



Fog and clouds,
then a little sun

High 58°
Low 42°
Weather, B6

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St. Joe's \$95 M investment

Project to add private beds, expand neonatal ICU

By Joe Goldeen
Record Staff Writer

STOCKTON — St. Joseph's Medical Center will invest \$95 million on a 95,000-square-foot expansion project at the northeast corner of Harding Way and California Street that includes a three-story patient tower expected to open in 2008.

The building project will provide 78 new patient beds all in private rooms, an expanded neonatal intensive-care unit for high-risk infants and a Women and Children's Pavilion with its own drive-up entrance for mothers-to-be.

Construction on the site — currently the hospital's 1.5-acre parking lot for visitors south of Maple Street — is not expected to begin until fall 2006, the time it will take for California's Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development to review and approve St. Joseph's plans.

In the meantime, the hospital expects to begin construction in six to nine months on vacant land it owns across California Street to provide 150 visitor parking spaces on the ground. It will continue to charge for parking in order to cover the costs of 24-hour security.

The new construction will help mitigate the shortage of hospital beds already occurring as Stockton and San Joaquin County's population continues to grow at a rapid rate.

"We've operated at high levels of occupancy over the past three years, and demand remains strong. Clearly, we must bring these beds online as soon as possible with the growth we've experienced in order to continue high patient and employee satisfaction," St.

Joseph's President Donald Wiley said Friday.

"Our county is dramatically underbedded compared with other counties on a per-thousand population basis," he said.

Wiley based his assessment on a 2002 study compiled by the late Steve Ebert, then-director of San Joaquin General Hospital, which showed the county with 962 available hospital beds, a rate of 1.6 per thousand. That is considerably less than the 2.9 beds per thousand considered the benchmark for hospital planners nationwide. The California average in 1999 was 2.3 beds per thousand, according to the study.

More people require hospitalization during winter months and San Joaquin County beds are full, Wiley said. By 2008, without the new beds at St. Joseph's, it's predicted the county's seven acute-care hospitals will be full 365 days a year.

Stockton obstetrician/gynecologist Dr. Jasbir Gill welcomed the news.

"We are going to handle all the hardest pregnancies here so women don't really have to leave town," said Gill, whose seven-physician practice delivers an average of three to four babies a day — about 100 a month — at St. Joseph's.

"They will move all the women's services to the new building. They should have done this 10 or 12 years ago," he said.

Once completed, the new facility will require an estimated 130 additional employees — primarily nurses to take care of patients. St. Joseph's is already Stockton's largest private-sector

WHAT WILL COME:
The 95,000 square-foot expansion will take place at the corner of Harding Way and California Street.



employer with more than 2,400 workers.

The new construction will sit atop an expanded underground garage that will add 107 parking spaces. Medical staff and support services will move between the main campus and the new building under Maple Street.

The focal point of the above-ground building is the Women and Children's Pavilion on the first and second floors, including 26 labor-and-delivery beds and 22 neonatal intensive-care beds. Twenty beds will be dedicated to medical/surgical patients and 10 will be housed in a new intensive-care unit.

Patients and visitors will enter the pavilion on Maple Street, facing the hospital's existing entrance across the street, with future plans for a center drive and courtyard as the medical center continues to grow. Public access to the medical center will be through an enclosed second-story walkway over Maple Street.

The \$95 million project cost will be financed privately by St. Joseph's through debt, operating revenues and reserves, and donations through fund-raising efforts.

The tower is the first expansion of the medical center since 1996, when St. Joseph's opened a dedicated heart center to meet the growing need for cardiovascular

services. Its heart program was established in 1957 and performed the area's first open-heart surgery in 1974.

"We're certainly supportive of the expansion. Architecturally, it fits into the city very well," said Jim Glaser, Stockton's community development director. The city official also was encouraged by the infill nature of the project and the large capital investment in central Stockton.

Wiley said at one time in the four-year planning process leading up to Friday's announcement, St. Joseph's considered opening a new 100-bed hospital on the edge of the city. But the extra costs were prohibitive.

"This is still the medical hub. It didn't make sense at this point to build a new hospital in north Stockton. This turned out to be most viable," he said.

Turner Construction, which built St. Joseph's heart and cancer centers, will be the primary contractor on the project. Wiley said they would focus on using local subcontractors. Anshen & Allen Architects of San Francisco designed the building, following consultations with hospital physicians, nurses, maintenance and technical personnel.

About \$63 million will be spent on actual construction and \$10 million will go toward new equipment and furniture, Wiley said.