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Public gets sneak peek at new Gooding hospital

GOODING — When the 50,000-square-foot, \$28 million North Canyon Medical Center opens on March 2 with new state-of-the-art digital equipment, it will replace the vintage 1970 Gooding County Memorial Hospital. The long-planned and long-awaited new hospital held a grand opening, ribbon cutting and public tours Friday and Saturday.

The hospital's human resources director, Sara Otto, said several hundred people turned out for the ribbon cutting on Friday. When the new hospital opened for public tours Saturday morning, about 40 people came through the doors within the first 10 minutes. "I think it's awesome. It's no comparison to where we are working right now," said hospital employee Laureen Shryock.

"I'm impressed. It will be so nice to have this facility here," said Sally Toone of Gooding. "So am I. It's more than I ever imagined," added her husband, Mark Toone.

"It's fabulous. We've needed this for years," said Susan McCray of Wendell. "There are windows. You don't feel like you're in a cave."

"This is Gooding, Idaho. This is pretty classy," said Arlene Ballard of Shoshone.

Hospital CEO Earl Fitzpatrick said the new facility was completed a little under budget with construction costs of about \$17 million. Another \$11 million funded new medical equipment, furnishings and artwork. What was originally slated to be a 13-month construction period turned into 18 months due to the slumping economy. "We went to the market and the market crashed," Fitzpatrick said. He said the hospital's triple-A bond rating secured a 6.75 percent rate.

Amenities make the new hospital appealing to those who need medical services. Unlike many other hospitals, all patient rooms will be private and most will have couches that will open into beds for family members wishing to stay. Two of the rooms will have chairs that convert into beds. The new hospital will feature two full-service operating rooms, eight surgeons on staff and six specialty physicians that will visit the facility. Currently, only colonoscopies are preformed at the old hospital. There will be new, modern radiology equipment, a new digital CAT scan, two new ER trauma rooms and two sleep labs.

"For a laboratory, this is a nice open area. It's not a basement like some labs," Fitzpatrick said. "Our pride and joy right now is our new digital mammography. We have a mammography machine at our other hospital but it's not like this."

MRI service will continue to be offered once each week from a trailer. Otto said there are 124 employees at the old hospital and that number will increase to more than 130 at the new facility. The hospital's foundation hosted a dinner and social on Saturday at the Gooding Basque Center. The 40-year-old Gooding County Memorial Hospital building at 1120 Montana St., is on state-owned land and will revert to the state. The new hospital is at 267 North Canyon Drive, near the intersection of U.S. Highway 26 and Idaho 46, offering easy access from Shoshone and Wendell.