



News Release

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Meridian Board Announces Don Savoie as Next President and CEO: Effective January 1, 2020

Gainesville, Fla. – Meridian recently announced that its Board of Directors has appointed Don Savoie as President and Chief Executive Officer of Meridian effective January 1, 2020.

Maggie Labarta PhD, current President and CEO stated, “As I wrap up 37 years, and 19 as CEO, I am more certain than ever that our mission is our strength. As a community behavioral health center, throughout its 48 years, Meridian has been dedicated to providing individuals and families with the best available treatment, to building partnerships that address community challenges, and to improving the overall health of our communities.”

As a strong advocate for mental health, with 30 years of industry experience, Don Savoie joined Meridian in 2011 after relocating to the area and had this to say, “Moving to North Central Florida from new England, with my family, 10 years ago, was a great move. We quickly became part of the community and this is our home. Knowing of Meridian and its reputation nationally as innovators in treatment, led me to reach out to Dr. Labarta and I’ve never looked back.”

“The work is rewarding, the needs are immense, and what we do is so essential to the health of our communities, our friends, and neighbors. Joining Meridian was a natural fit for me as my career is dedicated to the critical work of behavioral healthcare. My 14 years prior to Meridian were focused on working with agencies across the country and I was excited to bring that expertise to bear locally.” Said Savoie.

Labarta noted her support, “I am confident that this is the perfect time for Don Savoie to become Meridian’s President and CEO. He is a proven strong and informed leader who will honor and continue that emphasis on evidence-based treatment, problem-solving partnerships, and community wellness and he picks up the reins at a time when Meridian is very strong.”

“More and more, we need to incorporate technology if we are to build access and meet the needs of those who need mental health and substance use disorder care, and we need strong business acumen to navigate the complex payment and limited resource environment in our system of care. Don brings a wealth of knowledge in the area of business and technology – all tempered with a strong belief in service and mission. I couldn’t be more at ease as I step away, or more excited to see Meridian move forward under his leadership.”

Savoie’s commitment to the mission of Meridian is clear. “After 8 years at Meridian, I still can’t imagine myself anywhere else. The vision and leadership at Meridian is nationally recognized as a leader of comprehensive mental illness and substance use disorder treatment in North Central Florida. Meridian is a mission driven organization focused on expanding access and capacity, though, advancements in care delivery and technological initiatives, while providing exceptional care for all who we serve.” Stated Savoie.

Susan Summers, Board Interim Chair, stated, “the Board search committee received close to 300 applications from across the Country. Of those, 78 were selected for a more detailed review and 12 were selected for in-depth evaluation and pre-screening. The Board committee agreed on the top five applicants to move forward with in the more in-depth next stage of review. At the conclusion of the process, the search committee felt strongly that Savoie, Meridian’s current Chief Operating Officer and only internal applicant, was the clear choice to lead Meridian.”

Jeff Feller, a member of Meridian’s Board of Directors’ executive committee and Chief Executive Officer of WellFlorida Council, chaired the Board of Directors’ search committee and noted that while we had searched extensively, “we already had excellence from within”. The Board was enthusiastic in its support for the selection as well, and voted unanimously in support of it, authorizing Dr. Summers to offer the position to Savoie.

Don Savoie, the next President and CEO of Meridian is enthusiastic about the future and said, “What I am most excited about is the changing awareness and public discussion as it relates to mental health and substance use disorders as “healthcare”. The conversation is becoming more open within most communities, driving less stigma and greater opportunities for engagement for seeking treatment. Additionally, identifying mental health and substance use disorders as medical conditions that respond positively to treatment strengthens the ongoing argument in support of healthcare parity for funding and treatment.”

Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Inc. is a comprehensive community behavioral healthcare organization located in North Central Florida. With services available throughout the region, Meridian maintains offices in these eleven counties: Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Suwannee, and Union. Meridian is CARF accredited and licensed by the Florida Department of Children and Families and the Agency For Healthcare Administration. Its mission is to promote the health, recovery, and well-being of those affected by mental illness and substance use disorders through prevention, coordinated treatment, and supportive services and is based on the vision that hope, recovery, and wellness are within everyone’s reach. For more information, visit <http://mbhci.org/>.

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