

SVMH continues to move forward

By **KIMBERLY WHITE**
For The Salinas Californian

Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System is working through its “to do” when it comes to projects at the hospital.

Adrienne Laurent, director of news and public affairs, said more than 200 people have received care at the new Wound Care Center since it opened in October. Dr. David Perrott, senior vice president and medical director of SVMH, said the center benefits the entire community — especially the large Latino population, which is at a greater risk of diabetes.

Diabetes causes changes in blood capillaries, which may cause them to thicken and obstruct blood flow to organs and tissues. The loss of blood to these areas can lead to wounds that, if left untreated, may be debilitating. According to Texas-based Wound Care Consultants, 86,000 diabetic patients will undergo amputations this year because of non-healing wounds.

“A big share of the patients are diabetics, and they have lower-leg wounds oftentimes, and sometimes they result in amputations,” Perrott said. “So we have a lot of very happy patients because we’re able to close their wounds and heal them and save a limb.”

The average healing time for a

ABOUT SVMH

- n **NAME:** Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System
- n **TYPE OF FACILITY:** Nonprofit public district hospital
- n **ADDRESS:** 450 E. Romie Lane, Salinas 93901
- n **TELEPHONE:** 757-4333
- n **ONLINE:** www.svmh.com
- n **PRESIDENT/CEO:** Sam Downing
- n **BEDS:** 269
- n **STAFF:** 2,055
- n **SPECIALTIES:** Heart center, cancer center, neonatal intensive care unit, neurology and cardiac surgery

patient treated at the Wound Care Center is 34 days, he said.

Last year, 263 people received care at SVMH’s Joint Replacement Center, Laurent said. The minimally invasive procedure used by the orthopedic surgeons results in faster recovery times, Perrott said. For example, patients who undergo a knee replacement in the morning are able to walk around that same afternoon, he said.

“As the baby boomers get a little older, joint replacement is becoming a much more common procedure,” he

said. “We’ve put this performance-improvement team together, a real team to streamline our processes.”

Because hip- and knee-replacement surgeries and similar orthopedic procedures are becoming increasingly common, and joint-replacement patients have different needs than some other patients, seven rooms soon will be remodeled specifically to meet those needs.

Dr. David Kasting, medical director of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, said the baby ward also is gearing up for some changes in the near future. Nationwide, between 8 percent and 10 percent of babies are born prematurely. With an estimated 2,200 births recorded at SVMH last year, that’s more than 200 premature babies — many born with breathing and respiratory problems.

As a Level II NICU, those newborns can receive assistance — but only for a limited time.

“If (the babies) have to stay on a ventilator or breathing machine for a period longer than four hours, then we transfer them to another center where that can be carried out,” Kasting said.

But in late summer, the unit will be upgraded from Level II to Level III. After that, only newborns who require surgery or have significant birth defects will be sent to other hospitals. Additionally, Kasting said, a specialist

in maternal fetal medicine will be brought on board in August to handle high-risk pregnancies and pre-term labor, which the hospital doesn’t have the capability to deal with now.

And in April, the hospital will receive a new ambulance specially equipped to handle pre-term labor situations and complications that arise from premature births. A specialized team will ride in the ambulance to outlying areas and provide emergency care to newborns and women as they travel back to SVMH.

Kasting said the ambulance is equipped with various high-tech equipment, including heavy-duty suspension to provide a smoother ride, specialized ventilation and an air-conditioning system, incubator and mini-pharmacy.

“For the moms, we’ve installed a TV/DVD player so that when she’s being transferred, she’ll have something to occupy her mind instead of the labor pains,” he said.

Other recent changes made at the hospital include the opening of a new and improved pharmacy and the installation of a “tube system” throughout the entire hospital, which allows information to move more efficiently among the various departments.

See SVMH, Page 62

King City’s Mee grows with community

By **DAVE NORDSTRAND**
The Salinas Californian

KING CITY — To treat the aches and pains felt by a rapidly growing area, the George L. Mee Memorial Hospital has set course on an aggressive yet carefully calculated expansion plan.

Its directed trajectory is propelling it from a smaller hospital with rural roots to a regional health-care provider called the “Mee Health Systems.”

“We’re racing to keep up with all the new ideas,” said Joyce Martinez, Mee’s chief operating officer. “It’s an exciting time to work here.”

Evidence of the expansion begins within the hospital itself.

Crews in hard hats erect walls and install plumbing.

They’re shaping new rooms for patients, filling the interior of Mee’s second floor, until now an empty 23,000-square-foot expanse.

When the not-for-profit hospital expanded in 1999, its board predicted future need. It opted then to construct a “shell,” an empty second story, to one day accommodate that need.

ABOUT GEORGE L. MEE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

- n **SIZE:** 100,000 square feet
- n **OPERATING BUDGET:** About \$50 million
- n **ANNUAL PATIENTS:** About 25,000 outpatients at hospital, 65,000 at clinics, and 2,700 admissions, not skilled nursing unit.
- n **PHONE:** 385-6000
- n **ADDRESS:** 300 Canal St., King City, CA 93930
- n **ONLINE:** www.meememorial.com

That future is here. “The board’s foresight saved us \$58 million,” said Martinez, referring to what it would cost in 2006 construction dollars to replicate that second floor.

Today, the hospital has 68 beds. By July, when the second story is complete, it will have 130. Crews will then build an adjacent skilled nursing facility, which will house 99 beds. At that point, Mee Memorial will

have tripled its bed capacity.

“We’ve been anticipating growth, and we’ve been putting the pieces in place for quite awhile,” said Chief Executive Officer Walter Beck. “We’re being aggressive but selective. We want to use our resources in a smart way.”

Staff, too, has been in a growth mode. In 1999, Mee had 200 employees. Today, it has 580.

Since 1980, Cindy Banuelos, one of the emergency room nurses, has worked at the hospital. When she started, Mee Memorial had 42 beds and no clinics.

“Now we have a lot more services like a dialysis unit,” Banuelos said.

Laurie Grasso, also an ER nurse, began at Mee 12 years ago. All the growth has drawn new medical talent, she said.

In the hospital lobby, Marie Goodwin, wearing the pink frock of a hospital volunteer, sat poised at a polished reception desk.

Goodwin moved to King City in 1940. The town had 3,500 residents. It got its first hospital a year later, a 22-bed facility called Southern Monterey County Memorial Hospital.

In 1962, George L. Mee’s son donated \$150,000 in proceeds from a cattle sale as seed money for a new hospital. George L. was a prominent and colorful cattle rancher.

“I’m happy about all this” new expansion, Goodwin said. “There are a lot more people here now and we need it.”

Growth sweeping southern Monterey County and northern San Luis Obispo County has also prompted Mee Memorial to look beyond its 300 Canal St. site. Projected numbers for the King City/Greenfield/Soledad areas has the population tripling from 22,244 in 1990 to 66,524 in 2010, Martinez said.

“That’s a conservative estimate,” she said.

The numbers also represent but a part of the hospital’s service area.

Today’s residential mix includes refugees fleeing higher housing costs in the Salinas area. Many commute to jobs elsewhere.

“This is our own back yard,” Beck said. “We’re servicing this growing community. If we didn’t, somebody else would.”

See MEE, Page 62