



February 20, 2026

United Hospital District Announces Retirement of CEO Rick Ash Following More Than 35 Years of Rural Healthcare Leadership

Blue Earth, Minnesota (February 20, 2026) — The Board of Directors of United Hospital District (UHD) announced that Chief Executive Officer, Rick Ash, will retire after nearly 11 years of service at UHD and more than 35 years dedicated to rural healthcare leadership.

Throughout his tenure, Ash worked closely with the UHD Board of Directors, leadership team, medical staff, and employees to strengthen and grow healthcare services across the region. Together, their shared focus on access, quality, and sustainability has positioned UHD as a strong, independent rural healthcare provider for the communities it serves.

“Rick’s leadership has always been grounded in collaboration,” said Bill Barke, Board President of United Hospital District. “He brought people together, listened carefully, and empowered our teams to move forward with confidence. The progress UHD has made over the past decade is truly the result of a committed organization working together toward a common purpose.”

During this time, UHD expanded its provider base and specialty services, increased access to care in Fairmont, Wells, and surrounding communities, and experienced sustained growth in patient volumes and financial strength. Multiple capital improvement projects enhanced facilities and improved the patient experience, ensuring that care remains close to home for local families.

Working alongside clinical and operational leaders, UHD also made significant investments in technology and innovation. This included transitioning from two separate legacy systems to a unified, industry-leading electronic health record through Epic Systems, improving care coordination and safety across both hospital and clinic settings. Additional advancements, such as robotic-assisted surgery and expanded specialty care, have allowed more patients to receive high-quality services locally rather than traveling outside the region.

Ash and his team guided UHD through the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting patients, protecting staff, and maintaining continuity of care during a time of great uncertainty for rural healthcare providers nationwide.

Beyond UHD's campuses, Ash has worked alongside peers and statewide partners to advocate for rural hospitals and the communities they serve—promoting fair reimbursement, sustainable policies, and the belief that quality healthcare should not depend on a person's zip code.

Colleagues note that Ash's greatest impact may be the culture he helped cultivate—one rooted in teamwork, compassion, accountability, and service.

The UHD Board has initiated a formal search process and will engage an executive recruitment firm to assist in identifying the organization's next Chief Executive Officer. Once a successor is selected, Ash will remain involved to support onboarding and ensure a smooth leadership transition before moving into retirement.

"We are deeply grateful for Rick's partnership and the steady leadership he has provided," said Board President Barke. "On behalf of our Board, staff, and community, we thank him for the many years he has dedicated to UHD and rural healthcare."

About United Hospital District

United Hospital District, based in Blue Earth, MN, is an independent system of care comprised of a 25-bed acute care hospital, comprehensive outpatient services, ambulance service, and a home health/hospice care program, all supported by a 25 multi-specialty provider group with three clinic locations across two counties. UHD was recognized as a 2025 Best Hospital for

Obstetrics, 2024 Top 100 Critical Access Hospital, 2023 Best Small Hospital Under 25 Beds and a 2022 Top 200 Workplace in Minnesota. For more information, visit [uhd.org](https://www.uhd.org).

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