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Florence News

New hospital in the works near Anthem

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Pulte Homes officials confirmed that Gilbert Hospital is buying land at the northern edge of Anthem at Merrill Ranch for a future hospital.

Gilbert Hospital CEO David Wanger said Friday the new Florence hospital will continue Gilbert Hospital's tradition of a robust, fast emergency room. It will also have 20 inpatient beds and the full complement of diagnostic services - "what should be standard in a typical small community hospital."

If the facility experiences few snags in the approval process en route to groundbreaking, it could be ready for business in the fall of 2009, Wanger said.

Last week, Florence was surprised by news that Gilbert-based Urgent Care Express is planning an urgent care center near the intersection of Arizona highways 79 and 287.

Meanwhile, new owners continue to work toward the long-awaited reopening of the local hospital on Adamsville Road late this year.

All this, in a town that couldn't keep one of its few doctors offices in business last summer?

Can the community support all this medical care?

"We truly believe that is something the people who purchase land look at and make assessments," Pulte spokesperson Jacque Petroulakis said. "If two health care providers are looking at two sites, they're aware of it and believe the greater region can support them."

The town of Florence, also, expressed few worries about saturating the market. Jess Knudson, assistant to the town manager, commented that "residents will benefit" from all this interest in serving Florence.

"We're excited to see both (hospital) projects come along," Knudson said. "We'll do what we can to facilitate a relationship between the two entities."

But an official with Initiatives Healthcare Inc., which owns the Adamsville Road campus, was skeptical of the newcomers last week.

"Bottom line, the banks aren't going to do it until you can justify doing it," Gary Faulkner noted. He said the Adamsville Road hospital remains on track for a November opening with 25 inpatient beds; 60 long-term-care beds; all imaging services; three surgical suites; dialysis; an active kitchen and laundry, and "everything you'd expect in a working hospital."

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Wanger, Gilbert Hospital's CEO, said he wasn't worried about the Adamsville Road hospital opening first. "If there's another hospital coming in, God bless 'em. The people that benefit are the community of Florence."

He noted other hospitals followed his in Gilbert, but "we don't look at anybody in Gilbert as competition or anyone in Phoenix as competition. Arizona is severely medically-underserved."

Another local facility presents "an opportunity to collaborate, strategically partner, as we do in Gilbert," Wanger said. "In this country, any time there's more than one of anything, the general public benefits."

Wanger said he was pleased to hear Florence will have an urgent care center. "We work great with urgent cares."

Gilbert Hospital was that town's first hospital when it opened two years and two months ago. It is now about to start construction on a new four-story tower of patient beds, Wanger said.

He said when Gilbert Hospital first opened, the average wait in an emergency room in Maricopa County was 8.2 hours. Gilbert's pledge is "door to a doc in 31 minutes." When the wait is longer, the patient receives a letter of apology from the hospital's top officials, "but that doesn't happen very often."

Land in escrow

Gilbert Hospital has 10 to 11 acres in escrow near Hunt Highway and Franklin Road, where Anthem has a billboard, according to Brandon Jones, Pulte's director of general operations. The hospital will also have the opportunity to buy more land as the medical campus expands, Jones said.

Knudson, with the town of Florence, said the land is presently zoned "R-1" Residential for single-family homes. He said Gilbert Hospital is expected to seek commercial zoning, first before the Florence Planning & Zoning Commission in April or May, then before the Town Council in June.

Jones said Gilbert Hospital approached Pulte - "we weren't out soliciting, so to speak." Pulte actually spoke to a couple of different medical providers, but Gilbert Hospital was the only one to make a formal offer.

Wanger said the new Florence hospital will have ties to the Gilbert facility, but will be separately-owned and separately-run. It will be owned by its investors.

Gilbert Hospital has 26 investors, representing 43 shares, Wanger said. The new Florence hospital could possibly have 65 or 66 shares, he said. He said they can begin in Florence bigger than they did in Gilbert, "because we learned a few things on the way."

He said Gilbert Hospital also looked at the former Central Arizona Medical Center on Adamsville Road, and decided to pass. "In its time it was a showpiece, but medicine has changed." That facility has been closed since 1999.

Announcement - Florence Hospital at Anthem

Pulte Homes officially announced the hospital with a news release this week:

"Gilbert Hospital has announced plans to open a state-of-the-art hospital facility



in Florence.

"The healthcare group is in escrow with Pulte Homes to purchase 10 acres on the southwest corner of Franklin Road and Hunt Highway. The transaction represents the first phase of a planned 40-acre medical complex.

" 'We are very excited to provide a full service, general acute care hospital to the greater Florence community,' said David Wanger, CEO of Gilbert Hospital, adding that the group hopes to call the facility Florence Hospital at Anthem. 'Gilbert Hospital would not be what it is today without the hard work, dedication and loyalty of our physicians, nurses, associates, volunteers and our entire staff who have given themselves so significantly to help make it a successful member of the community. We look forward to the same wonderful association in the Florence community.'

"Gilbert Hospital opened in February, 2006 as the first general acute care hospital in the Town of Gilbert. The hospital is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The facility saw and treated more than 51,000 patients in 2007 in its emergency department making it one of the busiest emergency departments in the Valley.

"Wanger said the Florence Hospital is expected to open with a 50,000-square-foot, two-story structure that houses approximately 20 inpatient beds, 20 Emergency Department rooms, two operating rooms, full diagnostic capabilities to include MRI, CT Scan, Digital X-ray, Nuclear Medicine, Ultrasound, Full Service Laboratory and Blood Bank.

"Wanger said plans for the Florence Hospital also include:

- o Full Service Pharmacy;
- o Two Medical Office buildings (40,000 square feet adjacent to hospital);
- o Medical Physician specialties to start at Florence Hospital are expected to be Internal Medicine/Hospital services, Emergency, Cardiology, General Surgery, Gastroenterology, Urology, Orthopedic Surgery, Podiatry;
- o Strategic partnerships for provision of ground ambulance as well as air ambulance (helicopter service);
- o Florence hospital expected to have approximately 350 employees after the first year.

"Brad Schoenberg, vice president of operations for Pulte Homes, said that several hospital providers expressed interest in the property, adjacent to Anthem at Merrill Ranch, however Gilbert Hospital was the first to make a formal offer to purchase the land.

" 'Gilbert Hospital is a leader in the delivery of health care for the Southeast Valley and we are very excited that they have chosen Florence to expand their services,' Schoenberg, said. 'The growth in Florence and surrounding communities is tremendous, and with this growth comes the need for many services including hospitals,' Schoenberg said.

About Gilbert Hospital

"Gilbert Hospital is licensed as a full-service, acute care general hospital. The hospital is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Although offering a complete array of traditional hospital services, Gilbert Hospital is pioneering in its focus on emergency medicine and the rapid, accurate and compassionate care the entire Gilbert Hospital staff provides.

"Gilbert Hospital is the only hospital in the Valley that guarantees "Door to Doc in 31 Minutes" and it runs more than 9,000 lab procedures each month in its state-of-the-art laboratory. The hospital staffs for "peak volume" 100 percent of the time thereby anticipating increased patient flow and maintaining our short ER wait time promise. A 108 bed Inpatient expansion is set to break ground in early 2008. For more information: www.gilberter.com

About Anthem at Merrill Ranch:

"Anthem at Merrill Ranch by Del Webb is a 3,200-acre master planned community planned for 9,100 homes in two neighborhoods: an all-ages Pulte neighborhoods and a Sun City neighborhood for active adults. With a vibrant resort-style feel to the community and incredible amenities including a huge community park with sports fields, catch-and-release fishing, a Big Splash water park and two beautiful community centers for all ages and active adults.

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