

Heartbeats

Winter 2026

News & Stories From
Mammoth Hospital



Tom Parker | CEO
Mammoth Hospital

Welcome!

As Mammoth Lakes grows and changes, its year-round residents are joined each season by tens of thousands of visitors who come for the mountains, the snow, and the unique spirit of the town. Mammoth Hospital is working to meet the needs of everyone who calls this region home, whether for a weekend or a lifetime.

Our vision, to provide the premier experience in health, wellness and integrated care for the communities of the Eastern Sierra and beyond, has guided me through my time as CEO of Mammoth Hospital. As I write this, that vision feels closer than ever.

Across our organization, we are building new spaces and new models of care designed around what our community



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has told us matters most. The North Wing Project will reshape our campus and expand our ability to deliver high-quality care close to home, but bricks and mortar are only part of the story.

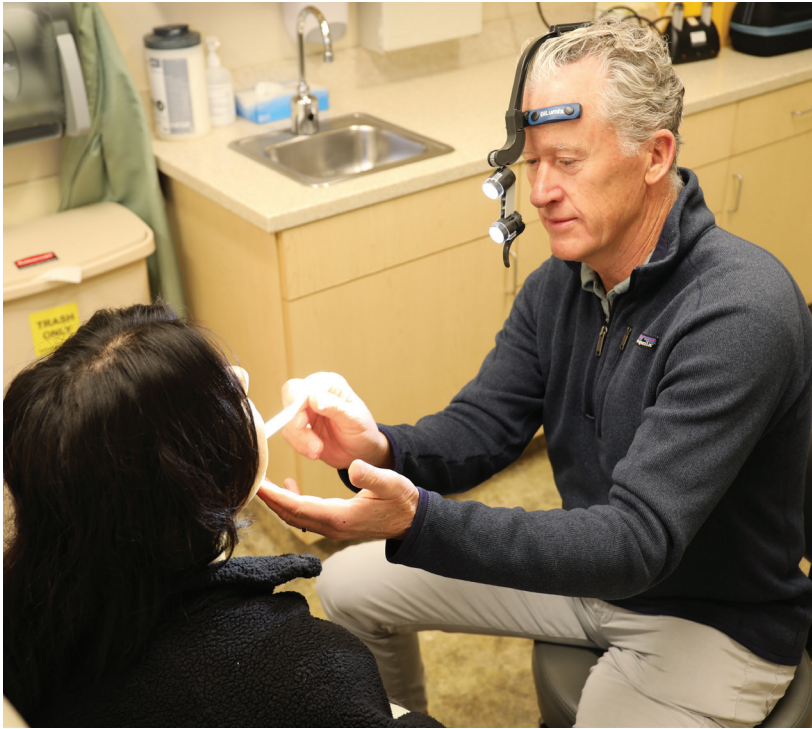
We have recently completed our Family Medicine Clinic expansion, growing to 18 patient exam rooms and creating the capacity for same-day rapid care access. We will be integrating women's health and internal medicine into the clinic which will create a centralized home for primary care—simplifying access, improving care coordination, and supporting the whole person.

We have also expanded specialized care to keep more patients in the Eastern Sierra for services that once required a trip out of the region. Spine care has grown dramatically, with a 230% increase in cases since 2024. Ear, nose, and throat services continue to strengthen, and with Dr. Patrick Fitzgerald joining, we anticipate ENT care to increase by over 200% in the coming year. We've bolstered chronic care management and added new offerings in internal medicine, rheumatology treatment, and palliative care—all aimed at helping people where they are.

At the same time, our commitment to wellness and prevention remains strong. Our Elevate program continues to grow, including work with students at Mammoth Elementary School to build coping skills that support lifelong well-being. These investments are part of a broader strategy: caring for this community not just when people are ill, but throughout the full arc of their health.

The Eastern Sierra is a place defined by resilience, beauty, and possibility. As your community hospital, we are building our future so that every resident and every visitor receives the care they need. Thank you for your trust, your partnership, and your belief in what we can create together.

Comprehensive ENT Care You Can Trust in the Eastern Sierra



Dr. Fitzgerald and Patient in our Specialty Clinic.

Mammoth Hospital's Otolaryngology (ENT) Services provide expert care close to home for allergies, chronic sinus issues, hearing concerns, and other ear, nose, and throat conditions.

Board-certified Otolaryngologist Patrick Fitzgerald, MD sees patients seven days each month in the Specialty Clinic, treating both adults and children. He manages a wide range of conditions, including:

- Sinus and allergy problems
- Nasal breathing issues and deviated septum
- Nosebleeds
- Snoring and sleep apnea
- Hearing loss, dizziness, and vertigo
- Hoarseness and swallowing difficulties
- Facial and neck injuries

Dr. Fitzgerald also treats common ENT issues such as earwax buildup, swimmer's and surfer's ear, fluid or perforations of the eardrum, and acute or chronic ear infections. He evaluates sudden, age-related, and noise-related hearing loss, as well as balance disorders. For Children, he treats frequent ear infections, hearing problems, tonsil and adenoid issues, sleep-related breathing concerns, nosebleeds, and foreign-object removal.

In addition, he manages head and neck conditions such as thyroid and parathyroid disorders, neck masses and cysts, salivary gland problems, mouth and throat lesions, and tumors. He performs endoscopic sinus procedures, tonsil and adenoid surgeries, and treats reflux-related throat irritation and chronic sinus infections. With Dr. Fitzgerald's expertise, Mammoth Hospital continues to expand access to high-quality ENT care.

For more information or to make an appointment, please call or text (760) 924-4102.

Rapid Care Access: Quick, Convenient Care Close to Home

Immediate Appointments for Urgent Needs

Life's bumps, bruises, colds, and cuts don't always fit neatly into your schedule. That's why Mammoth Hospital is proud to offer Rapid Care—our same-day or next-day appointment option for non-emergency medical needs.

When you need care quickly but don't need the emergency room, Rapid Care provides fast access to our skilled providers across multiple clinics.

What to Expect

To keep visits efficient and ensure timely care for everyone, Rapid Care appointments are designed to address one problem for one patient per time slot.



Call or text the following clinics to make an appointment:

- Family Medicine
- Orthopedics
- Pediatrics
- Women's Health

Strengthening Community Health Through Local Support

Mammoth Hospital is proud to extend its mission of “Patients First” beyond our hospital walls and into the heart of our community. Over the past year, we have provided essential medical and athletic support to local schools, teams, and organizations throughout the Eastern Sierra. Through these partnerships, Mammoth Hospital continues to foster a culture of health, safety, and community well-being across the region.



193 HOURS OF MEDICAL SUPPORT for local sporting events.



388 CONCUSSION BASELINE TESTS for Mammoth Mountain and local sports teams.



ATHLETIC TRAINING SERVICES for Mammoth High School, Bishop Union High School, and Mammoth Mountain Ski & Snowboard Teams.



SUPPORT FOR 30 LOCAL EVENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS across Mono, Inyo, and Kern Counties.



635 SESSIONS OF ELEVATE COMMUNITY WELLNESS WORKSHOPS serving **2874** participants.



A COMBINED \$88K IN CONTRIBUTIONS!

A Journey of Healing: Dr. Knecht's Mission to Serve



Each year, Foot and Ankle Specialist Dr. Stephen Knecht travels to Guatemala as part of a medical mission team dedicated to providing life-changing surgical care to communities in need.

The team is composed of surgeons, PAs, nurses, PTs, scrub techs, and sterile processing techs—each playing a vital role in restoring health and hope.

Last year, in just four intense days, the team performed 98 transformative surgeries. Dr. Knecht and his foot and ankle team alone completed 28 surgical cases, helping patients regain mobility and significantly improving their quality of life.

Dr. Knecht in surgery (left) and with a satisfied patient (right).





Welcome New Providers



Ashim Ahuja, MD *Neurology*

Ashim Ahuja, MD was born and raised in Los Angeles. He studied Classics and Neuroscience at UCLA and completed medical school at St. George's University, followed by a Neurology residency and a combined Memory and Movement Disorders fellowship at USC. He practices as a General Neurologist with expertise in neurodegenerative conditions such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, tremor, tics, concussion, and other movement and cognitive disorders. He is skilled in using Botox to treat migraine, dystonia, spasticity, blepharospasm, and hemifacial spasm.

Dr. Ahuja takes a humanistic, whole-person approach, emphasizing lifestyle, diet, exercise, mental health, and mindfulness. He is also interested in emerging psychedelic therapies. Outside of medicine, he enjoys skiing in Mammoth, hiking, cycling, camping, reading, and cooking, and is excited to join the community.



Dina O'Donnell, DMD *Dentistry*

Dina O' Donnell, DMD is a California native who grew up in a small Southern California beach town. She graduated cum laude in Economics from Brandeis University and earned her Doctorate in Dental Medicine with honors from the University of Pennsylvania, followed by a General Practice

Residency at the San Diego VA. After starting in private practice, she found her passion in community dental health, serving six years in the National Health Service Corps and continuing to provide care through a mobile dental unit for underserved communities.

For the past eight years, Dina has spent much of her free time skiing, hiking, and kayaking in the Eastern Sierra. Deeply connected to nature, she's grateful to live part time in Mammoth and serve the community while continuing her work in San Diego, where her children attend school. She enjoys skiing, hiking, kayaking, pickleball, and spending time with her four children, husband, and two dogs.

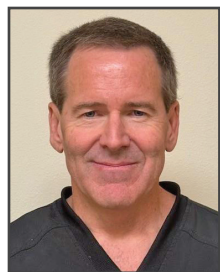


Katherine Fritz, PA *Orthopedics*

Katherine Fritz, PA grew up in rural Maryland and earned a B.S. in psychology in northwestern Pennsylvania. She then spent five years in Colorado with Outward Bound, leading wilderness expeditions and discovering her interest in wilderness medicine. After working as an EMT, she earned her master's in

physician assistant studies from Oregon Health & Science University. She has since worked in rural Washington emergency departments and a busy urgent care in Portland, Oregon.

A longtime admirer of the Eastern Sierra, Katherine is thrilled to call Mammoth home. In her free time, she enjoys rock climbing, skiing, trail running, fly fishing, and sewing her own clothing. She also loves adventuring with her partner and relaxing at home with her three cats.



Todd Braner, PA *Orthopedics*

Todd Braner, PA holds licenses in Physical Therapy and Athletic Training, a B.S. from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and a Master of Health Science from the Northeastern/Harvard PA Program. With more than 28 years in orthopedics—including 23 as a Physician Assistant at Sierra Pacific Orthopedic Center—he has worked in general orthopedics, trauma, an upper-extremity fellowship, and most recently spine surgery, treating conditions from routine injuries to complex cervical, thoracic, and lumbar spine issues.

Outside of medicine, Todd enjoys hiking, mountain biking, and maintaining his cabin at Shaver Lake and family ranch in New Cuyama. A certified flight instructor and commercial pilot, he also trains new pilots.

Todd and his wife, Josephine, have three grown daughters, and he looks forward to joining Mammoth

Hospital and caring for patients with spine-related conditions.



Thomas Nigro Jr., CRNA *Anesthesia*

Thomas Nigro Jr., CRNA, explored early interests in culinary arts, collegiate soccer, vector control work, and international triathlon—where he qualified for the Olympic trials—before turning toward medicine, influenced in part by the loss of a loved one to Substance Use Disorder. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he served as an interim critical care attending provider in Brooklyn and now works as Chief of Anesthesia for Advanced Anesthesia Services in Washington State.

Tom is excited to join the team at Mammoth Hospital, aiming to deliver excellent perioperative care through attentive practice and progressive anesthesia techniques. Outside the operating room, he enjoys improving his board-sport skills and sharing his passion for pizza-making. He and his wife, a nurse and internationally published photographer, look forward to becoming part of the Mammoth Lakes community.

Thrive Through Every Stage of Life with Mammoth Women's Health Services

At Mammoth Hospital, we're proud to provide compassionate, comprehensive care for women at every stage of life—from adolescence through menopause and beyond. Our Women's Health Services team offers a full range of care in a comfortable, welcoming environment right here in Mammoth Lakes.

Whether you need an annual well-woman exam, pap smear, STD or pregnancy testing, or guidance through menopause, our dedicated providers are here to support your health and wellbeing. We also offer individualized menopause care, including evaluation and treatment with bioidentical (natural) menopause hormone therapy (MHT) tailored to each patient's needs. Our goal is to help you feel your best throughout the transition into menopause.



We also specialize in minimally invasive gynecologic surgery for conditions such as fibroids, abnormal bleeding, ovarian cysts, pelvic pain, and endometriosis — helping women get back to their active Eastern Sierra lifestyles with faster recovery times.

For expectant mothers, we provide obstetric care through 28 weeks of pregnancy before coordinating a smooth transition to Northern Inyo Hospital for delivery. Prenatal and birthing classes are offered quarterly through our wellness & performance program, Elevate (visit elevatemammoth.com for the current schedule). After delivery, breastfeeding support is available through our in-clinic lactation consultant, Yesica Saldana, RN as well as through Mammoth Hospital Pediatrics.

Our Women's Health team also partners with the Mono County District Attorney's Office and Mammoth Lakes Police Department to provide compassionate, confidential Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) exams for survivors of sexual assault. In addition, we now offer forensic exams for victims of domestic violence, ensuring that individuals experiencing interpersonal violence receive timely, trauma-informed care and documentation close to home.

We offer excellent appointment availability—including same-day visits when needed—and se habla Español. At Mammoth Hospital, we're committed to ensuring every woman in our community has access to the highest quality care, close to home. Currently, our Women's Health providers are Lucienne Bouvier, MD, Laurence Fakinos, MD, and Maureen Fakinos, WHNP. **For more information or to make an appointment, please call or text (760) 924-4102.**



Giving Your Way

When you make a tax-deductible donation to the Mammoth Hospital Foundation, you help ensure exceptional care for our community today and for generations to come. Many supporters also choose to give through their estate plan, appreciated stock, donor-advised funds, or IRA distributions.

To discuss how you can make a difference, contact Gardiner Miller, Foundation Executive Director, at Foundation@MammothHospital.com or 760.924.4128.

Laura's Story: A Lifeline in Mammoth

“If you'd told me I'd still be here 14 years after moving to Mammoth, I might not have believed you,” says Laura Burton, a mom, grandmother, travel advisor, and three-time brain cancer survivor.

Laura and her husband, Bruce, came to Mammoth for a five-year adventure. Instead, they built a life here thanks in large part to the lifeline Mammoth Hospital provides.

“The level of care, the quality of the staff, and the diagnostic equipment are top tier,” she says. The support Laura received at Mammoth Hospital was vital to her recovery, with seamless coordination alongside major cancer centers.

“Quite simply, I wouldn't be able to live in Mammoth Lakes if Mammoth Hospital didn't exist,” she adds.

Today, Laura contributes as a patient advocate and partner of the Mammoth Hospital Foundation. She knows that behind every recovery is a community that makes compassionate, advanced care possible.

Her story is a reminder of how Mammoth Hospital strengthens lives every day and the important role a connected, caring community plays in supporting health and healing.

Explore the Mammoth Hospital Foundation and stories like Laura's at www.MammothHospitalFoundation.com.



Bruce & Laura Burton

Mammoth Hospital Expands Spine Services



Connor Telles, MD

Mammoth Hospital is proud to welcome the spine team of Connor Telles, MD, and Todd Braner, PA-C, to our Orthopedic Surgery Department. Their addition strengthens our ability to deliver comprehensive spine care to the Eastern Sierra community.

To support this expansion, the hospital has made a significant investment of more than half a million dollars in advanced spine technology and equipment. These upgrades have enabled a 230% increase in spine procedures year over year, ensuring our surgeons have the tools needed to provide safe, effective, and state-of-the-art care.

In addition to enhancing surgical services, we are prioritizing the growth of non-surgical spine care. This includes adding more physical therapy appointment slots for urgent spine-related needs and welcoming a Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) physician who specializes in non-operative spine procedures.

By expanding both surgical and non-surgical options close to home, Mammoth Hospital is committed to improving access to high-quality spine care for residents throughout the Eastern Sierra.

For more info on spine care at Mammoth Hospital, call or text (760) 924-4084.

Welcome Steve Kirtland, MD - Mammoth Hospital's New Chief Medical Officer



Steve Kirtland, MD, CMO

We're excited to welcome Dr. Steve Kirtland as the new Chief Medical Officer at Mammoth Hospital. In addition to serving as CMO, Dr. Kirtland is also seeing patients part-time as a pulmonologist in our Specialty Clinic.

Born and raised in San Jose, CA, Dr. Kirtland brings an impressive breadth of experience and leadership to his role here as CMO. He earned his BS with honors in Zoology from UC Davis, followed by research in Neuroendocrinology at the National Institutes of Health and a medical degree from UC San Diego. He then completed his internal medicine and chief residency at Virginia Mason Medical Center, and a pulmonary and critical care fellowship at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Dr. Kirtland spent over 30 years at Virginia Mason, where he served not only as a clinician but also as a Medical Director of the Cancer Institute and Chief of Staff for 12 years. He has also held prominent roles in several national and regional medical organizations. Board certified in Internal Medicine, Pulmonary Medicine, Critical Care, Sleep Medicine, and Undersea & Hyperbaric Medicine, Dr. Kirtland's clinical passion has long focused on interventional bronchoscopy and lung cancer.

Outside of medicine, Steve and his wife Cindy, who recently retired as Director of Spiritual Care at Virginia Mason, enjoy the outdoors and spend time hiking, camping, and skiing in the Pacific Northwest. They are proud parents and grandparents, and look forward to splitting their time between Seattle and Mammoth.

Enhancing Patient Care with Our Upgraded Chemistry Analyzer System

Our lab recently completed a major upgrade to its chemistry analyzers, along with advanced middleware (the "software glue" that provides services to applications) that improves how we manage and verify lab results.

Patients will see real benefits from this improvement: faster turnaround times, greater accuracy and consistency, longer reagent stability, and the ability to perform more testing in-house rather than sending samples out. Faster in-house results mean same-day care decisions for flu, strep, and chronic disease monitoring.

These changes strengthen the quality and speed of the care we provide. Thank you to everyone, especially our Maintenance and Help Desk teams, who supported this project!



Celebrating the arrival of our new Roche Cobas Pure chemistry analyzers in the lab.

Pardon Our Dust, We're Building Our Future

It's tough to miss all the action happening on the North side of the Mammoth Hospital campus—we made significant progress during the summer and fall of 2025 “building our future” with the addition of our hospital's new North Wing!

This past season, foundation work and soil backfill were completed and the S+B James and Clark/Sullivan Joint Venture, Mammoth Hospital's construction managers, pushed through long days and weekends to stay on track for the initial delivery and erection of structural steel.

The hospital held a “topping out” ceremony on Friday, December 12, where we celebrated the final structural steel placement. Weather wrapping of the structure has now been completed, which allows for work on the interior to continue during the coming winter.

The interior phase of the North Wing Project will conclude in June 2027 and relocation of our personnel and equipment will occur in the fall of 2027. Once the clinical staff have moved into the new building, work will commence on the remodel of the existing post-anesthesia care unit to fully connect the new building to the existing hospital.

We plan to complete the project and welcome patients to our new, modern facility in June 2028.

Join us in supporting this exciting journey at MammothHospitalFoundation.com/NorthWing.



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