

Mercy Fort Smith adds another small hospital to system

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



BOONEVILLE — Bishop Anthony B. Taylor blessed the new Mercy Hospital Booneville Jan. 31.

“Given the opportunities you have to practice all of the corporal works of mercy in this hospital that even bears the name Mercy, you have an advantage, but because of that advantage, you will also be held to a higher standard,” he said during the ceremony.

“The Catholic health care apostolate is concerned with both body and soul,” he said. “We are not merely a ‘social service agency,’ we are a ministry of the Catholic Church. Part of your role is to bring hope to people so you should seek opportunities to share what a difference having a life-giving relationship with Jesus has made in your life, especially when faced with adversity of any sort.”

Jared Bryson, vice president of mission at Mercy Hospital Fort Smith, said, “As a Catholic health ministry our connection in service to our local diocese is one of our greatest witnesses as a ministry of the Church. With the addition of Booneville, Mercy now has a total of four critical access hospitals in the Fort Smith regional structure. Our commitment to serving the rural community of the region continues to be strengthened as well as the increased presence of the Catholic health ministry. It was great to have Bishop Taylor lead the rite of blessing connecting our local ministry with the local diocese and the larger Catholic community.”

Booneville Community Hospital became Mercy Hospital Booneville Jan. 1. Mercy has managed the 25-bed hospital since October, but the lease agreement only became official Jan. 1.

“By being part of a larger system, we will work with the local team and commit the resources and expertise necessary to expand and enhance the delivery of care to the Booneville community,” said Ryan Gehrig, Mercy Hospital Fort Smith president. “Mercy’s goal is to make

health care available close to home by bringing additional services and providers to the community.”

One advancement that Mercy will bring to Booneville is integrated electronic health records to make patient information readily available to doctors, which prevents unnecessary treatments and duplication of tests. The EHR will go live in Booneville in June.

Opened in 2008, the Booneville hospital also has a 24-hour emergency department; an array of medical imaging services, including x-ray, computerized tomography, ultrasound and bone densitometry; laboratory services and specialty clinics.

According to the Southwest Times Record in Fort Smith, the hospital has been trying to recover since 2010, with an overhaul of its seven-member board of directors and a new CEO in August 2012.

Booneville residents approved a 1 percent sales tax in 2003 to support the hospital’s operation. In 2007, the tax was amended to allocate one-fourth of its annual revenue to build a new hospital.

Previously the city leased the hospital to the nonprofit Booneville Community Hospital Trust for \$100 a month. Ownership of the hospital will revert to the city when the bonded debt is paid in 40 years.

Mercy Fort Smith also operates three critical-access hospitals in Ozark, Paris and Waldron.