

# Decade of Growth Revamps Community Hospital Campus

By Gene O. Morris

Community Hospital of McCook is moving forward with the largest construction project, dollar-wise, in the town's history.

The two-phase project, which began in the fall of 2009, was originally estimated to cost nearly \$32 million and take two and a half years to complete. But, as construction work nears the half-way point, the Community Hospital project is gaining recognition for both efficiency and economy.

The efficiency part comes because the first phase is on time, with 25 new private patient rooms and an all-new labor and delivery area complete with two labor and delivery suites scheduled for completion in December of 2010. Being built at the crest of the sloping hill overlooking East 11th and East H streets, the new rooms will all be arranged with efficient and functional space for the three zones of care: the patient, caregiver and visitor zones. Each of the rooms will contain full headwalls of medical gases and suction. Included in the 25 private rooms will be two isolation/hospice rooms toward the south end of the patient floor.

The economy part - unusual in a time of unsettled costs - is the result of keeping a close watch on expenditures. "Originally, the project was allocated \$32 million, but we've been able to trim that total by close to \$3 million, which means the total cost for the two phases will be more in the range of \$29 million," said Jim Ulrich, president and CEO of Community Hospital.

Once the all-new private patient rooms are in place, attention will shift to the second phase of the project. Due to start in the spring of 2011, Phase II will include a new surgical area, pre and post-operative areas, a larger and more functional pharmacy, dedicated space for outpatient services, and public and staff meeting room space.

When the two phases of the project are completed in 2012, it will culminate an almost total remake of the Community Hospital campus. Starting with the planning and construction of the new McCook Clinic building between 2000 and 2003, the hospital has been making improvements on a near-continuous basis. One of the major steps forward was the building and opening of the Rehabilitation Center, accomplished in 2007 with the help of a fund-raising campaign.

The Community Hospital changes over the last decade have also included revision of the former clinic space into offices for visiting specialists, and a hospital-wide redecoration effort, featuring the colors of the prairie and the plains, including all earth tone, wood, metal, and stone colors. Among the other technological advances at the hospital are MRI, digital Mammography, and CT Scan equipment, as well as updated laboratory and health information management systems. Adding to all this, Ulrich said the new

construction in this two-phased project will be wireless enabled to provide for the flexibility to utilize current and future technology.

As part of the changes, the hospital will be doing away with the pods which were used for patient care from 1974 until the present. The pods were intended to give caregivers a view of all rooms from a central point, but the design posed problems, including cramped room spaces.

That problem, and others, inspired the design of the new patient rooms, all of which will contain much more functional and usable space along with larger exterior windows.

The latest, two-phase project's success is due, in large part, to the conservative, common sense way that people in Southwest Nebraska do business, Ulrich said. "We owe a lot to Troy Bruntz, Community Hospital's vice president of finance, and Sean Wolfe, the hospital's controller. They are the ones who scouted for financing packages, and came up with the two-phase direct loan and loan guarantee packages from local and area banks and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. From the banking and financing side, our board chairman Brian Esch from McCook National Bank, Pat Kenner from Thayer County Bank in Hebron, Nebraska and all of our friends at USDA-Rural Development have been extremely helpful in the process."

At the 11th hour, in August of 2009 just before construction started, the Community Hospital project was added to America's Stimulus Funding. In the time since then, the Community Hospital project has been praised as among the best examples of how the Stimulus Program should be used.

For one thing, the hospital is not getting free government money. It's getting a loan, guaranteed by the USDA because of Community Hospital's strong financial position and past record of fulfilling its obligations. Showing this, Community Hospital is budgeting net operating revenues of \$35 million in the current fiscal year compared to expenses of \$33 million. The hospital's total assets - including buildings, equipment, cash reserves and receivables - total \$34 million.

That's why the hospital has been able to grow. By building a solid financial foundation, Community Hospital is in position to serve the medical needs of Southwest Nebraska and Northwest Kansas now and in the future.