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PMC gets more for less

\$5 million savings on new hospital will fund other projects

POCATELLO — Portneuf Medical Center President and Chief Executive Officer Norman Stephens admits some of the technology planned for the new hospital conjures images of Big Brother from George Orwell’s novel “1984.”

Magnetic sensors on employee name badges will detect when staff members approach patients without first stopping by the sink to scrub. An alert will sound on the intercom in the patient’s room: “Don’t forget to wash your hands!”

Norm Stephens, right, Portneuf Medical Center’s CEO, and construction supervisors lead a tour of the hospital’s construction area this past March. Stephens told the Gate City Rotary Wednesday that construction is coming in under budget and ahead of schedule.

PMC will have the ability to electronically track the locations of all patients and staff members, and any time a patient rolls too close to the edge of a hospital bed, sensors will warn the nursing station.

“It’s going to be the most technologically advanced hospital from an electronics standpoint you’ve ever been in,” Stephens said during a Thursday address to Pocatello Rotary Club members.

Grandiose as PMC’s plans are, Stephens said the project is coming in far ahead of schedule and significantly under budget.

Due in part to more affordable building material costs amid the economic downturn, Stephens said the hospital is on track to be completed for about \$5 million less than the amount initially set aside for construction.

Stephens said the savings will be used to build a free-standing cancer center in the north parking lot of the new facility. That project, which was previously planned to be delayed for a future construction phase, should now replace the existing cancer center in the basement of the current west campus within six months of the hospital’s grand opening.

PMC also intends to take full advantage of the affordable building costs by completing the sixth floor of the patient tower by opening day. Originally, that floor was slated to be a shell for PMC to fill in as space required. At any given time, about 400 construction workers are on site building the new PMC, where about 400 sheets of drywall are installed per day. Initial estimates for completing the project were late July to August of next summer. Stephens said the planned completion date is now between April 15 and May 15.



“We should see the whole exterior of the campus looking pretty much ready to move into by the end of the summer,” Stephens said.

PMC attributes the impressive progress to good work by the general contractor, Boise-based Layton Construction, and a mild winter that significantly extended the construction season.

When Stephens first arrived in Pocatello, he said there was “a huge controversy about local labor.” At the time, about half of the work crew came from Southeast Idaho. Since then, Stephens said the local labor force has grown substantially and now makes up greater than 80 percent of the crew building the hospital. PMC has acquired Rocky Mountain “It’s just absolutely enormous. It takes about an hour and a half to walk through the whole thing,” Stephens said.

The hospital is the third largest employer in the region and the largest private taxpayer, Stephens said. Based on the current assessed value, PMC would pay \$1.5 million in property taxes.

Because PMC, formerly owned by Bannock County, is now owned by a partnership between a private Texas company, LHP Hospital Group, Inc., and the Portneuf Surgery Center, whose staff will have a separate entrance and lobby at the new facility, and Idaho Medical Imaging Center.

Stephens argues the increased volume made possible by those acquisitions will result in better care for the community. “It allows us to bring the surgery volume to the hospital, and through that we will be able to build a brand new surgery center,” Stephens said.

Stephens likened the new hospital to a fancy hotel, with room service, \$250,000 in locally produced artwork adorning the walls, a grand piano in the lobby and spacious rooms. And like a mountain range, Stephens said pictures of the facility don’t do justice to its scope.

Health Care Foundation, 23 cents of every dollar earned will go back into the community. For example, the foundation is poised to buy equipment and provide resources to extend teleoncology services to the area’s rural hospitals.

Stephens boasts the hospital now offers more charity care than back when it was county owned.

“One of the things the community was worried about was they’d get a bunch of corporate raiders coming in,” Stephens said. “We have a really, truly community hospital blend.”