

Signature execs visit RMC staff

CEO: Jobs safe for now

**By Jay Jones
Staff Reporter
jay.jones@rockdalecitizen.com**

CONYERS — Executives with Signature Hospital Corporation met with staff and physicians at Rockdale Medical Center on Wednesday. The meetings were a chance for the employees to meet the new bosses and to discuss the hospital's future following a decision Tuesday by RMC officials to sell the facility to the private firm.

For many, the future looks bright. The hospital will shed itself of \$87 million in debt after Houston-based Signature agreed to purchase the 138-bed facility for \$90 million.

Signature executives also agreed to be contractually bound in the proposed sale to spend at least \$32 million in capital improvements on the hospital over the next five years.

Ethel Boyle, chairwoman of the RMC Board of Directors, said her biggest concern during negotiations was protection of jobs at the hospital. Boyle said she was happy that Signature agreed to offer jobs to all current employees when the hospital's sale is complete and keep full credit of years of service and rates of pay.

“Protect the staff and employees — that was very important,” she said. “I have to say that was my No. 1 priority. My livelihood does not depend on this hospital, but if I did something to affect someone's livelihood, it would really bother for a long time — even if it was just one person.”

Signature President and CEO Charles Miller said all RMC employees will keep their jobs going forward after the sale; however, they will be evaluated on performance and productivity. He assured everyone Wednesday that there are no immediate plans to eliminate positions at the hospital.

“Our commitment is that everybody who is here today will continue with their job in their present position,” he said. “But just because you are here today doesn't mean you may not be here tomorrow if you are not doing your job. An important consideration in going forward is to make sure people are doing their job and being productive.”

In the purchase agreement, the company agreed to allow the Rockdale County

Hospital Authority to name a person to Signature’s corporate board of directors, making the local hospital authority the only one of the Signature hospitals with a member on the national board.

In addition, a local, in-house hospital board of directors will be named to replace the current board following the completion of the sale. Miller described the new board of directors as “the eyes and ears of the community” for the company.

The board will be made up of three physicians, including the hospital’s chief of staff, and five local residents. Of those five board seats, the hospital authority will be able to name three, Rockdale Hospital Authority member Ric Simons said.

“I don’t think you can get much more committed to the community than that, and that, to me, was one of the things that was part of our criteria that you would reinvest back into the community — not only monetarily but also in community involvement,” he said.

The announcement of the sale begins a public process governed by state law. Within two weeks Signature will submit a filing with the state Attorney General’s office. A public hearing is then required 60 days after the filing to allow for full disclosure of the terms of the proposed sale and to allow for public input, said Jay Hoffman, Signature vice president and chief development officer.

Pending any complications during the filing period, the sale of RMC could be completed by the end of year, Hoffman said.

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