

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Changing behavior

Cooler temperatures means furnaces, stoves and fireplaces are being stoked up to take the chill out of homes, cabins and shacks.

Area youngsters are getting hands-on lessons about fire prevention and safety this week thanks to officials and firefighters with the International Falls Fire Department.

Many of those lessons surround a simple message, but an important one: Prepare now in the case of a fire.

Firefighters have said when children come home with stories about what they learned at the fire department, it gets parents' attention and that means talking about the "what ifs" of a fire instead of waiting for the real thing to happen. We urge parents to listen closely as their children share these important messages.

Borderland youngsters are learning lessons about how to escape from a window and how to test doors for heat on the other side. In addition, local

firefighters are encouraging children to talk with their parents and the rest of the family about determining a meeting place if they leave their home because of a fire.

While some people may believe they know enough about fire prevention and safety, statistics show for some, the message isn't being put into action. Careless smoking, again, was the most common cause of fatal fires in 2012.

The good news is a long-term downward trend in fire fatalities continued in the state last year. Any fatalities due to fire is unacceptable, but the 50 deaths in 2012 represent an 11-percent decrease from 56 deaths in 2011.

The website of the State Fire Marshal's office states candles, stoves, fireplaces and cigarettes don't start fires. Instead, human behavior is the culprit and behavior can be changed. A good way to change that behavior is by teaching fire safety to kids, who can in turn help change the behavior of others.



ERICALLIE
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GUEST COLUMN

Independent hospital will work with all

BY BONNIE ERICKSON
Rainy Lake Medical
Center Board and FMH BOT

Over the past several weeks I have read with great interest the concerns the community has over the decision that was reached by Essentia Health and Falls Memorial Hospital not to continue the management services agreement, professional services agreement and affiliation agreement.

I am also surprised that no one has mentioned our newest board of trustee (BOT) member, Brian Briggs who replaced Gail Rognerud in April 2013. The FMH Board members because of long term health care involvement are also well versed and aware of the changes occurring in health care as well as the socio-economic impact on community members. We are dedicated to providing the highest quality health care services to the region. We are also bound by confidentiality as are the board members appointed by Essentia.

The agreements were reached after over two years of negotiations between the Falls Memorial Hospital and SMDC (now Essentia Health). The crux of the agreements were to assist the local clinic recover some of its losses in which they would receive provider-based reimbursement on Medicare and Medical Assistance patients as well as assistance in meeting clinic losses incurred. This would be made possible under the critical access status of the hospital. SMDC would in turn send specialists to International Falls to perform specialty services both at the local clinic and the hospital, benefiting patients who

would not have to travel long distances to receive care.

The two entities combined to form RLMC and developed a five year strategic plan with the main driving point to include growth of health care services to International Falls and the surrounding areas. Excitement over the integration was paramount and the FMH Board voted to put a hold on the ongoing planning of the new hospital which was very much affordable at the time. The hospital had an excellent cash position as well as five years of positive cash flow. Because of increased costs associated with the affiliation, the new facility planning remained on hold.

During the last four years the intent of the agreements and the strategic plan has not come to fruition. Requests have been made to Essentia to send specialists to our hospital to provide services we have lost. The losses of ophthalmology and oncology have had a major impact on community members. To receive care for these specialty services not only requires driving 100 to 160 miles one way, but also frequently requires an over night stay. This is not very desirable for those in discomfort or cost effective for the patient requiring these services. The loss of ophthalmology surgical services provided at the hospital resulted in \$450,000 in lost revenue which can be used to support other services locally. The hospital requested these services be provided locally by Essentia and the reply was they did not have the capability to do so at this time.

OB (obstetrics) services are another area the hospital believes is an essential community service. The

hospital remains committed to the community to provide this service and will continue to assist expectant parents and the local Essentia clinic physicians to ensure this continues.

When patients are hospitalized at the RLMC hospital campus, hospitalist care is provided by physicians hired by the hospital as local physicians no longer provide this service due to their clinic demands.

Questions have also been raised about the clinical records not being compatible. RLMC hospital is in the process of converting to EPIC under the auspices of Essentia Health.

To dispel another myth, patients have a choice of who they wish to see and to whom they wish to be referred to. Continued support of the local health care providers will always remain in place and the medical staff will remain open.

Dr. (Daniel) Nikceovich, CEO, Essentia Health East, stated in his letter to the RLMC BOT dated August 2013, Essentia will not pursue negotiations with FMH BOT stating the timing is not right for the partnership to continue. FMH BOT is in full agreement.

FMH will continue as an independent hospital not as a point of control, but one of continuing to fulfill its long-term commitment to the community to provide the highest quality of health care services to the community. The hospital will continue to send folks to Essentia as well as anywhere else the patient requests. The hospital wishes to remain independent and will work with all providers to ensure high quality health care services to area residents.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

GED tests will change beginning Jan. 1

To the editor,
If you have thought about taking the high school equivalency (GED – general educational development) test, do not delay.

On Jan. 1, 2014, the GED test will change. There will no longer be a paper test. It will be computer-based only. As of

right now there will be no local testing facility so you will need to travel to take the test.

There will be no transfer of scores from the old test to the new. If you have already passed some, but not all of the tests, you will need to retake the entire test. We will be testing locally only into November.

Your local adult basic education classroom can help you study for the GED, free of charge. Just call 283-9575 for information about the adult basic education classroom.

Julie Bernard
Adult Basic Education
instructor
International Falls, MN

The Journal welcomes letters from readers

Letters should be limited to 500 words or less. Longer letters may be edited. Letters must be signed and include the telephone number and address of the letter writer. Only the author's city address will be published.

Mail letters to The Journal, 1602 Highway 71, International Falls 56649. Letters can also be sent by e-mail to laurel@ifallsjournal.com.