

## Real-Time Business News

# Hurley has huge projects on drawing board

by Shantell M. Kirkendoll | The Flint Journal

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FLINT -- Her bone cancer in remission, Rebekah Harbin, 11, of Burton is getting back to life the way it was before 42 weeks of chemotherapy at Hurley Medical Center.

"It's a new start for us," said mom Teresa Harbin.

Hurley, too, is planning a fresh start: a nearly half-billion-dollar overhaul of the public hospital known for caring for some of the region's sickest children.

Over the next two to 10 years, Hurley expects to create a new wing for an expanded emergency department, new doctors' offices and a pediatric tower with a separate entrance for youngsters and their families. A new main entrance will face Grand Traverse.

And the hospital continues to look toward freshening up a run-down neighborhood to improve its image as a leading medical center.

"We've developed a long-term vision for the hospital. Some has some immediacy to it; some of it is several years off," Hurley President and Chief Executive Officer Patrick Wardell told The Flint Journal.

Wardell says Hurley will borrow the money for new construction and also look to other sources including community fundraising.

Families are already seeing the effort to make children more comfortable.

"It's wonderful to what they've done with the rooms already," Harbin said of new murals and TVs. "There were days when Rebekah could not leave her room because of the effects of the chemo. In just our time there, I've watched (pediatrics) grow."

The extreme makeover of the Hurley campus will look like this:

-- Emergency room: It needs attention quickly, as 78,000 people visit the ER each year. A new wing will be extended into the parking lot with a CAT scan nearby for assessing strokes and injuries. The ER will double in size from 22,000 square feet to 45,000 square feet. Cost: \$42 million. Timing: Within the next two years.

-- New skyline: Patient rooms -- private ones -- will be consolidated to the North and East Towers and new construction. Cost: \$54 million. Timing: Undetermined.

-- New welcome mats: The main entrance facing Grand Traverse will be one of several new separate entrances, including one for the women's center and pediatrics. Timing: Undetermined.

-- Demolition: In the more distant future, the West Tower, which dates to 1927, should be demolished, planners say.

The hospital has begun to earn money again. In the first three months of the year, Hurley showed profits of \$500,000 -- way more than the projected \$100,000.

Hurley is the county's only public hospital, which means it bears the greatest burden for caring for those without health insurance. It provides programs that are unmatched locally -- from pediatric intensive care, a neonatal intensive care unit and round-the-clock trauma surgery capabilities.

But Wardell indicated those services must be matched with fresh surroundings.

"It's about obsolescence, and new concepts in patient privacy and creating a healing, caring environment," he said of the plan's origins.

For other area medical centers, too, rejuvenation is in the air. McLaren Regional Medical Center, a World War II-era hospital, is undergoing a \$40-million expansion, and Genesys Health System plans an announcement next year on additions to its campus in Grand Blanc Township.

Hurley wants to propel a tide that will lift its neighborhood as well, said Karen Lopez, Hurley's assistant vice president for government and external affairs.

"We're trying to improve the safety and aesthetics of the neighborhoods people travel through to get to Hurley," she said. "People want an attractive, safe place to visit, and appearance is a consideration when recruiting residents, physicians, nurses and staff."

Or, as Boston-based urban design consultant Gretchen Von Grossman told Hurley leaders last week: "If Hurley sits in an attractive secure setting, it will attract people to its services."

Hurley has recently demolished 17 or 18 unredeemable houses. It owns dozens of other properties that it hopes will become part of an emerging, vibrant neighborhood.

Its eye is on Stone Street, south of the hospital, where five homes are being renovated and groundbreaking is planned any day now on eight homes.

And don't expect cookie-cutter design, said Michael Freeman, senior program officer at Local Initiative Support Corp., a Genesee County Land Bank partner.

LISC worked with Hurley, which gained funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, to survey workers about living nearby. A third of Hurley workers -- 627 employees -- responded and 27 percent said they'd consider moving in.

Freeman said he was impressed to see workers actually circle pictures they were shown of historically themed floor plans they'd like to live in, such as a one-story bungalow with a front porch, cathedral ceiling and three bedrooms; and a larger, 1,500-square-foot "Downtowner" with a full basement and two-car garage.

Those homes will be built over the winter, said Jim Maxwell of Flushing's Century 21Woodland Realty.

"They are beautiful houses that fit the Carriage Town environment," he said. "There's so much potential there for walk to work and great properties along the river. We'd love to have institutional workers -- Hurley, Kettering (University), University of Michigan-Flint -- make their homes here."

The Stone Street homes will start at \$129,900. Hurley and possibly other institutions are considering offering financial aid, such as help with closing costs.

Hurley should be commended for looking at the broader area, Freeman said.

"If there's no solid downtown, the county suffers" with a depressed tax base, he said.

Regardless of what the neighborhood looks like, suburban mother Keri Dickson said she wouldn't take her 18-month-old twins, Colton and Adalyne, any other place than Hurley.

They were born there prematurely, at 27 weeks, and have made frequent trips back from Montrose for follow-up care.

But that's not to say she hasn't noticed the deteriorating landscape.

"I can understand the hesitancy of going through the neighborhood," said Dickson. "But once you get inside, the services are nothing like the area. The care is wonderful."