

MTMC opens new era in 'Boro

When Rutherford Hospital opened on the eastern edge of Murfreesboro in 1927, it began transforming lives in the small farming village.

When Middle Tennessee Medical Center officials started accepting patients in a new \$267 million hospital early Saturday in the Gateway District they opened the doors for a health-care facility that has changed the course of history here.

This isn't just a new hospital after all. It is a validation that Murfreesboro has arrived as a destination for people — a place where they want to live, raise a family, attend school, have babies and receive medical care.

The ripples created by MTMC are already evident along Medical Center Parkway, a road that wouldn't have received such a moniker without the hospital's agreement to purchase some \$5.6 million worth of land from the city of Murfreesboro for a medical center.

Shopping centers, business offices, restaurants and medical-related buildings all vaulted off MTMC's decision to build there, and much more is to come.

The timing was right, too. With Murfreesboro topping 100,000 residents and Rutherford County reaching toward 250,000, MTMC officials knew in 1998 they had to start working toward a better hospital to serve a growing populace. No longer could the hodge-podge of buildings on North Highland, some equipped with outdated medical instruments, provide the kind of medical care people needed and deserved.

Despite great strides in its cancer center, stroke program and neurosurgery, MTMC has battled the image of a small-town hospital, with many residents preferring Nashville hospitals for treatment.

Not only will more and better treatment rooms help solve that, \$30 million worth of technology will help attract more and better doctors and associates. The best imaging equipment available will provide a better diagnosis of people's illnesses and injuries. A Sonitor program will help doctors, nurses and staff keep track of patients throughout the hospital. And a brighter atmosphere will freshen people's outlook.

But, again, this is about more than health care.

The hospital's opening will change the flow of traffic across Murfreesboro, making Medical Center Parkway a magnet for people from across the region, whether shopping for retail or health care.

It could boost land values for two adjacent tracts Murfreesboro is marketing as corporate headquarters sites. Selling those will help the city get back an even greater return on the 300 acres it purchased in 1997 on the northwest side for some \$12 million.

As planned, the new MTMC will become Murfreesboro's focal point, a dream years in the making and one that will do nothing but build a higher quality of life, one that our forefathers probably never imagined when Rutherford Hospital opened 83 years ago in a former cotton field.

Opinions in this space reflect a consensus of the discussion by The Daily News Journal's Editorial Board.