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Spirit of Freedom Award Winners

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SHELBY — Tom Davis could speak for hours on the subject.

The subject is not one you necessarily would picture a doctor talking about. It has nothing to do with a new medical procedure, or even the latest prescription drug company to run a television commercial.



No, this subject has a more personal connection to Davis — his deep respect for Cleveland County HealthCare System President and Chief Executive Officer John Young.

It's a respect that grew during Davis' tenure as Cleveland Regional Medical Center's chief of medical staff and was reinforced during Young's leadership in merging the county's two hospitals.

Today, The Star recognizes Young with its Spirit of Freedom Award for that leadership, which demonstrates the newspaper's values of community and respect for others.

"I have all the respect in the world for this man," Davis said. "He gets the job done."

Davis is not alone in his respect for Young, who has served with Cleveland Regional Medical Center since 1995. Those who work with Young daily say his personality contributes to his leadership style of trying to get the best result out of every situation.

"John is definitely a glass half full or better sort of guy," said Mark Hudson, Cleveland Regional Medical Center's executive vice president. "Sometimes he jokes that his blood type is B-positive. That is the type of person that he is. He always tries to help."

Hudson said Young's positive personality allowed him to take a prominent role in merging Cleveland Regional Medical Center and Kings Mountain Hospital. The merger became official at the first of 2003, but only after months of work by Young and others, Hudson said.

"He is a visionary individual," Hudson said. "He saw the county's health care had an opportunity to be more effective as a merged organization than a separate organization. There was definitely some efficiency that could be gained. It really came down to the quality of care that could be delivered."

Veronica Poole-Adams, Cleveland Regional Medical Center's chief nursing executive, said Young was responsible for the merged system going from possibility into reality.

"He led the entire merger," Mrs. Adams said. "John Young is responsible for that."

The hospital merger occurred as county leaders were in midst of a legal battle over merging the three school systems. Davis said Young was able to build a consensus relationship between Shelby and Kings Mountain, communities strained by years of opposition.

"Part of John's charge was to convince the people of Kings Mountain that merging the hospitals was going to be good for the community," Davis said. "He just masterfully achieved a consensus and turned suspensions into trust."

J.C. Bridges chaired the Kings Mountain Hospital Board of Trustees during merger discussions. He said Young was the leading force in bringing the two hospitals together.

"He is a great benefit for both hospitals and the county," Bridges said.

There is more to Young than organizing the hospital merger and providing effective leadership daily. Those who work with him closely say there is a caring side to Young that most, outside of the hospital, don't get to witness.

Davis said Young goes out of his way to send a birthday card to a doctor or employee and makes sure to call them if there is a sickness or death in their family. On Christmas morning, Young visits the hospital and gives fresh donuts to hospital staff members who have to work, Mrs. Adams said.

"That is his way of caring for the people who are caring for the people of the community," Mrs. Adams said.

Then there is Young's volunteer work with the United Way and as a youth assistance volunteer. His volunteer work sets him apart from other leaders of multi-million dollar corporations, Hudson said.

"I think they would be surprised at somebody who runs a couple hundred million dollar corporation that has as big of a heart as he has," Hudson said. "He would treat your mother as he would his mother. He hurts when members of the hospital family have pain and suffering in their family. I think most people would be surprised by that."

Davis said Young's personality and leadership makes everyone strive to work harder.

"John is an inspiration," Davis said. "He just leads by example."