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Medford, Ore., Hospital Has Towering Future Ahead

by Bill Kettler

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You can tell where Rogue Valley Medical Center's new "bed tower" will stand by sighting in on the big yellow crane that popped up on the RVMC campus over the weekend.

The crane stands on the east side of the six-level building that will be the most visible element of the hospital's three-year expansion and remodeling project. Over the next eight months the crane will move the materials for the striking elliptical structure, which RVMC staffers have nicknamed "the football."

"We're going to build the building up around it," said Bill Maibusch, construction supervisor for DPR Construction, RVMC's primary contractor for the \$76 million project. "Then we'll get another crane to disassemble it."

Along with the bed tower, the project includes new surgery suites, an expanded emergency department and a four-story parking garage, which opened in November.

The "tower" crane has 161 feet of clearance below its lift hook, Maibusch said, and includes a 246-foot horizontal "jib" that can lift as much as 7,000 pounds at the far end of its reach and 35,000 pounds near the vertical tower.

"It's one of the biggest cranes around," he said.

Sitting the crane takes careful consideration, he said. The jib needs to reach the farthest extremities of the building without exceeding its lift capacity.

Workers spent Saturday and Sunday using another crane to erect the tower crane, which was leased from Morrow Equipment Co. of Salem. It stands on a slab of concrete 19 feet square and 6 feet thick, which consumed about 90 cubic yards of concrete -- nearly 10 truckloads.

Maibusch said the crane will begin lifting the structural steel into place for the bed tower in March, then place the prefabricated wall panels. By August, if all goes according to plan, it will come down. Finish work on the building will continue into 2005, said Andrea Jablonski, marketing director for Asante Health System, RVMC's parent company.

Jablonski said the finished bed tower will give RVMC 299 patient beds, of which 94 percent will be single occupancy. The new emergency department will have capacity to handle 48,000 patient visits a year, and be built with enough space to be expanded to handle 60,000 annual visits.

Jablonski noted that emergency department use has grown at the rate of 8 percent per year for the past three years at RVMC.

Other Jackson County hospitals have seen similar growth as people who have no health insurance or can't get in to see a doctor turn increasingly to hospital emergency rooms for health care. Hospitals are required by law to treat anyone who comes to an emergency room.

"We're projecting that we'll reach 40,000 (emergency) visits by 2005," Jablonski said.