



By [Nathan Rubbelke](#) – Reporter, St. Louis Business Journal

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When [Nick Ragone](#) joined Ascension in 2014, the St. Louis-based health system was focused on creating a more integrated operating model.

Key to that effort was a national rebranding to include the unified Ascension name on all of Ascension's local health systems and locations. It's an effort of which Ragone has been at the forefront of in his role as executive vice president and chief marketing and communications officer for the nonprofit Catholic health system with more than 2,600 sites of care.

Today, Ascension's rebranding initiative is about 95% complete.

"To our knowledge, it's the largest ever rebrand in the health care space," Ragone said.

Ragone has also helped spearhead the Ascension Charity Classic, a senior professional golf tournament set to hold its inaugural event later this year at Norwood Hills Country Club. Net proceeds from the event will go to local charitable organizations.

How have you changed as a leader during the pandemic? I think I'm an even better listener than I was. What I found is the more senior you get in an organization, you should try to listen more and talk less. I think during the pandemic, it's really been for me about listening to our associates, my team, our patients, our communities and responding to their needs. I think it's made me more of a servant leader.

How has Ascension adapted to the pandemic and what's been your role in that pivot? As a health care system, the pandemic has reminded us how selfless our caregivers are. My job has always been storytelling. The pandemic has forced me to find new and creative ways to continue to show gratitude for our caregivers through our advertising and commercials. And to reassure our communities that it's safe to come and get care with us. It's forced me as a marketer and a communicator to bring out the best of me and my team on how to tell those two stories.

You're a lawyer by training. How did you get into marketing and communications? It's funny. I went to Georgetown, I loved the law school and I practiced for a little bit. But lawyering and marketing are not that much different in that you're storytelling. One is in a court of law and one is the court of public opinion. I just found myself more interested in the court of public opinion. There's really a lot of similarity to lawyering and marketing, so for me, it was a very smooth transition.

You've helped spearhead the Ascension Charity Classic. How did that opportunity present itself? We were going on this brand journey and as we were creating a national brand, we were looking for some signature brand moments to really share it nationally. There's a lot of ways to do that, but one is live events or sporting events. We had a relationship with the PGA Tour. As we got through our brand journey, I was looking for ways to share our brand nationally but also to give back to St. Louis, particularly North County.

Who was an early mentor to you and how did they help your career? My ultimate mentor was my dad. He passed away 10 years ago. I still take his wisdom with me literally everyday. Another mentor was the former CEO of Ketchum, **Rob Flaherty**, who was one of my earliest professional mentors. He taught me a lot about what professional communications looks like. More recently, our former CEO **Tony Tersigni**, brought me onto Ascension and was a great role model and mentor as we went through this transition of moving to more of an integrated Ascension. And then our current CEO, **Joe Impicciche**, who was our general counsel when I was hired. I'm a lawyer by training and Joe took me under his wing a little bit.

What's your favorite way to relax outside of work? Believe it or not, my favorite way to relax is playing chess. I'm a very avid chess player. I created a chess nonprofit in Ferguson in 2015 called Your Move Chess with the St. Louis Chess Club. My wife was a competitive chess player in high school back in Malaysia. My son, who is at MICDS, is a competitive chess player. In the last seven to eight years, I really learned chess and have fallen in love with it.

About Nick:

Title: Executive vice president and chief marketing and communications officer, Ascension

Age: 50

Hometown: Yonkers, New York

College: Ragone attended Rutgers University and is a graduate of the Eagleton Institute of Political Science. He has a law degree from the Georgetown University Law Center.

Career History: Prior to joining Ascension, Ragone was director of the Washington, D.C., office for public relations firm Ketchum. He also was an adjunct professor at Georgetown University.

Family: Ragone and his wife have two children