Meeting Notes – Jun. 21, 2020 –

The LaFayette Rotary Club met on Tuesday, June 21. Rotarian Sheriff Sid Lockhart was responsible for the program and had arranged for Greg Nichols, administrator of Lanier East Alabama Medical Center (EAMC) in Valley, to be our speaker. Mr. Nichols, pictured on the left, was introduced by Rotarian Chris Busby.

Mr. Nichols spoke on EAMC's facility master plan, especially for the main Opelika campus. Two of the plan's primary objectives are to maximize the use of existing buildings and to develop a vision for the construction of additional buildings. EAMC currently serves seven counties. Four of these counties have seen exceptional growth over the past 10 years based on recent census data and the same areas are projected to have 18-20% growth over the next 20 years. A master plan is essential for EAMC to keep up with the growing medical needs in these communities.

In order to expand, EAMC must have land. EAMC currently has 50-60 acres in Opelika on which they can expand. There is room for expansion near the Cancer Center, and also behind the Checker's restaurant across from the hospital in Opelika. EAMC is also interested in the Army Reserve Center, across the street from the hospital. The Army Reserve Center cannot be sold. EAMC must enter into a Real Property Exchange, in which they must find 20 acres of land and build a new facility for the Army Reserve. Once that is complete, the Army Reserve will exchange their existing building for that new facility. This process has already begun and EAMC hopes to have a building on the site of the current Army Reserve Center in about 10 years.

In addition to long-range planning, EAMC has several short-term projects. They will build two additional floors on top of the current ICU. This will allow for 40 additional ICU beds--20 traditional and 20 step-down beds. The step-down beds can be easily converted back to traditional ICU beds if the need arises. Plans for this project started in October of 2021. The projected cost is $18 million and EAMC hopes to start actually building in a year.

Another short-term project is a free-standing psychiatric hospital. It will be constructed on land near the Cancer Center. It is planned to be a 45,000 square foot facility with a residential feel, but heightened security. This will allow for expansion from the current 28 beds to 40 beds, each in a private room. Currently the rooms are all semi-private. EAMC also plans on offering a medical psychiatric residency program once the facility is complete. Both in-patient and out-patient services will be housed in the one location. Last year EAMC turned down 1,000 psychiatric patients due to lack of space. EAMC is starting the need application process now. The project is projected to be a four-year process.

Mr. Nichols also mentioned another long-term project at the Auburn Research and Technology Park. They are wanting to expand the free-standing emergency department and enter into a partnership with Auburn University for more medical research.

Diane Sherriff