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Hoopeston hospital braces for severe Medicaid payment cuts

Planned cuts in Medicaid reimbursement could have a very unhealthy effect on the local hospital.

Cuts will come on two fronts, said Frank Caruso, CEO of Hoopeston Community Memorial Hospital. First, Gov. George Ryan has indicated he will cut Medicaid reimbursement for outpatient hospital services, which could cost the hospital up to \$100,000 annually.

Second, the Illinois Department of Public Health is, after approximately eight years, reinstating nursing home Medicaid reimbursement that is based on annual inspections of care. Using 10 percent as a funding cut guideline, the change would cost the nursing home about \$200,000 because approximately 60 percent of the nursing home's 75 patients are on Public Aid, Caruso said.

Under the inspection plan, nursing homes are reimbursed by how well they do on state inspections. "It's a pretty subjective measure for setting rates," Caruso said.

On the hospital side, Ryan's action will undo what has been standard reimbursement policy for two years, namely a higher rate for outpatient care. "Most of our

Public Aid business is in the emergency room or outpatient," Caruso said.

The potential loss of \$300,000 is "a challenge that is formidable," Caruso said. "For a Provena or a Carle, that's small potatoes but for us, it's huge."

Although figures for the hospital and nursing home were not immediately available, the budget for Hoopeston Regional Health Care, which also includes the Charlotte Ann Russell Medical Center and Country Terrace Apartments, is approximately \$9 million. Of that, Medicaid contributes about \$3.5 million.

Although the hospital measure has not been signed, Caruso said Ryan has indicated he will sign the legislation. Caruso expects the change to affect the hospital in a month or two.

The facilities are taking steps to cut costs. For example, malpractice insurance rates have risen dramatically but hospital officials convinced the insurance carrier that the rural hospital should not be lumped in with bigger facilities that have a higher risk of malpractice, thereby

See HOSPITAL on other side

Rossville-Alvin board to meet on teachers' intent to strike

ROSSVILLE—The Rossville-Alvin School Board will hold a special meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday to discuss an intent-to strike approved by the teachers' bargaining unit.

The Rossville-Alvin Education Association approved the intent-to-strike after a meeting last Wednesday failed to produce a tentative agreement.

Teachers have worked without a contract since Aug. 19.

By law, teachers must wait 10 days from the vote before they go on strike.

Issues between the school board and teachers include

salary and insurance. According to reports, the union wants a 2.5 percent pay increase for a one-year contract, some health insurance increases and some district-paid retirement for non-certified staff. Meanwhile, the board has offered increases of between four and six percent of individual salaries last year.

The board will go into closed session to discuss the teachers' intent to strike and will return to open session to take any action resulting from the executive session.

Neither Superintendent Phil Smith nor Debbie Wilson, association president, could be reached for comment at press time.

Treat them or yourself to a beautiful lit wreath!
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Hoopeston VFW
Fourth Ave. & West Orange

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Hospital continued from other side

getting a lower rate. However, he said, there are few other cuts that can be made. “Costwise, there is no fat in here to cut,” he said.

To offset the potential losses, Caruso is asking the community to pull together as it did when Hoopeston was a finalist for a state prison, by lobbying state officials about the importance of the facilities to the community. State Rep. Bill Black and state Sen. Judy Myers are “fighting tooth and nail for us” but others are not so helpful. “There is no reality check there for legislators,” Caruso said.

Thank You, Hoopeston

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**And on the Internet at
www.justthefacts.fm**

Residents may contact legislators at:

Gov. George Ryan, 207 Statehouse, Springfield, IL 62706; email governor@state.il.us.

State Sen. Judy Myers, M106 Capitol Building, Springfield, IL 62706.

State Rep. Bill Black, 634 Statehouse, Springfield, IL 62706; email wblack@soltec.net.

There is one other way residents can help the hospital

Police News



Christopher L. Cox, 35, of 844 E. Washington, was arrested at 6:25 p.m. Tuesday in the 800 block of East Washington. He was charged with battery on a complaint from an 18-year-old woman after an altercation.

Cox was released on a notice to appear.

Daniel J. Crowley, 22, of 715 E. Thompson, was arrested at 11:26 p.m. Tuesday at 1030 W. Chestnut, Hoopeston. He was charged with possession of a controlled substance, possession of cannabis under 2.5 grams, disorderly conduct and criminal trespass.

Police said employees of Jerry’s IGA asked that Crowley be removed from the premises. The cannabis and controlled substance were found after he was taken into custody.

Crowley was taken to the Public Safety Building in Danville.

A girl’s pink and purple Magna bicycle was found Wednesday in the 100 block of East Main. The owner may identify and claim it at the police station.

Briefly

Caroling for Construction

Members of Beta Sigma Phi Sorority will Carol For Construction this holiday season. For a \$10 donation to Playground Project 2002, residents may have carolers sing at the homes of friends or loved ones. For more information, call Kathy Watson at 283-6961 or Suzi Root at 283-7754.

Voices needed

Singers are needed for the Community Christmas Cantata. Practices are 8 p.m. Wednesdays and 4 p.m. Sundays. For information, call 283-9771 or Betty at 283-5544.

and that is by using its services, Caruso said. “The community needs to decide it wants the hospital, nursing home and physicians’ clinic here and use them,” he said. “If they don’t use us, we won’t be here.”

It would not take many patients to offset the loss. Just two in-patients per day for the rest of the year would make up the difference, as would residents using local services, such as physical therapy, rather than going outside the community.

Recalling how the community pulled together for the prison, Caruso said the same thing needs to happen again. “We need help,” he said. “We need support. We need that passion that everyone has to turn into commitment.”

Caruso said he is aware of some residents’ complaints about the hospital, but said many of those complaints are from years past. “We’re not the same place we were eight years ago,” he said. “We’re not the same place we were four years ago. We’re not perfect. I know it and I’m constantly reminded of it. But we’re striving to be perfect.”

The hospital and other health services try to be good

Obituaries

EADS—Velber Marshall Eads, 70, of Hoopeston, died at 4 p.m. Monday, Dec. 3, 2001 at Ford County Nursing Home, Paxton. There will be no services. Memorials are suggested to Ford County Nursing Home, 1240 N. Market ST., Paxton, IL 60957.

ISENHOWER—Dorothy A. Isenhower, 89, of Paxton, formerly of East Lynn, died at 10:23 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 2, 2001 at Gibson Area Hospital, Gibson City. Funeral services will be at 1:30 p.m. Thursday at Ford-Baier Funeral Home, Paxton. Burial will be in Oakwood Cemetery. Visitation was 3-7 p.m. Wednesday at the funeral home. Memorials are suggested to her family.

Weather



Mostly sunny today. High 50. Tonight, partly cloudy. Low 33. Tomorrow, partly cloudy. High 47, low 25.

For current weather conditions, call the **Hoopeston Weather Line** at (217) 283-6221.

neighbors to the community, he said. More than 220 people work in local healthcare. The physicians clinic and Country Terrace pay about \$40,000 in property taxes that benefit the community and the hospital and other services spend about \$500,000 annually with local vendors, Caruso said.

“Everybody out here cares so much for this community and we’re just asking for a reciprocal emotion,” he said.

Classifieds

ADULT CARE

Will do private care for elderly. References available. Call (217) 283-5399.

APARTMENTS FOR RENT

1 bedroom apartment. Close to downtown. Washer/dryer hookup, stove, refrigerator furnished. \$300/mo. plus deposit. Call Doug, (217) 283-6865.

CHILD CARE

Country mom will care for your children in my home. Available 6 a.m.-5 p.m. Mon.-Fri. (217) 283-5442.

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Rossville: 2 b/r, 2 bath, 2 car detached garage. No smoking & no pets. \$450/mo., \$450 security deposit. Month to month. May also be purchased on contract. Illiana Real Estate, (217) 283-4644.

Hoopeston: 3 bedroom, 1.5 baths, 1 car detached garage. \$375/mo., \$375 security deposit. Month to month. Illiana Real Estate, (217) 283-4644.

LOST & FOUND

Black and gray tiger kitten - probably about 6 months old - at the high school. If it belongs to anyone please call 283-5993.

MISCELLANEOUS FOR SALE

3 lots in 500 block of West Chestnut. (217) 283-5016, 283-7116, (217) 497-9662.

VEHICLES FOR SALE

1979 Chevy 4X4. New motor, new parts. \$2,800. (217) 283-9537.

Red 1956 Ford truck, 350 engine. \$3,200. (217) 283-7167.

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