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EIRMC's big baby

Hospital breaks ground on neo-natal expansion

In response to a local baby boom, Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center officials are about nine months shy of delivering one of their biggest babies on record.

EIRMC CEO Doug Crabtree helped break ground Wednesday on a \$20 million expansion and renovation of the hospital's Women's and Infants Center --all designed to reduce the stress that has come with an increase in local births. Work begins today, and plans call for construction of a 24,000-square-foot building situated off Sunnyside Road. Renovations of patients' rooms, nursing stations and the delivery center are also included in the project.

"Over 15 years, our women's center has done what it needed to do," Crabtree said. "But it is definitely time for an extreme makeover -- and it's going to get one."

This year, the hospital has reported as many as 27 births in a single day, more than four times the daily average of six deliveries in 2007, EIRMC officials said. "We expanded our service three years ago ... and we've just been swamped with babies," Crabtree said.

Batten & Shaw Inc., a Nashville, Tenn., construction company, is the general contractor for the project. Hospital executives estimated the project could create 140 construction jobs. Work is scheduled to be complete in April 2011.

Hospital officials said that although an out-of-state construction company was selected because of its medical center expertise, dozens of local subcontractors will be hired.

"Considering the real estate and construction sectors are somewhat depressed, that is going to be a boost," said Linda Martin, executive director of the economic development group Grow Idaho Falls Inc. "We want to keep a lot of those (construction) skills and trades right here and not lose them to somewhere else."

Sandee Moore, EIRMC's chief operations officer, said construction will be tackled in 10 phases to minimize the impact to mothers and babies. Patients' rooms will be decommissioned two or three at a time during renovations, signs will be placed to guide the public away from construction zones and the medical staff will remain at full strength to ensure bedside needs are met during the project, she said.

The whole project is aimed at making EIRMC the most advanced maternal and neonatal care facility in the region. "It's really a big step in the right direction to keep those medical dollars right here in our community and region," Martin said. "If you have state-of-the-art health care, why would you go somewhere else?"

Crabtree said he is most proud that EIRMC was able to acquire the construction funds from its parent company, HCA Inc., without seeking tax dollars during a period of economic uncertainty. "We're not going to the taxpayers with an additional levy or bond," he said. "We're moving forward."