as they needed.

"He genuinely cares about them as a whole person," said Melisha Boyd, one of Gerard's assistants. "They may come in for one thing, but he cares if they have another issue, even if it's something that's like a personal issue. He'll take the time to listen to them and care for them."

It is that one-on-one care that has endeared Gerard to his patients, said Kay Mesecher, a nurse who has worked alongside Gerard for the past 25 years.

"When he receives someone's lab results, he will personally call them to review it with them if there is anything abnormal," she said. "In a lot of places, a nurse or a medical assistant will make those calls. Dr. Gerard makes those calls and explains everything to the patient and answers their questions. He tells them what he wants to do next for them."

Mesecher marvels at how patients show their love and respect for the doctor.

"They'll bring stuff from home and bring it in," she said. "There's a lady that cans. She makes jams, and she'll bring her jams and beets and salsa for him. There's a lot of times a patient will knock on the back door and they've got a full meal for him."

Dr. Gerard is a Bowling Green native who did his undergraduate work at Western Kentucky University.

"The first time I left Bowling Green and went anywhere is when I went to medical school at the University of Louisville," he said. "I did my residency there and then went to England for a fellowship in geriatric medicine. That was interesting to me because I have been interested in medicine and old age."

It was his close relationship with his grandparents that piqued his interest in that field. That's one reason Gerard helped start Hospice in Hardin County in 1979, shortly after he opened his medical practice in Elizabethtown.

"It was a nurse, a social worker and I," Gerard said. "I was the medical director there for 35 years."

Gerard also started a free medical clinic and has served on the board of the Helmwood Presbyterian Homes.

Gerard credits his late grandfather, a biology teacher at WKU for also introducing him to animals.

"I would go out to his place and we would release snakes and other animals his students would bring to him," Gerard said. "Those are some of the first memories that I remember of enjoying animals."

The doctor is well known in Hardin County as an amateur herpetologist.

"I teach classes on Kentucky salamanders and frogs and snakes and turtles in a lot of the schools," he said. "The kids get really excited because I bring in live animals and they get to hold different snakes and turtles."

Boyd said Gerard welcomed her children to his farm to see his array of animals. It made such an impact on one son that he now wants to become a veterinarian.

"He always loved animals, but being around Dr. Gerard changed it so that he likes it even more," she said. "We even sat his seven turtles one year at Thanksgiving."

Mesecher once asked Gerard why he chose to become a doctor instead of a veterinarian, given his love of animals.

"He said the animals don't talk to him like patients do," she said. "He enjoys talking to people so much."

Gerard is looking forward to sitting out on his farm, enjoying the thousands of trees he's planted and nurturing the animals there.

"I do everything in my forests with hand tools," he said. "You could do in two hours with a chainsaw what it takes me to do in a week with my ax and handsaws."

Gerard knows it is going to be different not having patients to see on a daily basis.

"What worries me is that I've always enjoyed feeling useful," he said.