

Hospital

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new hospitals and clinics. Jensen said one of the reasons for Arizona's doctor shortage is "managed care."

"This is a huge managed care state and doctors simply can't make as much money here as they can someplace else," Jensen said. "If we do have 400 doctors graduating, we will be training them for other states. The second reason is malpractice and the tort reform. The studies I've seen is that's more of a perception than a reality for states that have it and don't have it."

"In rural Arizona, even here where it's a great growth area but still considered rural, you're not going to get doctors to come out here. You're going to bring doctors out here with the technology. If we don't do that, we will have missed the boat."

For specialists, Jensen said options like a "time-share office" would be a solution. "Then a doctor doesn't have to sign a seven- or 10-year lease, you rent as you go," he said. "That will enable specialists to come down here and schedule appointments earlier. But we don't know how that would play out."

Eric Faas of C.I. Development Group in Mesa said it has a project in between Thompson and Ellsworth roads on the south side of Hunt Highway that would be tailor-made for medical professionals.

"It will provide 72,000 square feet of office condominiums," Faas said. "That's a professional place for doctors and lawyers, insurance agents, to buy office condos. Our project should be delivering product sometime in the middle of next summer. It will be one of the first professional office centers in the area."

"The residents there now desperately need these services. I think you can explain part of the exodus that you're seeing in areas like Johnson Ranch by people seeking services and not wanting to drive so far. People can only drive for so long, then they just move to where the services are. What will slow or reverse that exodus will be to provide professional services, more retail centers, more shopping options near the homes."

Beveridge recently addressed a meeting of the Pinal Partnership Health and Human Services Committee, outlining the ARHA resolutions for the 2007 fiscal year:

Florence ponders possibility of another hospital

By DANIEL DULLUM
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FLORENCE — Pinal General Hospital carried Arizona license No. 1, going back to the territorial days when it was founded in 1876. While occupying its fourth home along Adamsville Road, Pinal General was closed in the fall of 1999, when it was owned by Casa Grande Regional Medical Center.

Will Pinal General be reopened? Or will another hospital serve the immediate Florence area?

Jack Beveridge, who works for Empowerment Systems in Apache Junction, didn't have the direct answers when he visited Florence on July 11. But the president of the Arizona Rural Health Association did mention the dormant hospital in passing.

Noting that the only hospital in Pinal County is Casa Grande Regional Medical Center, Beveridge said, "You

saw what happened with the hospital here (in Florence), the people weren't using it. That's why it went away. Even at Casa Grande (Regional) Medical Center, there are people who would rather drive to Chandler.

"Some of it is a PR thing, a view of quality."

Jess Knudson, public information officer for the town of Florence, said, "The town's role of attracting a health care facility is taking a look at what we can do as a town, and also what we can do from a regional perspective in working with other agencies and organizations so we have more than one iron in the fire."

As to whether Pinal General, later known as Central Arizona Medical Center, will be revived, Knudson said, "Every company looks at things a little differently. We've had other companies come in and take a close look at that hospital. Hopefully, the health care provider and the owner will reach

an agreement, but it looks like it might be a possibility."

One company that isn't looking at the old site is Banner Health, based in Phoenix, according to spokesman Craig Jensen.

"It's an older facility, and for us to get it up to today's standards would just cost way too much money," Jensen, system director for new site development of Banner Health, said. "We've actually bought an 80-acre campus at Gantzel Road at Combs Road southeast of Queen Creek near Hunt Highway (to be called Banner Ironwood). That's going to be a hospital (in early 2008) when the population is big enough.

"Gantzel Road is eventually going to be a six-lane road that will connect to Hunt Highway. We view Florence as a secondary market, and something will have to happen for Florence and Coolidge."

Banner Health would look at the

possibility of clinics, or having doctors and services up and running.

"Most won't be Banner employees, but we work with providers of those services to get them placed out into the community," Jensen said. "That's because we know the community needs them to serve the medical needs, and those people will generate business for a hospital sooner or later. It's an investment that we make.

"We're a not-for-profit, but it's a business. We can't build a hospital until we have enough population to justify putting it up. That's why we want to get out here and get some services going, so we're in the marketplace providing those services that the community desperately needs now. Then, when the population grows enough, we'll build a hospital."

Of course, doctors and medical staff will be needed to staff these

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