

NEW AND IMPROVED

People have different reactions to news of change. Some embrace it, while others resist it with all their might. I tend to be somewhere in the middle – I am open to new ideas and change, but I take a cautious approach, especially when it comes to important and far-reaching matters. This is why I took great pains to ensure the best possible outcome for Secaucus residents when the governing body learned that Meadowlands Hospital was going to be sold. As your newly elected mayor, I wanted to make sure that losing such a major medical service provider, employer, and taxpayer did not occur under my watch. Fortunately, I had help. Along with the Council, I reached out to the State agencies which oversee and regulate transfer of hospital ownership. The sale of a hospital requires approval from the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services. As Mayor and Council, one of the first things we did was to pass a Resolution requesting participation in the public and regulatory process. We stated that as your elected representatives, it is our duty to protect access to quality health care, to guarantee fair and equitable working conditions and wages for the hospital employees, and to be aware of the impact such a sale may have on our local economy.

Our participation in this process and the cooperation of new management - MHA LLC have already paid tremendous dividends for all patrons of the establishment, with the greatest benefits reserved for Secaucus residents. Ownership is dedicated to finding the most effective ways to meet our needs, and for that purpose they are forming a community action committee – including two members whom I will personally appoint – to give them direction.

Economically, this transition represents a clear move in the right direction. The hospital will now provide free ambulance service to the Town, with two ambulances operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This move saves taxpayers \$700,000 per year. Another benefit to our pocketbooks is the fact that the hospital is now a for-profit establishment, a ratable entity with a tax value assessed at \$25 million.

The other services reserved for Secaucus residents are extremely exciting, especially when you consider the level of care and convenience of access provided. One of these services will be the creation of a mobile medicine program where medical professionals will be able to visit patients who are sick in their homes. This will be different from the days when the doctor brought his hand bag to the house, took your temperature, listened to your heartbeat, and prescribed rest and aspirin. This will be comprehensive medical treatment brought to the patient. We are also working with the Hospital on establishing a healthcare clinic in the center of town located in our Senior Center to provide a full bevy of specialty services to the community. Be on the lookout for these outstanding exclusive services.

There are many other improvements that have already occurred and are in the works that are aimed at the general hospital-going population. In just over two fully functional months, new management has added skilled and renowned specialists in orthopedics, pain management, and neurosurgery, and the hospital has already surpassed the operating room volume from the previous twelve months. On top of the recent upgrades in personnel, new ownership has spent over \$8 million in revamping the system of electronic health records,

leading to cleaner, more streamlined documentation and processing, as well as enhanced safety for the patients. This is the first use of such integrated technologies in the county.

Another key element of this early success has been the focus on the comfort of the individual. The hospital now is a 230-bed, private-room facility. Patients don't have to share a room, and visiting hours have been lifted. They also provide free television, phone and internet. Even the food service is new and improved; ala carte dining and fresh made meals are offered daily. In making these adjustments, MHA LLC has changed the whole atmosphere of the hospital. They make accommodations for both the patient and the patient's family, backing their mantra that being with family is part of the healing process. These improvements have effectively redefined the level of service at the hospital, but they are only the tip of the iceberg. Management has definite plans to expand the emergency room; the radiology department has new MRI, X-Ray, and mammography equipment on the way; and a full-fledged, in-house cardiac program should be in effect before the end of the fall.

Possibly even more exciting is the planned upgrade to the rehabilitation institute, which will focus on brain injuries and disorders. It truly is amazing to consider: top-notch brain specialists will be using cutting edge technology and techniques to treat conditions like Traumatic and Non-Traumatic Brain Injury (with special attention to Severe Disorders of Consciousness and Stroke), Autism Spectrum Disorders, The Aging Brain (Dementia, Alzheimer's, Memory Disorders), Learning and Attention Disorders, Developmental Brain Disorders; and Chronic and Progressive Neurological/neuropsychological Disorders. A program like this will put the Meadowlands Hospital and Medical Center on the map internationally. The incoming group of specialists includes the former Director and Chief Neuroscientist of the Brain and Trauma Program at the Kessler Institute and has even been successful in bringing patients out of comas. And we will have these services at our fingertips.

Our town has many excellent resources, but the new developments at the hospital have made health care into one of the most impactful assets in this community and beyond. While many towns are facing the prospect of the closing of a local hospital, we in Secaucus are fortunate that Meadowlands Hospital and Medical Center is here to stay.