



Celebrating 50 Years of World-Class, Close-to-Home Care

Bringing Multi-Specialty Surgical Care to Appleton

Fox Valley Surgical Associates (FVSA) was one of the first multi-specialty surgery clinics to open in the Fox Cities area, and the practice is now celebrating its 50th anniversary as it continues to expand.

We wanted to take the opportunity to share the story of where FVSA began and how it's grown over the years as we mark this major milestone!

FVSA got its start after Dr. William (Bill) Chandler graduated from Marquette University and felt the need to bring more surgical expertise to the community. He and Dr. Gilbert (Ace) Mueller officially co-founded FVSA in 1970 after merging their local practices. They were joined by Drs. Hal Harding and Phil Pier as their journey began.

Initially focused on heart and general surgery in a small office space on the north side of Appleton known as Doctor's Park, FVSA soon began to welcome more and more patients, making it necessary to expand the practice's services and staff. This also meant a move to a larger clinic as space was so limited that Dr. Pier had just a card table and chair set up as his office and Dr. Harding occupied only a corner of the proctology room.

FVSA moved to a bigger main office within Appleton Medical Center, now ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Appleton, and continues to serve patients here and at six additional locations across Northeast Wisconsin. These include two more Appleton locations, as well as offices in New London, Oshkosh, Waupaca and Shawano.

Recruiting Top-Notch Talent

Keeping with its long-time reputation for offering exceptional care, FVSA has always been highly selective in the provider recruitment process. In the last five decades, the vast majority of FVSA physicians hired are fellowship trained. This means that providers receive the highest level of education available in a specific medical specialty. The combination of this fellowship training and the providers' other high-caliber instruction and credentials has allowed FVSA to be at the forefront of so many "firsts" and innovations in the Fox Cities medical community.

In looking back at this list of innovators, here are a few examples. Dr. Robert Ballard, a double fellowship recipient with FVSA, was one of the first providers in Wisconsin to perform abdominal aortic aneurysm repair – a vascular procedure using minimally invasive techniques and x-ray support. In addition, fellowship trained in surgical oncology, Dr. Charles Cheng was among the initial group of area physicians who routinely performed the Whipple procedure to remove cancer in the pancreas.

As Dr. Pier explained, this tradition of pioneering leadership dates all the way back to FVSA's beginning. "The founding principals of FVSA were leaders in the medical community," he said. "They served as medical staff leaders, surgical department chairmen and as part of many committees. They helped set the standard for the way medicine was practiced in Appleton."

Expanding Care to Meet the Community's Needs

Today, FVSA continues to keep pace with the ever-evolving needs of the community and add to the clinic's specialized surgical and care services however necessary.

Specialty areas now include breast, colorectal, endocrine, general, oncologic, thoracic and vascular/endovascular surgery. They also extend to endocrinology, laparoscopy, gastrointestinal endoscopy and interventional endoscopy, as well as hepatobiliary, liver and pancreas surgery. Most recently, acute care and heartburn/reflux treatment have been added.

In terms of breast care services, a great need in the community, FVSA operates the area's only High-Risk Breast Clinic for patients who have an elevated risk of developing breast cancer. The care team is headed up by Honnie Bermas, MD, FACS, who was fellowship trained at Northwestern University Lynn Sage Comprehensive Breast Center. It provides personalized risk assessments, clinical breast exams and the most state-of-the-art breast ultrasound/imaging. FVSA also performs breast surgery for benign and malignant conditions and specializes in procedures like nipple sparing mastectomy and partial breast irradiation catheters. Additionally, FVSA's Patricia Martins, APNP, is among just a select number of practitioners worldwide to receive advanced training in genetic cancer risk counseling through City of Hope in California.

Endocrine care is one of FVSA's latest expansions. Janeil Mitchell, MD, joined the team as the first endocrine surgeon in the Fox Cities with specialty training. She is fellowship trained in endocrine surgery from the University of Pittsburgh and surgery research from Brigham and Women's Hospital/Harvard Medical School. Also fellowship trained, Dr. Iftikhar Malik came on board shortly after as an endocrinologist, and together, the two are able to treat FVSA patients with conditions like diabetes and even the most complex thyroid issues.

Two more key staff additions include Peter Janu, MD, FACS, in late 2019, and Christopher Smith, MD, FACS, FASCRS, earlier this year. Dr. Janu furthers FVSA's capabilities to provide specialty treatment for reflux/heartburn sufferers and Dr. Smith treats patients with acute care needs ranging from laparoscopy scopes to port placements.

A Strong Team & Advancing Technologies

In reflecting on the FVSA team, Dr. Pier explained some common characteristics FVSA has sought out in its providers since 1970. "As new associates joined the practice, they all exhibited the qualities that identified FVSA – honesty, integrity, a strong work ethic, willingness to work together, and most importantly, a genuine concern for the welfare of their patients." He shared that of all physicians who

have been part of FVSA, only one has left to practice elsewhere, and that was driven by the desire to live in a warmer climate. Dr. Pier also shared about something that goes beyond the team's combined surgical skills and experience: a genuine camaraderie. He explained that while FVSA providers have been a hard-working group from the very start, they've also understood the value of mixing in a little fun and friendly competition outside the office. This has included everything from the infamous Jocks vs. Docs basketball games and the Appleton vs. Theda Clark softball league to golf outings, an annual touch football game and much more.

In the operating room, FVSA continues to incorporate the latest advances in medicine and technology with providers trained to perform the most minimally invasive procedures available, including robotic-assisted surgeries.

"Technological advances have been monumental over the last several decades at FVSA," explained Dr. Thomas Winek, president of FVSA and a fellowship-trained surgeon with the practice since 1989. He credits FVSA with being consistently innovative in bringing new, cutting-edge procedures to the Fox Valley. "I've told many of my colleagues that there is nothing I did 31 years ago in training that I am still doing today."

Looking to the Future

As FVSA looks to the future, the team will continue to stay on top of the community's health needs. This includes welcoming two new gastroenterologists in early 2021 – Dr. Abdullah Fayyad and Dr. Timothy Roarty – to offer comprehensive services related to gastrointestinal issues like liver disease, Crohn's disease and irritable bowel syndrome. FVSA will also remain focused on growing sub-specialty needs like those of the renal failure and dialysis population as the number of patients requiring related services increases.

"Reaching the 50-year mark is a significant milestone for FVSA, and our team is excited to continue to build on the founders' legacy by serving the community around us," Dr. Winek said. "We've made it our mission to provide the most exceptional care since 1970 and that goal will carry forward for the next 50 years."