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Maquoketa High School senior athletes featured

This is the first in a series that will put the spotlight on members of the senior class at MCHS that are also involved in athletics.

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CARDS Club thanks firefighters with gift of U.S. flag



Maquoketa Middle School CARDS Club members Ashlea Beam, Sammy Houston and Rachel Rohwedder present a United States flag to Baldwin Fire Chief Robert Rohwedder. The flag is a visual thank you to the department and all area firefighters who risk their lives to protect the communities they serve.

Contributed Photo

Local dialysis unit to remain open

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

Renal dialysis will continue to be offered at the Jackson County Regional Health Center.

The Maquoketa hospital's Board of Trustees, at its second hastily-called special meeting in as many weeks, voted unanimously Thursday, Sept. 17, to negotiate a lease of hospital space to the Quad Cities Kidney Center of Moline, Ill.

That group would take over operation of the dialysis unit from the hospital on Nov. 1.

After considering proposals from both groups, the board chose the Quad-Cities group over Tri-State Dialysis of Dubuque, for which Dr. John Whalen, the dialysis unit's medical director, is a partner.

The board's action reverses a decision made in July to close the dialysis unit effective Nov. 1 as a cost-cutting move.

Curt Coleman, hospital executive director, said he met earlier with the dialysis unit's current four patients and informed them of the status.

Whalen will continue as the medical director until the transfer takes place.

Under the plan, the hospital will still get out of the dialysis business, but will contract with the private group, which will provide the service without interruption.

The hospital will lease 2,500 square feet of the total 3,600-square-foot dialysis unit to the Quad Cities Kidney Center at a rate to be negotiated.

The hospital will sell to the group the eight dialysis machines and the other equipment and furnishings in the department, which the hospital now owns.

The hospital also is encouraging the new provider to hire staff members who have worked in the unit. Both groups said in their proposals they would be interested in hiring local staff members.

The board's action directs Coleman to negoti-

ate with the Quad Cities Kidney Center the terms of the lease and to file necessary documents to make the transfer.

Immediately after the board's vote, Whalen and other staff members accompanying him left the meeting.

As he left, Whalen thanked the board for its consideration and added that that the hospital "may not have heard the last of us." He said may consider opening his own dialysis facility.

"I don't agree with your decision, but what can I say?" said Whalen, who has been medical director of the unit since it opened in December of 2002.

The board's decision followed a special meeting on Sept. 10 at which Dr. V. R. Alla of the Quad Cities Kidney Center and Whalen told the board they wished to take over operation of the dialysis unit after what had been the scheduled Nov. 1 closing date.

The board at that meeting directed Coleman to draft requests for proposal, send it to the two groups and request a rapid response.

Coleman read general terms of the two proposals during Thursday's meeting. He did not list specifics, saying that if negotiations fell through, the second group would know what the first group had bid.

Coleman said the lease rate per square foot offered by the Quad Cities Kidney Center amounted to "a significant difference" above the rate offered by Tri-State Dialysis.

The lease rate will include utilities. The portion of utilities, such as heating and air conditioning, which will be fed from the hospital's main unit, will be pro-rated because of the difficulty of separating that cost for the dialysis unit from the main hospital.

General maintenance of the facility will be

included in the lease, but housekeeping services will not be included.

The payments offered by the two groups to purchase the equipment "are very comparable," Coleman said.

The Quad Cities group proposed a 10-year lease with three five-year options for renewal.

Tri-State Dialysis had proposed a five-year lease with an option to renew it for another five years.

Both groups said they wanted exclusive rights to provide the service in the hospital.

Both groups said they would pay the cost of renovating the dialysis unit to fit their needs.

Hospital board members said they would like to have an annual increase in the lease rate built into the agreement.

Rakesh Alla, chief operating officer of the Quad Cities Kidney Center, said that provision would be agreeable. He suggested the increase be tied to economic indicators.

Asked about staffing, Dr. Alla said a nephrologist would be visiting patients at least once a week. He said his group does not use nurse practitioners.

He said he also would be offering services to area residents who may be close to needing dialysis.

Whalen said he and his partner, who are nephrologists, or a nurse practitioner see patients weekly.

Hospital board members had little discussion of the issue other than to note that it was a difficult decision.

"It's a very tough decision," said board Chairman Kevin Burns. He said the hospital "owes a debt of gratitude" to Whalen for having helped

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