

DIOCESAN NEWS

St. Mary's, Park Ridge may combine hospitals

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — By December, St. Mary's Hospital and Park Ridge Health System may form a holding company that will combine both organizations into one system, according to St. Mary's and Park Ridge officials.

The two health-care providers signed a non-binding memorandum of understanding this month. It permits the hospitals' officials to discuss consolidating and relocating services to each other's campuses, officials said.

Stewart Putnam, president and chief executive officer of St. Mary's, and Timothy McCormick, president and CEO of Park Ridge, spoke to the *Catholic Courier* about the anticipated merger.

Putnam said a variety of factors brought the two health-care providers together six months ago to discuss forming a mutually beneficial system. Among the factors he cited were cuts in federal and state reimbursements for services provided to low-income patients; the increasing demand of hospitals to cut costs by businesses and insurers; and the geographic proximity of the two hospitals.

St. Mary's is located on the west side of the city, and Park Ridge is on the west side of Monroe County in Greece.

Putnam also pointed out that the expansion of primary care offices in Monroe County in recent years has reduced the demand for all hospitals' outpatient services. Additionally, he said, from January to June of this year, St. Mary's number of inpatient admissions declined 17 percent. Meanwhile, admissions for hospitals throughout Monroe County have declined



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer
Barbara Berges, RN (left), a lactation consultant at St. Mary's Hospital, talks with Sheila King after the birth of King's daughter, Nadaca Caprie. St. Mary's obstetrical services are among those that may be affected by the proposed merger.

eight percent in the last year, he added.

"A big thing we're doing here is maintaining and enhancing the Catholic health-care system in Monroe County," Putnam said. "Just because of the trends going on, there's a need for less (hospital) care. We're trying to make St. Mary's able to survive in this new environment."

Putnam and McCormick said the move would probably affect some employees' positions at both institutions, but neither official could say how many or what positions would be affected.

"I think we believe there's going to be a downturn in employment," McCormick

said. "We see this as a chance to stabilize that."

The new health-care system would be called St. Mary's/Park Ridge Health System, and its president would be McCormick. Putnam would serve as vice president of the new system, but continue also as president of St. Mary's. Warren Hern, Park Ridge's current senior vice president and chief financial officer, would serve as chief financial officer of the new system.

The new system would be affiliated with the Daughters of Charity National Health System — East, Inc., with which St.

Mary's is already affiliated. Park Ridge has agreed to comply with the Catholic ethical guidelines under which St. Mary's operates, McCormick said. That would include guidelines on treatment of dying patients and on the provision of obstetrical and gynecological services, he said.

Both presidents said in the next few months hospital officials will be discussing such possible changes as:

- Relocating Park Ridge's inpatient psychiatric beds to St. Mary's.
- Consolidating both systems' rehabilitation services, and relocating Park Ridge's acute rehabilitation beds to St. Mary's.
- Relocating Park Hope Nursing Home, operated by Park Ridge, from its current site on Mount Hope Avenue in Rochester to St. Mary's campus.
- Expanding ambulatory care services at St. Mary's and maintaining St. Mary's emergency and urgent care services.
- Consolidating and relocating St. Mary's obstetrical and inpatient medical and surgical services to Park Ridge.
- Combining the clinical laboratories and occupational health programs of both institutions.

McCormick said both organizations serve large low-income populations — St. Mary's through its various physical health services, and Park Ridge through its mental health, nursing and chemical dependency programs. Both officials said they saw particular promise in the institutions collaborating on chemical dependency treatment programs in the inner city.

"It makes a lot of sense," McCormick said of the proposed system. "We've got a lot of services that we can relocate to St. Mary's."

Watkins Glen parish marks 150th year with wave of events

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

How strong is the bond linking Catholics in Watkins Glen with their parish?

The long list of 150th-anniversary events staged by St. Mary of the Lake Church provides an answer. Rather than simply hold a weekend celebration, the parish community has been commemorating its history throughout 1996.

This package of activities has included a visit by Bishop Matthew H. Clark; an appearance by auto racing star Bobby Allison; various banquets; and even a commemorative book nearly 200 pages long.

Father David L. Bonin, pastor at St. Mary of the Lake, noted that parishioners have a special passion for both their parish and their village. St. Mary of the Lake is located in the heart of Watkins Glen, just a few blocks from the southern tip of Seneca Lake.

"The past is very important to this community. I've never been in a community where three or four pages in the local paper (the *Glen Review*) are devoted to what happened 100 or 125 years ago," said Father Bonin, who also serves as pastor of St. Benedict Church in nearby Odessa.

St. Mary of the Lake and its parishioners constitute a huge part of the village's past and present. Many of the 800 families currently in the parish are de-



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer
Sundine Franzese Specchio (center) shows St. Mary of the Lake's 150th-anniversary commemorative book to Carol and Bill Franzese. The three are leading a campaign to raise \$600,000 to restore and renovate the church.

scendants of Irish and Italian immigrants who settled in Schuyler County during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Those families are noted in a special 150th-anniversary commemorative book, *Through the Windows of St. Mary's of the Lake Church*, written by parishioners Jean Argetsinger and Patricia Ellison. Argetsinger and Ellison spent two years ac-

cumulating family biographies, anecdotes, photographs and local history.

According to Bill Franzese, a third-generation parishioner at St. Mary's, the authors "did a wonderful job. They researched and researched and researched that book."

Another highlight of the anniversary year was an appearance by Bishop Clark, who celebrated a 150th-anniversary liturgy May 5. One additional celebrity guest at the parish was Allison, a NASCAR racing standout, who appeared at a dinner at St. Mary's in early August.

In addition, St. Mary's has opened its celebration to the community at large by staging such events as a spaghetti dinner, the parish mission and a brunch cruise.

Father Bonin said that the parish has attempted to hold some sort of anniversary-related gathering every month. He added that the menu of events has varied

greatly in an effort to draw participants of many ages and backgrounds.

"We've done things at different price levels. If you have an expensive banquet, a lot of people can't go — it's more of an exclusive kind of thing," Father Bonin explained. "We said, 'Let's do things that will attract all kinds of people.'"

The anniversary was also used as a taking-off point for a fund drive titled "Bring the Past Into Our Future." This effort seeks to raise \$600,000 for the renovation and restoration of the St. Mary's church building, rectory and parish center.

The campaign, begun Aug. 15, is the parish's first capital fund drive in 40 years. Father Bonin noted that it makes good sense to launch the drive while anniversary celebrations are drawing to a close.

"It was a way of drawing attention to the history of our parish, but also looking to the future," Father Bonin said.

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