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## West Point Hospital building an addition

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Tammy Real-McKeighan/Fremont Tribune | Posted: Saturday, July 17, 2010 3:00 am | (0)

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Conceptual drawing of what the new addition to St. Francis Memorial Hospital in West Point will look like. (Courtesy HDR Engineering)

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St. Francis Memorial Hospital is getting a makeover.

The critical access hospital in West Point has 25 beds. That number won't change when construction concludes in 2012, but rooms which are part of a \$21 million addition will be larger.

"It's probably the biggest thing that's happened for local health care since the current building opened in 1950," said Todd Consbruck, executive director of physicians' services and communications. "It should help secure the future of health care here in West Point."

The 52,000-square-foot addition, under construction on the hospital's south side, will include three stories above ground and one below as a basement is being put under it, said Ron Briggs, hospital administrator and chief executive officer.

Because the hospital was constructed in the 1950, rooms and bathrooms were small.

New patient rooms will be close to 350 square feet.

Briggs said the addition will include 17 new rooms. The other rooms will be turned into the remaining eight rooms. All rooms will be bigger and better, Briggs said.

The addition also will have a new lobby and an addition to the attached clinic. It will have a new registration area and there will be an addition to the laboratory and the rehabilitation unit.

Briggs added the hospital is being built on a hill and Decatur Street was closed. The west end of that street was raised 10 feet to make the street flat so there will be flat parking for patients and visitors.

The project, which began last year, is a joint venture between MS Construction in West Point and Beckenhauer Construction in Norfolk.

Briggs said the hospital, which has 235 workers, is the community's largest employer; he also expressed appreciation for the community.

"The community has been very supportive of everything we've done," Briggs said. "They've helped us recruit physicians and supported loan repayment for doctors and the community has been very good about raising funds for new technology."

That support, in turn, has helped the hospital recruit medical personnel.

"We have five family practitioners, one general surgeon, three physician assistants and one psychiatric nurse practitioner," he said.

Consbruck believes the project will help the hospital retain and attract new staff.

"People want to go to attractive buildings and be cared for by quality staff. We have very good staff," he said.

The hospital and St. Joseph's Retirement Community can trace their start back to the 1880s when the first missionaries arrived, stated information from the hospital.

Msgr. Joseph Ruesing and the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity started St. Joseph's Home for the Aged in 1905. In 1923, a 22-bed hospital ward was added to St. Joseph's and soon filled to capacity. With the advent of Hill-Burton Federal funding in the mid-1940s, the community and the sisters began planning for a new hospital. Using funding support from the surrounding communities, federal government and the sisters, a 75-bed hospital - then named Memorial Hospital in honor of veterans and pioneers - was constructed on the site where it now stands.

Historical information from the hospital also states that it has continued to integrate services and now owns West Point Medical Clinic and the Elkhorn Valley Medical Clinic building. The hospital started employing physicians and physician assistants in 1994. That was the same year the community saw the addition of St. Francis Home Care, a service that provides nursing care to patients in their homes.

The hospital offers various services and has an in-house CT scanner, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and digital mammography.

Briggs is pleased with the current project.

"This will take our hospital into the future and it will provide a health care facility that our community and surrounding area can be proud of and bring the services they need to the area," Briggs said. "This will match the facility with the quality of professionals who provide the level of care our patients expect."

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