

LCMH postpones project for campus transformation

by Patrick Thomas

Facing an unpredictable economy, Little Company of Mary Hospital (LCMH) officials have decided to hold off on a four-year construction project until further notice.

Just before the hospital community was preparing to gather for the annual Crystal

Heart Ball fundraiser at the Field Museum, hospital officials decided to pull back on ambitious plans to transform Little Company.

"The board made a decision to let up on the gas pedal a little bit on the project due to what's going on with the econ-
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omy. We are being prudent with our limited resources and waiting for when the markets are more favorable," said Denise Stillman, vice president of marketing and planning at LCMH.

Fundraising efforts to complete the transformation at an estimated cost of \$180 to \$196 million have gone on successfully with hopes that shovels might hit the ground by the fall of 2009, but Stillman said officials were concerned about maintaining over the long-term what resources were still available.

"We are changing our timeline basically and looking at our investment portfolio. Our long-term obligations are being impacted like everyone else's," Stillman said. "We don't want to put us in a position where we are depleting those resources and we are

not comfortable that we will be able to come back to them again."

The decision comes just months after officials at Advocate Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn chose to hold off on a \$200-million, 148-bed expansion.

The Little Company of Mary Campus Transformation, which was scheduled to occur in three phases concluding in 2013, called for 96 new medical/surgical beds with private rooms and baths. The transformation would mean saying goodbye to the 80-year-old Tower Building but would also allow for construction of a new women's health center, a new one-day surgery pre- and post-operative care unit, an outpatient behavioral health center, a new pediatric unit and a new kitchen and dining area.

The project already began addressing parking availability on the west side of the hospital after LCMH purchased and razed several houses

along Francisco and Richmond avenues. Stillman said the hospital was working with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago to address drainage issues. When weather warms in the spring or early summer, they expect to have the lot paved.

Hospital officials were hoping to start work sooner rather than later to avoid an escalation in construction prices, but given the economy, Stillman said, some of those prices might de-escalate, making the project less expensive. In the meantime, they will continue to search out grants, and the capital campaign for the campus transformation will continue. The time frame as to when the project will begin, however, is currently suspended.

"If we had a crystal ball, someone would be really rich," Stillman said. "But for now, we are going to wait and see."

To learn more about the planned project, visit lcmh.org/transformation.



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