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Gulf Coast plans \$21.6 mill. renovation

Gulf Coast Medical Center has announced that a \$21.6 million building and redesign project will begin this fall.

"I am excited to begin work on much needed improvements that will modernize the hospital and allow our staff to provide more efficient services in an attractive setting," said Donnie Frederic, chief executive officer of Gulf Coast Medical Center.

"Our plans represent a significant step forward, and when work is completed we will have a hospital capable of meeting the needs of our communities for years to come."

The capital improvement project includes renovation and expansion of the Emergency Department, the Ambulatory Surgery Unit, the Endoscopy Suites, and the Women's Services Department.

The hospital was built in 1986.

The Medical-Surgical Unit's patient and visitor areas will be renovated, including the replacement of patient beds and room furniture. Additionally, the hospital's exterior will receive a complete face lift that will give it a contemporary appeal, hospital officials said.

"This is the largest capital project approved by the company to date for any of its hospitals," said Charles Miller, chief executive officer of Signature Hospital Corp., which owns Gulf Coast.

"This decision simply validates the faith we have had in Wharton's future since we acquired the hospital last year. It is also a reflection of our enthusiasm and desire for a long-term commitment in this

dynamic community."

Frederic said the improvements will be implemented over 24 months to minimize disruption to existing hospital services. The initial six months will be designed for planning, followed by 18 months of actual construction.

In December 2006, Gulf Coast held a series of focus groups to obtain feedback from area residents about the hospital and potential health-care needs in the region.

"We are taking the community's input to heart and have already acted on several issues discussed in the recent focus groups," said Frederic.

"These improvements will bring our hospital up to date and provide a better experience for the patients, while at the same time ensuring our medical staff has access to

state-of-the-art technology."

Hospital leaders say they also plan to continue the recruitment of additional medical staff. Gulf Coast Medical Center has recently recruited three family practice physicians, two internists and a general surgeon to its ranks.

"Wharton and the surrounding communities are growing rapidly, and people have a choice of where they can go for their medical care," said Frederic. "We want Gulf Coast Medical Center to be their first choice."

Signature also owns the 115-bed Pampa Medical Center in Pampa, and the 79-bed Medical Park Hospital in Hope, Arkansas. The company has reached agreement to acquire the 325-bed St. Joseph's Hospital in Parkersburg, West Virginia.

agement coordinator.
"That's what we think will be coming through on Tuesday and Wednesday (today). We still need to keep an eye out."

Wharton resident Bill Kost is hoping his luck is better today than it was earlier in the week. Around 4:20 a.m. Monday, two barns behind his Bay City Highway residence were demolished by intense winds.

Debris was scattered over 100 yards, with tin paneling twisted around tree limbs 15 feet in the air and boards driven into mud-soil over a foot deep. Yet, just a few yards away, Kostka's home remained unscathed.

Kostka was at the donut shop when it hit. He knew the storm was fierce as he maneuvered his pickup through the fast falling rain. About 1.58 inches of rain were recorded.

"It was raining so hard you couldn't see nothing," he said. Kirkland said Tuesday that

Church fires ruled accidental

By BENJAMIN C. SHARP
Journal-Spectator Staff Writer

Final reports from state arson investigators confirm that a pair of church fires in Wharton County were accidental.

Fires at Mt. Vernon Missionary Baptist Church in Glen Flora and Zion/Rising Star Baptist Church in Spanish Camp were both investigated as possible arson. Both

said Lt. Daniel Marek of the Wharton County Sheriff's Department.

"That's what we kind of thought from the beginning," Marek said of the ruling.

The Glen Flora fire was not quite as clear cut. Much of the church was gutted by flames that tore a hole through the west side of the wood-frame structure.

Off the Map

Some residents don't want their roads listed

By BENJAMIN C. SHARP
Journal-Spectator Staff Writer

County commissioners hope a new map will clear up whether area roads are privately or publicly owned. But a specially-appointed panel of residents may have the final say.

County attorney Trev Maffett

personal interest in the issue, will be appointed to the panel.

County commissioners will ultimately oversee the appointments. But Maffett said protesters will also be allowed to submit names for consideration.

These must be "disinterested folks they also feel will be fair."

be satisfied."

"I think that there will be some that won't be, he said on Tuesday. Several of the protesters addressed the court during a public hearing on Monday. Maffett said notices were mailed to residents informing them of the proposed map and the hearing.