

HDH unveils new emergency care and ICU facility

By Neena Hanchett

A ribbon cutting last Friday and a Community Day open house last Saturday heralded the opening of the new Wetzel Family Emergency Department, which is in its final permitting stages, and the Patricia and Raymond Chambers Intensive Care Unit at Healdsburg District Hospital which opened on Monday, Feb. 4. The hospital serves the communities of Cloverdale, Geyserville, Healdsburg and Windsor.

Ten years ago, Healdsburg Hospital, known then as Healdsburg General Hospital, was going to be closed down by its owner Hospital Corporation of America. A group of physicians headed by Dr. Daniel Rose and with two million dollars raised by the Healdsburg Hospital Foundation took over the reins keeping the doors to the small community hospital open.

After struggling to make ends meet, a North Sonoma County Hospital District was formed to take over the ownership and operation of the hospital using monies from a parcel tax assessment passed by two thirds of the voters in 2001.

Another parcel tax increase in April, 2004 was approved by the

voters in the district raising the parcel tax to \$150 a year. The additional funds were needed to keep the doors open due to increased health care costs, lower than expected reimbursements for Medicare and Medicaid patients and the bankruptcy of Health Plan of the

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HEALDSBURG District Hospital CEO Evan Rayner at the dedication of the new Emergency Department and the newly opened ICU. Rayner is standing beside SID, a medical robot which is used for remote patient diagnosis controlled by a specialist off-site, using Internet technology.

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Redwoods which was the insurer for about 50 percent of the hospital's patients, according to comments made in April, 2004 by the Measure G campaign manager, Bill Wood.

With the broad based support of the community, a \$14.5 million capital campaign undertaken in 2007 by the hospital's fund-raising arm, the Healthcare Foundation Northern Sonoma County, and with major funding from a number of well known local families, Healdsburg District Hospital will open its new state-of-the-art emergency facility, doubling the facility's capacity. A two million dollar gift by Maggie and Harry Wetzel, owners of Alexander Valley Vineyards made the expansion possible.

The new department includes eight examination and treatment rooms, medical equipment, centralized nurses station and a reception area. Dr. Jonathan Kreger, a Cloverdale physician, commented, "the new 4500 sq. ft. emergency department allows for patient privacy, virtually unheard of in other hospitals. The patient entrance is separate from ambulance entrance, making triage more efficient.

A one million dollar gift from Patricia and Raymond Chambers will enable the district to re-open the hospital's Intensive Care Unit later this month after being closed for seven years. The ICU has room for four patients and has significantly upgraded its monitoring equipment.

All of the hospital's departments now have the use of a \$180,000 medical robot named SID, according to Dr. Kreger. "The medical robot can assist in examining patients in the Emergency Department or any part of the hospital including the operating room. Via live webcasts diagnostic information can be shared real time with any medical specialist with access to the Internet, anywhere in the world."

Another large gift, \$1 million, given by Betty and Edward Kozel, Sr. is being used to fund a new Stroke Institute which will open later this year.

The hospital has specified additional initiatives targeted at attracting new physicians and other key medical personnel, upgrading computer systems and infrastructure as well as continuing to expand the services that it can offer to patients.