

The Haverhill Gazette Weekly Editorial...

Hospital Alive and Kicking After One Year

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Some of the best news in our community is that Merrimack Valley Hospital is alive and kicking, like a newborn baby.

The formerly municipal facility, now privately owned and managed, has rounded the Year 1 mark. No one is saying how much it is returning in profit to Essent Healthcare, but CEO Lester P. Schindel is bullish in both word and deed. His company is investing in new equipment and the redesign of the hospital, searching out market niches and planning for the future - which he says is people of baby boomer age and older in Greater Haverhill.

That makes sense, since nobody gets hospitalized any more if the managed care industry can help it.

Still, Schindel sees the future in outpatient diagnosis and treatment, inpatient care of an increasingly aged population, plus people undergoing specific procedures like knee replacements.

Essent wants to get its hands on the city's former municipal nursing home, which sits empty just across the street from the hospital itself. Its bids for the Glynn have been shot down twice now, which is kind of a shame, because that building belongs in Essent's hands.

The company is showing itself attuned to Haverhill's health care needs. All the city gets from going through yet another bidding process is a little bit more money. But we suspect it will work out satisfactorily.

What we really like about Merrimack Valley Hospital are two things. First, staff morale appears high, as evidenced by the activities like the recent 9-11 tree-planting that come up from employees, not management.

The hospital this month is launching a continuing education program, with lectures for the public and for health care professionals. Support groups are starting up again, making the hospital a hub.

Second, Schindel & Co. are really alert. The old Hale, for all of its virtues, did little to build public trust or plead its case. You will see no such lackadaisical behavior at Merrimack Valley Hospital. It will not be seen as a backwater of health care, but as the best community hospital it possibly can be and the hub of medical services in Haverhill.

Little more than a year ago we feared we might lose our hospital. Now, under new management, its future looks bright.

**This article is re-published on the Essent website with permission from Eagle Tribune Publishing.*