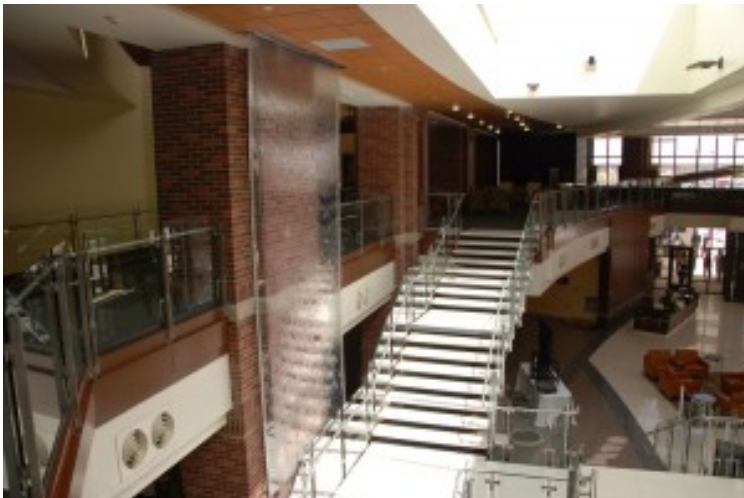


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New Twin Falls hospital portends progress, yet leaves void

St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center could be a boon for property values and business development in one corner of the city, but the project leaves an aging part of the community, and local governments, facing uncertainty.

The 700,000-square foot hospital on Poleline Road in northwest Twin Falls, an area boasting some new retail and housing developments, and lots of open space, opens May 21.



With the new digs complete, St. Luke's will leave 12 buildings containing 500,000 square feet on the city's southwest side. St. Luke's has occupied the Twin Falls County-owned spaces for five years.

"You are really going to start seeing full expansion and full development of the (Poleline Road/U.S. 93) corridor, and we are planning for that to occur," said Twin Falls City Manager Travis Rothweiler. Meanwhile, "another section (of the city) shortly may become very quiet," he said.

Construction of the new hospital has already pumped millions into the local economy — \$600 million, St. Luke's estimates - and it could spur new development,

said Shawn Bariger, president and CEO of the Twin Falls Area Chamber of Commerce.

"Moving forward, the new facility really is an anchor for new development," he said. In a down economy, the new hospital makes new ventures "a little more realistic," he said, adding that he's had a few inquiries from prospective developers. Additionally, a new hospital with state-of-the-art offerings, as well as private rooms, could make the region more attractive to relatively deep-pocketed retirees looking for somewhere to settle.

But, Bariger says, the move leaves service operations like restaurants, hotels, and coffee shops on the city's southwest side wondering what will happen. "I think that certainly there is some concern," he said.

So what will become of all that space? Right now, Twin Falls County doesn't know. The county assessor and sheriff's office have occupied some of it, and it's possible more county workers could move in someday, said Twin Falls County Commissioner George Urie. There's also an idea out there that the city of Twin Falls, currently crunched for space as the county is, could move in. There's been some talk along those lines, but nothing yet

serious, said Twin Falls City Manager Travis Rothweiler. The city needs more space, he said, but is “struggling to make ends meet” and is not in position to take on the bigger overhead bills.

Twin Falls County Commissioner George Urie said the larger building could suit another health care provider, while some of the smaller structures could work well for restaurants, or retailers. But right now it’s all up in the air and there are no serious prospective tenants knocking on the door. “We don’t have anything firm, that’s for sure,” he said.

The unfortunate bottom line is that vacant space isn’t exactly a hot commodity in Twin Falls these days, Urie indicated. “There’s empty buildings all over the city.”

St. Luke’s Magic Valley Medical Center

Opens: May 21

Value: \$238 million

Beds: 186

Size: 700,000 square feet

Construction jobs: 1,600 over four years

Building features: roof-top gardens, photo cells that adjust interior lighting to balance natural and artificial light, nature-inspired design themes.

Care features: private patient rooms, expanded emergency room, cancer clinic, and cardiac catheterization lab.