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Gooding hospital moves to finalize HUD finances *Groundbreaking planned next month for new building*

Almost one year ago, Gooding County Memorial Hospital CEO Earl Fitzpatrick sat in a Times-News conference room, sharing his plan to raise money for a new building by converting the hospital to a nonprofit. In two months, Fitzpatrick could have his money - in the form of loans from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Partners In Healthcare Inc., the nonprofit created to manage the facility, has been approved as a 501(c)3 public charity by the Internal Revenue Service, clearing the way for officials to complete the final documentation for \$30 million in federal bonds, Fitzpatrick said. HUD officials visited Gooding earlier in the summer to discuss the new building and recently gave the hospital approval to move forward with the construction loan. "It's an exciting time for us right now," Fitzpatrick said, crediting U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson and his staff with helping to move the IRS application along.

Set for completion in January 2010, the new North Canyon Medical Center will replace the current hospital and is planned for the southeast corner of the intersection of U.S. Highway 26 and State Highway 46 in Gooding. The loans will cover everything from construction to furnishings for the 52,000-square-foot building, and won't come a moment too soon.

Construction equipment will begin arriving at the site the first week of September, Fitzpatrick said. Members of the public are invited to view construction plans at a groundbreaking from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sept. 16. That event will trigger a busy year and a half for both the hospital and the local governments relying on it. Fitzpatrick has made regular visits to city councils in the area to keep them informed, he said. The hospital has organized a transition planning group made of physicians, employees, board members and others who will spend the next year creating the best way to move between buildings.

"It won't be a very long time," Fitzpatrick said of the transition window, citing the need to continuously serve patients during that time. "It'll happen rather quickly once the trigger's pulled."

The building isn't the only construction project hospital officials are involved in this year. Work began Thursday on a \$25,000 remodel of the indoor pool at the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind, Fitzpatrick said, which hasn't even had water in it for three years. The school quit using the pool, built in the early 1960s, two decades later because of the costs involved in maintaining it, ISDB Director Mary Dunne said. It's since been leased to the Gooding Recreation District.

The deal will provide Gooding with a year-round pool to complement its current outdoor one, Fitzpatrick said. It will also ensure space for the hospital to offer water-based physical therapy, a better type of therapy for people with weight problems, leg injuries and other issues, he said. Along with fixing the cracked pool, workers will improve handicapped access to second-floor locker rooms and install a new boiler system. The hospital is seeking volunteers to help with repainting the area and other jobs, Fitzpatrick said. The work should be complete in late October.