

PAYSON ROUNDUP

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75 CENTS

Upcoming hospital changes detailed

BY ALEXIS BECHMAN
ROUNDUP STAFF REPORTER

Better care, a whole slew of changes including new laboratory and air medical transport services, and possibly lower prices.

That is what Payson Mayor and MHA Foundation president Kenny Evans promised Thursday at a Kiwanis meeting when the Arizona-based nonprofit Banner Health takes over Payson Regional Medical Center Aug. 1.

The first of many changes is the name — Banner Payson Medical Center.

Evans said many exciting things are coming to the area's only existing hospital with \$25 million in capital improvements over the next seven years, including new telemedicine in the intensive care unit.

The MHA Foundation recently negotiated an agreement with Banner after an 18-year lease agreement with Tennessee-based Community Health Services (CHS) ended. The MHA Foundation decided not to renew with CHS because they were too focused on profits and not health care, Evans said.

In 2013, data released by federal officials found PRMC had among the highest fees in the state, charging Medicare tens of thousands of dollars more for common inpatient procedures than what other hospitals in the state charged.

From 2010-2013, Evans said PRMC was one of the most successful hospitals in the state, revenue wise.

When CHS took over operations of the hospital in 1997, the hospital, however, was more than \$15 million in debt.

Under CHS management, PRMC grew to a 44-bed facility with services that included diagnostic imaging, medical surgical and emergency care. Thomson Reuters also named the hospital one of the nation's Top 100 hospitals.

Despite the financial turnaround, PRMC remained one of the most expensive in the country. The hospital was also losing doctors, Evans blamed CHS for the loss of 15 doctors before the deal with Banner was complete.

After failed negotiations with CHS, the MHA Foundation began looking for another operator and last autumn opened talks with Dignity Health, Banner and several others. Although it received an offer \$21 million over what Banner offered, the foundation went with Banner.

Evans said the foundation board liked Banner's corporate philosophy, the work it is doing with the University of Arizona (they operate the UoA's University Medical Center), the willingness to improve the Payson facility and let the MHA continue to have a voice in hospital operations. He said the MHA Foundation plans to meet with hospital officials weekly.

Banner also gave the Foundation \$40 million. With Banner at the helm, one of the largest nonprofit health care systems in the U.S., Evans said residents could expect to see more reasonable prices.

Jennifer Ruble, director of Banner's corporate communications, said it would maintain current rates when it first assumes

• See **Hospital**, page 2A



Alexis Bechman/Roundup

Workers from a Prescott-based company unloaded three large drill bits from a flatbed trailer Thursday morning, just south of Gerardo's Firewood Cafe. The crew recently dug a 10-foot hole off the Beeline Highway and will lower a borer that will carve out a tunnel under the roadway for a water line that will deliver C.C. Cragin water.

Cragin pipeline work progresses

Construction crews continue to overhaul Payson's water system

BY PETE ALESHIRE
ROUNDUP STAFF

Construction crews continued work this week on the mammoth task of connecting the C.C. Cragin Reservoir (formerly Elbe Ridge) pipeline to the town's existing, complex water system.

The local contractor working on the in-town phase spent the week digging a giant 10-foot-deep hole in solid granite alongside Highway 87, south of Gerardo's Firewood Cafe.

Crews will next drop a borer in the hole to drill a 150-foot-long tunnel under the highway for a 36-inch concrete casing to house an 18-inch water pipe, said R.E. Bob Olsson, who provides inspections and quality control for the town through its contract with the local engineering firm Tetra Tech.

It should take crews a week to drill under the highway.

From there, the construction firm will work outward to connect the incoming C.C. Cragin Reservoir water to the town's existing

water system.

For six months, crews will close one lane of northbound Highway 87 (east side) so crews have room to dig a trench for a new water line, which will stretch from Ace Hardware to Tyler Parkway, said LaRon Garrett, interim town manager. While the roadway will not be dug up, a seven-foot trench will be dug on the east side of the sidewalk for the water line.

Crews will work Monday through Thursday from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. Construction will not impede access to businesses.

Crews will then bore under the highway again, this time just south of the roundabout at Airport Road to deliver water to the tanks near the airport.

Recently, the town awarded several key contracts in the \$30 million final phase of the \$50 million pipeline.

One contract involved actually putting in a pipe from Washington Park to a not yet built water treatment plant on Houston Mesa Road near Mesa del Caballo.

Another just-awarded contract will alter a network of existing town wells so that they can put water from the pipeline back into the ground to replenish the town's underground water supply.

The water table had fallen some 100 feet when the town

• See **Pipeline progress**, page 10A

Ducey appoints Chambers to Gila County Superior Court

BY ALEXIS BECHMAN
ROUNDUP STAFF REPORTER

After 23 years with the Gila County Attorney's Office, Bryan Chambers will no longer sit before the bench, but on it after Governor Doug Ducey Tuesday appointed him Division I judge with the Gila County Superior Court.

Chambers will take the bench Aug. 31, at which time he will resign as president of the State Bar — a post to which he was just recently appointed.



Bryan Chambers

Chambers said his goal above all else is to be fair.

"I pledge to give the Superior Court my best efforts to be respectful to all parties before me, and to fairly and impartially render judgment according to the Constitution and laws of the United States and the State of Arizona," he said.

Chambers will complete the remainder of Judge Peter Cahill's term. Cahill retired early to spend more time with his family in Maine and Tucson.

Chambers said he was planning to run for Cahill's seat in 2016 since he knew Cahill was not going to seek another term.

When Cahill announced he was leaving early, Chambers and Shawn Fuller, deputy county attorney with the GCAO, applied for the position.

In his application with the governor's office, Chambers said he was ready to face the challenges of being a Superior Court judge.

In his two decades with the GCAO, Chambers has handled a high volume of civil child support

• See **New Judge's**, page 9A

Budget forums clarify county spending

BY TERESA MCQUERNEY
ROUNDUP STAFF REPORTER

Residents were invited to get a close look at the 2015-16 county budget at public forums this week. But in Globe only a couple of citizens attended the first hour the Payson presentation took place after press time.

County staff offered several interesting facts through illustrations at the forums.

For every dollar of property taxes paid in Payson, 27 percent of the primary tax goes to the school district, with another 14 percent from the secondary tax going to the district as well.

Payson residents have 32 percent of every (primary) property tax dollar going to the county, 9 percent to the state, 8 percent to the community college district, 7 percent to a assorted special districts (secondary tax rate), and 3 percent to the Town of Payson.

Globe residents have 35 percent of every primary property tax dollar they pay going to Gila County, 28 percent to the Globe school district, 15 percent to the state, 11 percent to the City of Globe, 8 percent to the community college district, and 3 percent (secondary tax rate) going to special districts.

The primary tax rate is \$4.19 per \$100 of assessed value; the secondary tax rate is one-tenth of the primary value. So, the higher the assessed value of a property, the greater the tax bill — the assessed value is not the same as the market value.

The secondary property taxes paid

vary by community. Payson has its school district, Northern Gila County Sanitary District and the Gila County Library District among the "special districts" which residents must pay taxes.

Pine and Strawberry residents have the Pine Strawberry Water Improvement District and the Pine Strawberry Fire Department, along with the Pine Strawberry School District and Gila County Library District as some of the "special" districts on their tax bills.

Star Valley's Helligate Fire Department is a special district and residents there also pay secondary taxes for the Payson Unified School District and the Gila County Library District.

Officials presented the following information as part of the budget public forums July 15 and 16:

- Gila County with taxes, both primary and secondary, funds public safety through the offices of the sheriff, search and rescue, county attorney and courts, emergency operations and public health public works (through much of this department's funding is from the Highway Users Revenue Fund, federal money and the extended half-cent transportation excise tax approved by county voters in November 2014); elections; libraries; community and other quality of life services.
- Property values decreased following the economic downturn for five consecutive years.
- Property valuations increased this year from \$416 million to \$482 million. The majority of the increase, \$56 million,

How your Residential Property Taxes are allocated — Payson Example



was attributed to centrally assessed properties (trucks and utilities).

- Despite the economic downturn and decreased property valuations, the Gila County property tax (rate) has remained unchanged for more than six consecutive years (\$4.19 per \$100 of assessed value).
- The FY16 (the second half of 2015 and the first half of 2016) overall budget decreased \$2.5 million compared to FY15; the county reduced the number of its full-time positions by 28.5.
- The county now shares 53 percent of the half-cent transportation (excise) tax with the county's incorporated communities.

The supervisors are scheduled to adopt the final budget on July 28 and then it is scheduled to set tax rates for all taxing jurisdictions (based on the final budgets their individual boards have approved) on Monday, Aug. 17.

THE WEATHER
Weekend: Rain likely over the weekend with highs dipping into the upper 70s, lows around 60. Skies clearing and temps rising at beginning of the week. Details, 9A

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