

From the Atlanta Business Chronicle:

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Batts has long connection to Shepherd Foundation

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Nov 25, 2016, 6:00am EST

Shepherd Center Foundation has named [Sarah Batts](#) its new executive director. Her connections to the Atlanta-based spinal cord and brain injury hospital date back to her childhood.

When Batts, 45, was around 10 years old, a family member was treated at Shepherd for a spinal injury following a serious accident.

“She has an emotional connection of having had a family member here 30 years ago who has done really well,” said [James Shepherd](#), co-founder and chairman of the board at Shepherd Center. “It makes her much more committed than just anyone. Everyone loves the mission here, but she’s got a very personal reason to be involved.”

Batts remembers looking up to the center’s co-founder, [Alana Shepherd](#), from a young age — when her Girl Scout troop helped raise funds for the hospital.

“It was what everyone was talking about — this mother who was fearless and insistent that we needed this in Atlanta,” Batts said. “Nobody else had that vision, and she was able to articulate it and bring everyone on board so everyone understood its importance.”

Shepherd Center was founded in 1975 by Harold, Alana and [James Shepherd](#) after James was injured in a bodysurfing accident and couldn’t find a place to be treated close to home.

As executive director of its foundation, raising funds for Shepherd is now Batts’ official job. She will head all capital campaigns and fundraising for the hospital, which has treated patients from all 50 states and 64 countries.

“Having grown up here and having a family with a variety of health issues, this became my passion,” Batts



JOANN VITELLI

Sarah Batts will run the Shepherd Center Foundation.

said. “This is what I wanted to do, increase philanthropic support for meaningful organizations in the health space.”

Batts succeeds [Scott Sikes](#), who in 2015 led a \$12.4 million Building on Excellence Campaign to expand the center’s lab, pharmacy and MRI suite.

Earlier this year, Shepherd also named a new CEO, [Sarah Morrison](#), who takes over from current CEO [Gary Ulicny](#) next April. Now that its new executives have been hired, the center will begin a planning process to outline future initiatives and funding priorities. These will likely include recreational therapies, innovation work in partnership with Georgia Tech and the center’s SHARE Military Initiative, which doubled in size this year after a \$3.8 million grant from the Marcus Foundation.

“So much work needs to be done,” Batts said. “The reimbursement rate for rehabilitative services is really low. Shepherd needs philanthropic support, and Atlanta needs Shepherd.”

Shepherd’s current fundraisers include Pecans on Peachtree, where supporters can buy Georgia-grown pecans to benefit the hospital; Derby Day, a live broadcast of the Kentucky Derby in Chastain Park; and Summer in the City, a cocktail party and auction.

Before accepting a position at Shepherd Center, Batts was managing director of campaigns at Piedmont Healthcare. She also worked as Emory University’s director of development, where she led fundraising efforts for the Department of Pediatrics, and as Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta’s development officer from 1997 to 2005.

“We’re fortunate to have great health care, destination health care in Atlanta,” Batts said. “That’s what’s kept me here.”

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