



MADISON

St. D pushing for hospital

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St. Dominic wants to rally south Madison County behind its bid to open a 71-bed hospital here.

Facing a February administrative hearing before the Mississippi Department of Health, hospital officials are asking for a "call to action" from local citizens to speak out on the need for emergency

and hospital services.

"We need a hospital in Madison. It's too far to drive all the way to Canton or Jackson when an emergency hits and seconds are ticking away," said Madison resident Jim Walker. Last December, Walker's 11-year-old son couldn't breathe because of an allergic reaction and his wife rushed him to a Madison Fire Department for emergency

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assistance.

"When minutes count, and with as much population as we have, we need a hospital," said Walker, adding that his son recovered.

St. Dominic's has been trying for about seven years to locate a hospital in Madison County. The hospital now is seeking a certificate of need (CON) from the state to move 71 beds from the Jackson campus to a new \$121 million hospital at the intersection of the Reunion Parkway and Parkway East, just east of I-55 and north of the Madison city limits. HMA, which is building a new 67-bed Madison County Medical Center just off Nissan Parkway in Canton, is opposing St. Dominic's move.

Claude Harbarger, president of St. Dominic Hospital, said public comment can have an effect on the state's decision to grant the required CON. "We often hear from residents who say they wish St. Dominic's could be there," he said.

"We are reaching out to residents of Madison County to share our campus expansion plans and to help improve their access to medical and emergency services," he said. "We're urging people to make their voices heard and this critical need clear to the state

regulators."

Through a new Web-site, www.mystdommadison.com, citizens can sign online petitions that will be presented to state officials and request speakers to address civic groups about what the hospital can offer Madison County.

Steve Vassallo, Madison's economic development consultant, said the city is ready to launch a widespread campaign to help St. Dominic's with vocal support and signed petitions.

"This hospital is something we desperately need," he said, and not only for meeting the health care needs of the community. "You can't make a strong economic development case to a lot of companies to locate here without a hospital."

Eighty-six percent of Madison County residents leave the county every time they require hospital services, and 29 percent of those come to St. Dominic's, said Lester Diamond, vice president for operations.

"When 86 percent of your residents leave, that makes a compelling case for a hospital here," Vassallo said.

With an initial goal of 10,000 signatures, Vassallo said he expects local citizens to rally for the hospital. Banking on the same techniques that resulted in a successful

petition drive to land a Tula University branch here, said residents are always willing to support the needs of the community.

Over the next two months leading up to the Feb. 3 state hearing, the city will take the petition drives to the public in a series of community meetings and other avenues to get the word out, Vassallo said.

Woody Middleton, a resident of the Cherry Hill neighborhood, said he wants peace of mind knowing the hospital is close by and easy to reach when an emergency arises.

"I believe everybody should have access to quality health care," he said. "I can't imagine why anybody would not sign this petition. With the population of this area growing so much, it absolutely warrants the need for a hospital."

Madison County is "critically lacking" in hospital beds and is one of the underbedded counties in the state, Diamond said. Madison County has .75 beds per thousand population, compared to 2 beds per thousand in Rankin County, 1.57 beds per thousand in Desoto and 8.65 beds per thousand in Hinds.

Madison real estate broker Cherry Deddens said with huge developments in Madison County that have 800-foot lots and rooftops, the need for a close hospital is great. "Ultimately, the thing people will be behind the petitions," she said. "With the growth pattern, the need is there. We're ready for one."

PROPOSED MADISON CAMPUS

Proposed St. Dominic's Hospital, Madison Campus

- \$121 million facility
- 71 acute care beds, including 59 for medical/surgical, 6 intensive care and 6 obstetrics
- Level IV emergency
- Imaging services, laboratory, pharmacy and other outpatient services
- 350 new full-time employees, \$8 million in annual salaries/benefits

- 450 construction jobs to build facility
- Long-range plans include medical offices, fitness/wellness facility, retail and a community park on the 400-plus acre site.
- To sign the online petition or learn more about St. Dominic's plans for Madison County, visit www.mystdommadison.com