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Hospital development booming as old buildings hit retirement age

New hospitals and health care facilities are springing up across the state, and more projects are in the pipeline. The boom is cyclical, said Joel Rogers, chief operating officer at Minidoka Memorial Medical Center in Rupert.

Idaho saw a flurry of hospital construction in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Those buildings are now all facing retirement at about the same time, he said. Minidoka, built in 1960, is aiming for a big emergency room upgrade. The plans are drawn up and the county-owned hospital is now exploring financing options. Other new and pending developments around the state include:

- St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center — 700,000-square foot, 186-bed hospital; opening May 21.
- Portneuf Medical Center — 187-bed hospital in Pocatello; opened in May.
- North Canyon Medical Center — \$17 million, 50,000-square foot facility in Gooding; opened in 2010.
- St. Luke's Nampa Medical Plaza — 40,000-square foot facility featuring a 24-hour emergency room, part of a \$25 million, 120-square foot medical and retail project of Gardner Ahlquist Development; planned opening 2012.
- Benewah Community Hospitals — renovation and 60,000-square foot expansion of facility in St. Maries; construction started in November 2010.
- Minidoka Memorial Medical Center — plans for new emergency room and expansion of main medical floor complete, officials are now seeking a construction loan.

St. Luke's leads the recent development push and more is coming from the non-profit that announced earlier this year that it aims to spend \$1.27 billion on new buildings and improving existing facilities over the next decade.

St. Luke's spokesman Ken Dey said an announcement about the next big project could happen in as soon as six months.

Steven Millard, director of the Idaho Hospital Association, figures the boom is about pent-up demand, as well as aging facilities. An improving economic outlook is helping things along, he said.

While the health care industry has been cooking compared to other sectors during the down times, the bad economy certainly delayed some projects, including the hospitals in Twin Falls and Pocatello, Millard said.

“Skyrocketing” increases in unpaid debts and charity care, along with a decline in customers’ appetites for elective procedures, were to blame, he said.