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Major Step in Hospital Merger Completed

By Martin Toombs
Southern Tier Editor

Hornell — The Boards of Directors of St. James Mercy and Bethesda hospitals scaled a major hurdle facing the merger of the two facilities when they each approved a consolidation plan last month.

Meeting separately, the two boards each approved "Option 3" of those offered by the merger consultant. With that decision made, the consultant, Thomas P. Weil, will prepare the application for the approvals required to proceed with that service arrangement.

Option 3 calls for Bethesda to become the "child and maternal health center" and for a slight expansion in the number of beds at the North Hornell facility. Bethesda would include 94 acute-care beds, 20 for a regional alcoholism unit, and 12 pediatric, as well as the ambulatory and outpatient surgical unit, and the ancillary services those units require. The 94-bed total is four more than the hospital operates currently.

St. James would contain

121 medical-surgical beds, plus 12 in an intensive, coronary care unit, as well as the emergency room, the major surgical suite, centralized laboratory and radiology. The 133-bed total would be 11 fewer than currently.

The \$6.5 million estimated cost of the option was among the cheapest offered by Weil. The money would be raised through increased reimbursement from third-party payers through rates set by the state Health Department.

The St. James board approved the option unanimously at its meeting Nov. 16. The 17-member Bethesda board approved it Dec. 11 with five negative votes.

Sister Mary Rene McNiff, St. James administrator, said that the selection of a service arrangement was probably the last major decision facing the two boards; many other issues, such as make-up of the new board of directors and of the new administration, had been determined previously. Some further points need to be decided, she noted, in-

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cluding the new corporation's name, but none are as important as those already made.

Sister Rene noted that at the St. James board meeting Nov. 16, the board expressed interest in another option presented, which would have placed all acute care in the St. James building, and a 60-bed skilled nursing facility and the alcoholism unit at Bethesda. "That's the one that the state's pushing, and that's the one I'm afraid the state's going to continue to push," she said. But the St. James board realized that it would not be politically feasible, and that

they would "have to come up with a compromise" like that offered by Option 3.

The Interim Advisory Committee, which is preparing to present the merger plan to health planning and state Health Department officials next month, reaffirmed the terms and conditions agreed upon in the Oct. 26, 1978 Letter of Intent: Current employees at both hospitals have been guaranteed they will not lose their jobs because of the merger and the current auxiliaries will be encouraged to continue functioning.

The Letter of Intent spelled out the membership of the combined board, which will include five Sisters of Mercy selected by the congregation; two physicians elected by the board from five nominated by medical staff; eight members selected by the Bethesda board, three selected by the St. James board, and the chief executive officer (who, if a Sister of Mercy, will be one of the sister members).

The Letter of Intent also states that "statements concerning moral or spiritual considerations or which are inconsistent with the religious views of the major faiths shall require the approval of both the Board of Directors and the Sisters of Mercy."

The Letter of Intent also provides for the administration of the merged facility. Sister Rene explained that it now seems likely that she will take the title of president, with the Bethesda administrator, Carl Luger, and the two associate administrators at St. James each becoming vice presidents.

Sister Rene noted that it has been agreed upon that no abortions will be performed in the merged facility.

"Option 3" does not include the proposed 60-bed skilled nursing facility that was included in other options presented to the boards. Sister Rene noted that "we're going to address" the question of a skilled nursing facility in the future, as there is a community consensus that it is needed.

In presenting the selected option, Weil summarized the five reasons he sees favoring a corporate merger of the hospitals:

1. A 90-bed and a 144-bed hospital are below what is considered by hospital consultants to be the "critical mass" to provide a broad range of community-oriented programs, services and facilities.

2. Pediatrics and obstetrics could be centralized immediately after the corporate consolidation is consummated, the savings could be used to develop 24-hour physician coverage in a centralized emergency room.

3. Additional or expanded programs can be developed, such as a regional alcoholism center, cancer care, renal disease, and expanded physical medicine and rehabilitation services.

4. More physicians, particularly primary care doctors such as family practitioners, general internists, pediatricians and obstetrician-gynecologists will be attracted to the Hornell community.

5. Improved capital and operating incomes should be forthcoming from New York State, and there should be some reductions in costs of providing existing services.

While the proposed merger is reviewed by health planners, work will proceed on a legal contract for the merger.

Sister Rene added that she sees the rate-setting involved in the negotiations with the state to be important. Pointing out that some recently passed legislation allowing merged facilities to receive special treatment in rate-setting should help, she said that she would like to have the new rate spelled out, and not simply left to future review.

Charities, OHD Set Meetings On Southern Tier Ministry

For the past several months the diocesan Catholic Charities and the Office of Human Development have been exploring the idea of establishing a Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry.

According to a release from William Privett of Catholic Charities, "This new office would continue to carry out the traditional social justice activities of OHD and also would begin the development of human care programs aimed at priority needs of people in Chemung, Schuyler, Tompkins, Tioga and Steuben Counties.

A major element of the

planning for this office involves establishing a local board composed of people from each county, and lay people from various social and professional fields."

A series of five meetings has been scheduled to explain the proposal and to provide people in each county an opportunity to air their views on either the structure or the activities of the proposed office. The information gathered at these meetings will be given to Bishop Matthew H. Clark, who will make the final decision on any such unit established.

Following is the schedule of the meetings:

Steuben County — Jan. 17, 7:30 p.m., St. Mary's School, 32 E. Morris St., Bath.

Chemung and Schuyler Counties — Jan. 24, St. Peter and Paul School, 160 High St., Elmira; 1 p.m., pastors and parish staffs; 4 p.m., Catholic Family Services Board; 7:30 p.m., open to the public.

Tompkins and Tioga Counties — Jan. 29, 7:30 p.m., St. John the Evangelist parish hall, 24 Rock St., Newark Valley.

A snow date for any of the meetings has been slated on Feb. 4.

Monastery's Puppies for Sale

Elmira — The Dominican sisters living in the Monastery of Mary the Queen on West Church Street have some youngsters in their community they're willing to part with.

The sisters' German Shepherd had a litter of nine puppies, and although three of them are spoken for, the sisters are looking for buyers for the other six, who as yet are not quite ready to leave their mother.

Mother Agnes, prioress at the cloistered monastery, noted that they had their

female dog bred, but have found caring for the nine puppies quite a chore. The puppies' lineage was reported incorrectly in the Jan. 2 Courier-Journal; they are AKC-registered German Shepherds.

In addition to the mother and her puppies, the sisters have another dog, a collie, and a few cats.

The monastery's telephone number is 734-9506.

Geneva RTL Sponsors Bus To Washington

Geneva — Geneva Area Right to Life is sponsoring a bus to Washington, D.C. for persons who wish to participate in the annual Jan. 22 March for Life, the protest demonstration against the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortions.

The bus will depart at 9:30 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 21, arriving in the nation's capital at dawn the next day. Washington events include lobbying in the morning and the march, beginning at noon. The bus will return to

Geneva at midnight the same day.

Persons who wish to be included in the bus trip have been asked to call Kathy Peters (315) 539-8006.

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Deaths

Father Leonard Rush, Basilian for 61 Years

Father E. Leonard Rush, CSB, linguist, teacher and orator, died Dec. 24, 1979, in Toronto, his native city. He was 85 years old and had been in the Congregation of St. Basil for 61 years.

Father Rush was a professor of modern languages at St. John Fisher College from 1957 to 1968. He had served in the same capacity at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Tex., where he also was vice president. He was the first

superior at Detroit Catholic Central, a high school, and founder and first superior of St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

After leaving Fisher, he taught at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. He was educated there, at Columbia University, in Germany, and at the Sorbonne in Paris and at Laval University in Quebec, where he received his doctoral degree. For his teaching of the French

language, the government of France decorated him as a Chevalier avec des Palmes Academiques. His other languages were Italian, Spanish and German, as well as English.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Dec. 26 at St. Basil's Church, Toronto, with burial at the church. Concelebrants from Rochester included Basilian Fathers Charles J. Lavery, president of Fisher College; John Murray of the faculty; Alfred Caird and Howard Keon of the novitiate on Augustine Street. Msgr. John E. Maney, pastor of St. Mary of the Lake Church, Ontario, also took part.

Winter Picnic Planned

Elmira — The Elmira Divorced, Separated and Widowed Catholics will meet for a family winter picnic Sunday, Jan. 13 at the Elmira College Domes, or the Murray Athletic Center, the Domes. Families may use the Domes facilities from 3:30 to 5 p.m. and should bring ice skates or bathing suits as needed. At 5 p.m. the group will meet for an indoor picnic, which each family providing their own meal; coffee and tea will be provided. Persons of all faiths are welcome.

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