

City's first hospital to rise in N. Peoria

Cecilia Chan - Mar. 24, 2008 08:58 AM
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Peoria's first hospital is expected to open next year on 48 acres northwest of Lake Pleasant Parkway and Happy Valley Road.

Peoria Regional Medical Center's initial 70,000-square-foot, acute-care facility will have more than 30 private emergency rooms and 30 inpatient beds.

"As the community grows, we will be able to grow and add in-patient beds on an as-needed basis," said Drew Markell, spokesman for Visionary Health Corp. "Whether it's two years out or five years out, as demand increases, we will go ahead and keep up in a posthaste fashion."

Markell said groundbreaking is expected in the second quarter to middle of this year. It will take 15 months or so from that point to complete the facility, he said.

Officials said the primary focus of the facility will be quick delivery of efficient and accurate medical services. Visionary Health's hospitals feature a "Door to Doc in 31 Minutes" model of emergency medicine.

The hospital also will offer a full range of diagnostic imaging and laboratory services, complete surgical services and an on-site pharmacy.

Visionary Health has a facility in Gilbert that opened in 2006 with 22 in-patient beds. The Gilbert site is expected to break ground next month on a 106-bed, 170,000-square-foot expansion, Markell said.

"Most people don't want to come to a hospital," said Drew Markell, spokesman for Visionary Health. "So, we want to take your situation and make it as comfortable as possible, Number 1. Number 2, we rate the reason why you are there and not make you sit around and wait."

Markell said the average emergency room wait time for a patient in an Arizona hospital is five hours, 37 minutes. The latest report for Visionary's Gilbert Hospital for March 11-17 showed an average wait time of 15 minutes, 56 seconds, he said.

"From the 11th to 17th of March, 1,104 patients were treated," Markell said. "It's not like we were treating 10 patients. We have a high volume."

The Gilbert hospital has treated more than 93,000 patients since it opened in 2006.

Markell credited the number of physicians and physician extenders, such as nurse practitioners and physician assistants, on staff for the fast patient response.

"And at the same time, all the departments work as one cohesive unit to make sure there are no breakdowns in the system," he said. "Everybody has to be on the same page. We can't sit and wait to get to the lab work later.

"Customer service and communication is a big thing."

Visionary Health was to present its project at a community meeting in north Peoria on Thursday. More meetings are planned to update residents on the hospital.

"This facility will provide residents of Peoria and surrounding communities access to a full-service, acute-care general hospital," Visionary Health's CEO, David S. Wanger, said in a released statement. "We are committed to ensuring the facility's design and architecture complements the natural beauty of the area."

The hospital is expected to employ about 260 people with an annual payroll of about \$17 million.

"We are very excited about this opportunity," said Steve Prokopek, city economic development director in a news release. "We have seen the high quality facility that Visionary Health plans to build and operate, and think it's a great fit for Peoria."

Peoria elected officials have made economic development a priority for the city, directing staff to attract major employers, hospital facilities and a higher-learning institution. The city's main focus is to develop an economic corridor around the incoming Loop 303.

"When the 303 connects, we are going to probably go after a major medical facility for that area also," said Steve Bleyer, city economic-management analyst.

Visionary Health isn't the only medical facility setting up shop in Peoria.

Sun Health plans to build a 61,000-square-foot outpatient facility at 99th Avenue and Jomax Road. The groundbreaking for that project is still undecided, Bleyer said.