Two thousand twelve marks 60th anniversary of Lisbon Hospital
By Janet Hansen

Lisbon’s hospital, now known as Lisbon Area Health Services, but originally named Community Memorial Hospital, has been in existence for 60 years. The hospital staff and administration are planning a series of events throughout the year in celebration of the facility’s 60th anniversary. The first will be an ecumenical prayer service for prior and current employees which will take place in the dining room of the hospital’s swing bed unit at 10 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 3. Members of the Lisbon Ministerium will take part in the service.

(Editor’s Note: The anniversary provides an appropriate time to review the history of the LAHS facility. The following is the first in a series of articles which will be rerun from a hospital history published in the Gazette ten years ago, beginning with the Feb. 18, 2002 issue, in honor of the facility’s 50th anniversary. Information for the original article was gleaned from articles in the Gazette’s archives.)

The hospital first opened its doors on Feb. 1, 1952 following a 10-year struggle and a lot of work on the part of community leaders. According to early accounts, the idea of building a community hospital first came up during a Kiwanis meeting in 1942. The idea, attributed to Kiwanis member Dr. R.K. Dodd, was followed by some informal discussion which eventually led to the circulation of a petition to determine the amount of community interest in such a project.

The 56 businessmen and farmers who signed the petition were invited to an organizational meeting at the Lisbon Armory, where a Lisbon Hospital Corporation was formed. Officers were elected as follows: M.O. Satre, President; C.S. Ego, Vice President; C. G. Mead, Secretary and W. R. Sandager, Treasurer. The following were named to the board of directors: O.S. Trom, P.A. Ranes, Ed Hinchberger, Dr. R.J. Dodd, William Heaton, Martin Lund and G.W. Hanna. All the officers and directors were from Lisbon except Lund, who was from Fort Ransom.

The first order of business for the newly formed board was to find a sponsoring organization. The Catholic Diocese of Fargo agreed to help if the community could come up with a starting amount of $25,000. So a fund drive was started. A total of $15,000 toward the project was collected in 1942, but then World War II put a damper on the project and it was put on hold.

Following the war in 1946, another public meeting was held in an attempt to revive the dream. Dr. H. J. Halbeisen spoke on the need for a local hospital. Dr. Steven C. Bachelor of Enderlin offered that community’s support. The hospital board was reorganized with Ordner Trom as president. Ranes replaced Sandager as treasurer, while Sandager stayed on as a director. S.D. Adams and A.Thomte replaced Dodd and Heaton on the board. A new fund drive netted an additional $10,000, bringing the hospital building fund up to the requested $25,000. However, plans hit another snag when the Catholic Diocese informed the board that they were no longer interested in taking on the Lisbon project.

In March of 1947 a meeting of area residents who had donated to the hospital fund was called. A decision was made to go ahead with fundraising efforts, but to expand the solicitation area. A
new organization, calling itself the Community Memorial Hospital Association, was then formed. The new group was headed by Trom, with Ego and Ranes staying on as vice-president and treasurer. J. W. Purdon became secretary. Directors included: Joe Sander, Milnor; William Huether, Elliott; William Dick, Englevale; John Muilenburg, Enderlin and C. G. Mead, Lisbon.

The board set $100,000 as its goal. A survey was done and preliminary plans laid for the project by architect U.L. Freed, Aberdeen. Plans were to build the hospital along Main Street, in the area where the Boy Scout hut stood at that time. A public meeting was held in August of 1947 to get the fund-raising underway. The board explained to those assembled that a federal grant was available if the community could come up with enough funding to meet its qualifications.

The Kiwanis kicked off the new fund drive with a variety show featuring local talent. Lisbon Civic and Commerce added enough to the proceeds from that event to hire Freed Architects to draw up blue prints for a hospital building.

A community auction sale, complete with lunch, was the next fundraiser. Businesses donated items including cars, a pickup, a tractor, furniture, appliances, savings bonds, seed grain, a cream separator, chickens, a radio/phonograph and other items.

In September a county-wide fund drive was organized, which netted additional items for the community auction. The auction, which was held on Oct. 15, featured entertainment, a free noon lunch, an afternoon band concert, free coffee, cookies and ice cream served by the Lisbon Mothers Club and culminated with a dance at the Lisbon Armory in the evening. The auctioneer was Al C. Fahlsing and the clerk was L.E. Lilyquist of the Farmers State Bank. There were around 2,000 people in attendance. Despite some rain showers throughout the day, attendance was good and the auction netted around $50,000, including cash donations. That brought the fund total to within $25,000 of the community’s $100,000 goal.

The board decided enough money had been collected to start pursuing a sponsoring organization once again. Eight organizations were contacted. The only one which showed an interest was Lutheran Hospital and Homes Society of Fargo. The Society offered to take over the project by overseeing the building, installing the equipment, staffing the facility, and maintaining it once it was opened. It also agreed to take over the negotiations for federal funding for the project. The community, as their part of the agreement, would furnish a minimum of $100,000 toward the project.

A survey indicated that a 20-bed facility was sufficient at that time. It was designed so that two floors could be added later, if needed.

In the spring of 1948 a final drive, headed by George Gilbert and J.N. Johnson brought the total local funds raised to $104,000.

Ground breaking was set for Golden Rule Day, July 6, 1949. The ceremony took place on the corner of Ninth Avenue and Main Street, on a lot donated for the hospital by the City of Lisbon. The groundbreaking ceremony included a review of the history of the project by Ordner Trom, followed by the presentation of the deed to the lots to Lutheran Hospital and Homes Society by Mayor Jens N. Johnson. Businesses closed for an hour to allow their employees to attend the ceremony. There were an estimated 2,000 people present at the groundbreaking.

The Lisbon High School Band, under the direction of Kenneth Enstad, took part in the program, as well as members of the local American Legion and VFW. The Master of Ceremonies was Ed T. Hinschberger. Members of the Fargo office of the Lutheran Hospital and Homes Society were on hand, along with members of the North Dakota Department of Health.
The speakers praised the community members for their efforts. The first shovel of dirt was turned by Ordner Trom, President of the Community Memorial Hospital Association.

When the construction actually began, the old Community Memorial Hospital Association ceased to function actively and the construction and operation of the facility was turned over to the Lutheran Hospital and Homes Society.

Bids were called for in February of 1949. The general construction bid was awarded to Swedsberg Construction of Wheaton, MN. The overall cost of the construction was estimated at $235,000, including equipment and architect fees. A federal grant was received for 46 percent of the project.

Construction started in May of 1949. The project was expected to be completed by early 1951, but unavailability of equipment delayed opening until February 1952.

On Apr. 29, 1951 as open house was held, even though the building was not completely finished and there were no furnishings. Since funds had been exhausted, a committee was formed, with Bob Holt as chairperson, to raise another $25,000. The drive raised $22,000, just short of the goal. This brought the grand total of community contributions for the project to $126,000.

In January of 1952 it was announced that the hospital would be opening on Feb. 1. Miss Effie Larson, who had formerly been employed at Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis, arrived to serve as Hospital Superintendent.

Some of the other staff members who were hired for the new facility included: Miss Phyllis Spencer, Ortonville, MN, lab and x-ray technician; Miss Fern Froysland, Audubon, MN, Martha Kramer, Henry County, MO and Forence Johnson, Oakes, registered nurses; Anna Johnson, Fargo and Esther Tiedeman, Havana, practical nurses; and Ada Jallo, Appleton, MN, bookkeeper. Dr. Bakke, who had practiced in Lisbon for over 35 years, was named Chief of Staff. Dr. A.K. Lewis was named Assistant Chief of Staff. Dr. Steven C. Bachelor of Enderlin served as secretary/treasurer. Other staff members included Dr. George Haynes and Dr. Abner Veitch, both of Lisbon and Dr. D.W. Nagle of Enderlin plus some associate staff members from Dakota Clinic in Fargo.

Two weeks before the hospital’s opening the staff began cleaning and furnishing the entire facility as well as washing all clothing and bedding. They also took a careful inventory of hospital equipment. A snowstorm delayed shipment of the beds and other furnishings, but they arrived by train just in time for the hospital’s opening. Along with the beds were mattresses, dressers, stands, bassinets and other furnishings. A crew of volunteers was kept busy unloading the boxcar.

Exactly one week after the last of the furnishings arrived, on Feb. 1, 1952, the hospital opened. It did not take long before patients started flowing into the newly-opened hospital. The first patient to be admitted was Mrs. Carrie Nims of Lisbon, who had slipped on some ice and fractured her wrist. She was admitted at 9:20 a.m. on the hospital’s opening day. She was kept overnight for observation and released the next day.

The first baby to be delivered at the new hospital also arrived on the day the facility opened. At 5:25 p.m. an 8 lb. 14 oz. dark-haired daughter was born to Mrs. Earl Reisdorfer of Alice. She was taken to the new eight-crib nursery, where many gifts provided by area businesses awaited her.

The first twins to be born at the Community Memorial Hospital arrived a month later, on March 9, 1952. Twins Karen and Connie Cross were born to Norman and Clarice Cross of Milnor.
(Editor’s Note: An article in next week’s Gazette will include memories shared by some of the staff who helped with the opening of the hospital or worked at the facility early in its history.)

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Pictured above is the Community Memorial Hospital, Lisbon, now known as Lisbon Area Health Services, as it appeared in 1952. The hospital is celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2012.