

# County hospital losing money after Village fire

By Karen Krien

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At the Jan. 27 meeting, the Cheyenne County Hospital Board members were told that, after the Oct. 19 fire at the Good Samaritan Village, the hospital will be losing hundreds of thousands of dollars.

After the fire, the residents were taken to other area nursing homes and were no longer brought to the county hospital. Thus, Les Lacy, hospital administrator said, the hospital will be losing approximately \$350,000 in revenue in the course of a year.

The Village provided meals on wheels so, after the fire, the hospital took on this task. Medicare reduces the hospital's reimbursement by \$15 a meal served to non-patients or non-employees. Les Lacy, hospital administrator, said supporting the meals on wheels program is a service to the community and that is what the hospital is about.

The nursing home is supposed to open up in March with 20-plus beds and by May, there will be 32 beds. That, he said, will be about 60 percent of what was there before the fire. This creates a situation that will reduce the hospital's revenue generating capacity and reimbursement over a longer term. The reduction in Medicare days will also negatively affect reimbursement. Mr. Lacy believes the cash loss to the hospital including revenue and reimbursement challenges would be around \$500,000 per year. "This creates some real challenges for the hospital," he said.

The administrator said hospital staff wages had been frozen starting the first of the year. But, he said, he recognized the need to maintain the current services if possible. We are still working the problem, he said, and we don't want to cause panic or fear but the hospital could run out of operating money in 20 months if cash utilization continues at the current rate.

"While it is important that we trim expenses," Mr. Lacy said, "we will continue to focus on patient safety and the quality of our care. We can fix this situation; we just need to be sure we are choosing the best thing for patients and community as we do it."

Mr. Lacy said in 1996, the taxpayers voted to give the hospital board 12 mills in appropriations. A mill generates \$35,780. This year, the board is getting 5.41 mills along with the 1-cent of the sales tax.

"It is likely that we will need the full 12 mills to recover," he said.

He went on to add that the county already has problems and the nursing home needs help. Understanding the county's situation and knowing that the status of the nursing home is another critical component, the community will need to choose a vision to pursue.

As a hospital board, said Jerry Toler, board president, it is important to be proactive and work in unison. The county residents need to be considered but we need to start working on these problems and let the county know we need support and more money to operate.

With health care reform, when and if it is fully implemented in 2015, Mr. Lacy said, there will be more people insured and there should be a reduction in charity care. This should help.

The administrator said he was cooperating with the Community Builders group to apply for a Kansas Rural Health Works - Community Engagement Program. The application for this is competitive in Kansas, with

two communities out of the state to be selected in this round. This would serve the entire community and be helpful for the nursing home task force and the hospital in strategic planning. (See related article that shows one component of this study.)

Mr. Lacy has been appointed to the Policy Congress of the National Rural Health Association representing Critical-Access Hospitals. Great Plains Health Alliance is covering the expenses.

Lacy continues to work toward a financial proforma to assess the viability of a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). He indicated that there were some serious governance and reimbursement issues that would have to be considered and dealt with to proceed with the model, but that it brings with it several enhancements including some improvements to reimbursement and scope of services, relief of some malpractice costs, and approximately \$650,000 per year in grant funds.

"This is one option we need to look at, but we may need another model," he said.

Mr. Lacy reported that he is writing a position paper describing this alternate model that will be submitted to the United Methodist Health Ministry Foundation later this month. When questioned, he indicated that the model would be designed to serve the needs of a frontier county (fewer than six people per square mile) and would enable improved collaboration and integration between the current components of health care. The orientation of the model would be far more prevention and wellness oriented than the current system. He said he has been very active in pushing for this new model.

#### In other business

In other business:  
• Terry Miller, county clerk, swore in new board members, Mike Bandel and Erika Zimelman. Traci Neitzel and Joy Anderegg are the outgoing members.

• Board elections took place with Mr. Toler re-elected as the president; Kari Gilliland is the new secretary; and Jane Young, the treasurer.

• Susan Roelfs, case manager department head, gave a brief report on what is happening in the department.

#### Next meeting

The next meeting of the board has been scheduled for 3 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 24, in the St. Francis Clinic conference room.



ATTENDING KANSAS DAY — Meta Dankenbring, Edna and Paul Roesener visit. Paul Roesener was the eldest Kansas-born man, the Cheyenne County eldest born man in Bird City, Cheyenne County, and eldest man present.



Lynn Glasco (above) started the celebration by giving the welcome. Helene Landenberger (right) uncovered the Kansas birthday cake.

Times photo by Norma Martinez.



## Legislative News

I now have four weeks under my belt as a state legislator. I thought it might be interesting to share some information to help you understand the process I have been learning. There are 29 different committees, in the House of Representatives, working toward the goal of setting a budget and making good policy. The senate has committees doing the same thing.

Committees in both houses have been holding hearings on bills to allow all of the parties involved an opportunity to share their perspectives, concerns and support. After holding a hearing on the bill, the committee is ready to "work the bill" or amend it before voting on whether to pass it out of committee. If a bill is voted out of committee, it goes onto General Orders and it is printed in the House Journal "below the line."

This indicates that it is ready to be brought "above the line" at which point it will be debated by the full house. After the debate there is a vote, if it passes it goes on to the senate, and then to the governor.

There are lots of things that can happen when a bill is debated on the floor. It can be changed dramatically by an amendment and can change drastically what the bill was originally intended for. I still find it hard to believe that, in a few weeks, we will be voting as many as 40 times a day. I will not be told how to vote. I will study as hard as I can and vote for what I feel is in the best interest of my districts and Kansas.

The governor has proposed a bill for the state budget for fiscal

year (FY) 2011 to bring it into line with declining revenue. He calls it a freeze bill that combines fund transfers and \$52 million in the State General Fund cuts. This will turn the deficit into a \$35 million ending balance at the end of this fiscal year. The legislator refers to this process as the "rescission period." A point I did not think of about his proposal - for every dollar we save this year, it is actually two dollars - the one that we saved this year and the one we don't have to budget for next year.

The governor has also authorized the sale of 10 percent of state assets to help with this year's cuts. I did not realize that the state owns the property our six Board of Regents colleges sit on. There

are many other properties as well. We will see a list of proposed land sales and then decide.

When I agreed to serve western Kansas as a legislator, I knew that I would try to promote and fight for our area with all of my heart. It is an uphill battle. There are very few western Kansas legislators. Due to population trends there are many legislators from the three biggest areas of the state. I have truly realized what a diverse state we are and how suitable for one is not necessarily suitable for all.

I do believe that western Kansas is deserving of the new catch word in the legislature, "suitable."

We deserve suitable in every aspect of our communities -

hospitals, schools, courthouse services, nursing homes and cities. Instead of just writing our local legislators, we should start enlisting the help of the thousands of western Kansas people that have moved to the larger metropolitan areas of Kansas. Our high school graduates are playing an important role in their new communities and I wish they would voice, to their legislators, that growing up in our towns and cities made them the good workers and people they are today. Sending tax dollars to western Kansas is a great investment for the future of Kansas.

Ward Cassidy  
120th State Representative

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