

# TriCorner News

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## Changes at Sharon Hospital: Do your part

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When Mike Browder, the executive vice president and chief financial officer of RCCH Health Care Partners, the current ownership group of Sharon Hospital, who has been involved with the hospital all the way back to Essent's ownership, says it doesn't make sense for his group to keep running the hospital, he should be believed.

This is exactly what he said during his speaking time at the public meeting at the Sharon Town Hall on Thursday, March 16, when he also said he was relieved to have what he believes to be a good alternative for Sharon Hospital's ownership.

Browder understands hospitals and the way they work and don't work. As Essent CEO for four years, he and his group made good and more on the promises they made to the Sharon Hospital community after it was converted to a for-profit. The hospital has much better facilities than it did when it was taken over by Essent, with millions of dollars of capital investment improving the plant.

But the challenge of bringing in enough health-care consumers to keep the hospital itself financially healthy still has to be met.

Now, Browder said, he is happy to be passing on the ownership of the hospital to Health Quest, the local group in New York state that owns Vassar Brothers Medical Center in Poughkeepsie and Northern Dutchess Hospital in Rhinebeck, as well as Putnam Hospital Center and an array of other medical services centers throughout the Hudson Valley.

Both Browder and Health Quest Chief Executive Officer Robert Friedberg talked about the proximity of Health Quest physicians to Sharon, making both economic and medical sense for Sharon Hospital patients to have greater coverage by doctors of all kinds and for Health Quest to have the ability to serve a wider population.

At the March 16 meeting, there were many good questions from the audience to the officials from Sharon Hospital, RCCH and Health Quest, and all those officials were ready with answers, yet they did not try to gloss over any shortcomings. After all, the hospital is still losing money. Yet one of Browder's points was that with more local group support and sharing of facilities and staff, the shortfall should be able to be addressed.

Friedberg said the mission of Health Quest is to identify the needs of the hospital's community, and then to meet that need. He said the health-care system is integrated into the community with a long-term view, and that Sharon Hospital fits right into that mission. The objective, he said, is to use the facilities and services at Sharon Hospital and to encourage residents who are equidistant between Northern Dutchess Hospital and Sharon Hospital to go to Sharon.

If this strategy works, it will be the salvation of the most critical service organization in the Tri-state region: Sharon Hospital. There will be a public hearing on the conversion of the hospital back to nonprofit status and to Health Quest ownership on April 5 (see the article by Cynthia Hochswender, Page A1).

This is an important meeting to attend, and an important subject to do some research on before going. Take a look at the Certificate of Need before the state of Connecticut now, and read the articles on the process in this newspaper and other local media.

The outcome of this process will affect the region for generations to come, and its success will mean much to the future economic success of the entire Tri-state area.

### **The play was a great thing**

Kudos to the Housatonic Valley Regional High School students who gave their audiences a treat last weekend as they presented the play "The Drowsy Chaperone." Many audience members came away impressed with their professionalism as well as their enthusiasm, talent and vigor (see the letter to the editor from state Rep. Brian Ohler on this page and story on Page A8.)

Thanks to them for the hard work and skill, and to their adult mentors, for putting on some great entertainment for the community to enjoy.

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