

MTMC's challenge: Sell former hospital



JOHN A. GILLIS/DNJ

Rodger Klein, vice president of support services at Middle Tennessee Medical Center, stands in front of the former facility on North Highland Avenue. A key for MTMC's mission this year is to find a buyer for the former hospital location.

Cost will be \$1.2 million per year to maintain complex

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Middle Tennessee Medical Center spent much of 2010 moving to its new home. A key MTMC mission in 2011 will be finding a new buyer for the old Murfreesboro hospital.

"It's a good building, and it's well-maintained," said Rodger Klein,

MTMC's vice president of support services.

Since relocating to its new hospital on Medical Center Parkway, MTMC faces spending \$1.2 million per year to maintain an older complex of five buildings and a parking garage at 400 North Highland Ave.

"You can't just shut it down," said Klein, noting that the MTMC adminis-

tration is committed to providing funds to uphold the quality of the older complex that includes the original Rutherford Hospital building that opened in 1927.

"Items that make up this budget are utilities, security, building maintenance and landscaping," Klein said. "We'll continue to maintain the landscaping as

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History of the original MTMC campus

1927: Rutherford Hospital was established through a contribution from the Commonwealth Fund of New York City. It began as a 37 bed, private, not-for-profit hospital with the mission to operate "for the welfare of mankind."

1952: Minor additions built to the hospital.

1958: Second addition included a new surgical suite with two operating rooms, a four-bed recovery room and all other operating room supportive services. Thirty new beds were added, as well as two labor and delivery rooms, a clinical laboratory, X-ray department and central supply room.

1962: Third addition created the juncture of "A" and "B" Buildings and part of the crossover area, and added three additional operating

rooms: one general surgery, one urology, and one orthopedic. Forty beds were added in a wing that is the first floor of a future "West Wing" or "B" Building. It was constructed on "stilts" and joined the hospital at the end of the middle wing. Also added were a pharmacy, medical library and two emergency rooms.

1967: Fourth addition created 66 new beds, a new clinical laboratory, radiology suite, emergency room suite, obstetric floor and pediatric floor. The critical care pavilion, now housing laser surgery, included intensive care, coronary care and recovery beds. Also added were a newly enlarged central supply department, laundry, kitchen and cafeteria.

1978: Fifth addition was the boldest,

most extensive construction program ever undertaken by the hospital at that point. It added 89 beds, a new intensive care/coronary care unit, nuclear medicine unit, newly enlarged pharmacy, and a medical records department. A board room, education classroom, conference room and three additional operating rooms were also added.

1982: Renamed to Middle Tennessee Medical Center.

1986: Affiliation with Baptist and Saint Thomas Hospitals.

1988: The medical center was granted a Certificate of Need approval for ancillary services and Baptist Women's Pavilion East expansions. The 70,000-square-foot expansion, plus 80,000-square-foot renovation to the existing facility marked

the largest and most comprehensive building project ever undertaken by the hospital and one that greatly assisted in meeting MTMC's objective of becoming the hospital of choice between Nashville and Chattanooga. The facility opened in April, 1990.

1989: Neurosurgery services were implemented by Dr. Warren McPherson.

1993: In November, Cardiac Catherization Laboratory was opened in an area outside the ICU with state-of-the-art technology.

1994: Employee parking garage opens.

1997: In May, MTMC opened the Radiation Therapy unit after acquiring the facility from a private physician. Major renovations were completed as well as the replacement of the linear

accelerator and support equipment for the area. MTMC also replaced surgical suite.

1998: Neonatology services began. The Health Facilities Commission granted the hospital a Certificate of Need for a neonatal ICU and construction began in 2001 to expand the newborn nursery and add a 13-bed NICU.

1999: Bell Street Center opens.

2000: Cardiology, Diagnostics Lab expansion.

2002: Emergency Department expansion.

2010: On Oct. 2, MTMC's new 286-bed, \$267 million replacement hospital opens on Medical Center Parkway.

Source: MTMC spokesperson Erin Yeldell.

itive use, then it would feel more secure. We certainly want it to have a use that is a positive use, so it's not left as vacant property."

Richard, though, does appreciate that traffic congestion has decreased, especially since the hospital's emergency room moved to the new campus.

Future land use potential

To assist MTMC in finding a buyer, the Murfreesboro City Council approved rezoning that allows more than just medical uses for much of the property by the old hospital.

"For so many years the hospital was the focal point of that area of town, and while we are all excited about the new hospital,

we don't want to forget about the economic vitality in the Highland Avenue area," said Councilman Toby Gilley, who's also a member of the city's Planning Commission.

"We have had the planning staff do some extensive research on the types of businesses outside of the medical profession that would seem to be an appropriate fit for the area. These include other types of professional offices, specialty shops and, actually at the suggestion of public comments, tea rooms."

Gilley hopes a buyer will find a way to keep the old hospital building in use.

"From an aesthetic and historical standpoint, it's an attractive building that blends into the area well,"

Gilley said.

Potential hospital buyers

MTMC has explored many possible building suitors, including from its own non-profit parent company. Ascension Health, which is based in St. Louis, considered using the old hospital for a back-office record processing operation, but the Catholic healthcare system chose to locate those jobs in Chicago, confirmed Klein.

A mental healthcare company examined the old MTMC campus but decided it was too large, he said.

"Most calls we are getting are for residential, retail or commercial interest," said Klein, adding that

it's possible that MTMC might have to sell the campus in sections. "Ideally, we would sell it as one piece of property, but I guess we're open to new ideas. The size of the building dictates multiple uses because it is pretty large."

MTMC staff have even discussed the old campus with MTSU, which is within a mile from the former hospital.

"They have some interest in it," said Klein, noting that the price tag would be much less than the \$95 million to \$120 million cost the state faces when the Tennessee General Assembly approves funding to construct a new MTSU science building.

Potential buyers have looked at the old building for possible multi-family

residential use, Klein added.

"It could be affordable housing for any age group," he said. "It's well maintained with a lot of square footage. It's in a good location within the city. We think it has a lot of potential for a potential owner."

The hospital staff has been marketing the property with the help of Southeast Venture, a Nashville real estate company.

"We are trying to stimulate interest in the building," Klein said. "We would like to see it used constructively for the city. We're not apprehensive about it yet. We're confident a good use will be found. It's a good building, so hopefully we'll find a use for it."

— Scott Broden, 615-278-5158

Hospital neighbors

Although all of MTMC and its related services will have moved a year from now, healthcare professionals will continue to see patients in the old hospital area, including Dr. Randall Rickard and his wife, Dr. Susan Andrews. The couple are family physicians who practice at a building they own at 515 East Bell St.

"We have enjoyed the corner being a very busy place, and now it's a very desolate place at night," said Rickard, who's hopeful MTMC will find a good buyer for the old hospital. "If the property had a pos-