

APRIL 29, 2010

## Former McCleary mayor says Elma 'saved' hospital

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*Visite Reporter*

ELMA — Someone told the commissioners of the Mark Reed public hospital district what he said was a little-known story last week.

Former two-term McCleary mayor Ellsworth Curran, 93, who helped get the McCleary hospital started "way back when," has been involved in his town since moving there more than 70 years ago. But though he said Tuesday he "in no way" wants to be disloyal to McCleary, Curran not only thinks the new hospital should be in Elma, but he shared poignant memories April 22 of when, he said, Elma "saved" Mark Reed Hospital.

The district's first commissioner, Curran also told of having served before that on the hospital board.

At his first board meeting, Curran said, he was "appalled ... at what didn't go on. This was a public corporation at that time," he said, and the 10 or 11 board members "were just not doing anything. And it was terrible because the hospital was having all kinds of problems; it was just about ready to fold," he said. "They were not addressing the issues," and some members would even sleep during the meetings, he said. "Nothing was getting done."

Curran said the board president, who'd invited him to join, told him there would soon be three vacancies and would appreciate it if Curran could find some capable replacements.

"So I did," Curran said, a bank manager in town and two business managers, "all people in executive positions" who were "used to solving problems on a daily basis."

"We realized the gravity of the situation and realized that something had to be done shortly or the hospital would no longer exist," he said. "It was going down like a sinking ship."

Their only viable option seemed to be forming a hospital district. Curran said, "So we set out to do that" with a local attorney with experience in hospital administration helping us make the transition."

Then, because forming a hospital district required a public vote, "we had to put on a big selling campaign to the public," Curran said. "And we set the boundaries of the district."

To his surprise, Curran said, the vote "came across with a bang."

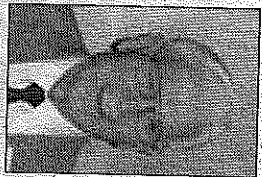
"And whether the people know it or not, that changed everything," Curran said. "Before that, we had been primarily a community hospital or McCleary hospital. But after that, we were a district hospital, and our commitment is to all the people within that district. Our duty is to all the people in that district."

"A lot of people didn't want to accept that and still don't accept it," Curran said. "But it's a fact, absolute fact," he said.

"After all the struggle of getting the hospital district formed, we were still not out of the woods. We still had problems, because we had no money," Curran recalled. "The hospital was in terrible condition. They were down to the point where they were using their creditors for their bankers, and you should never do that," he said. Suppliers refused to deliver supplies unless paid in cash right at the very moment they were delivered," he said. "You just can't do that."

Moreover, Curran said, the hospital would need to survive at least two more years before the rocky financial road would begin to smooth, "and we had no money to do that with."

Before Curran became active in city government, he said, "we had a community developer



Curran

was get a bank established that we hadn't had before."

The hospital, under construction at the time, had received a \$100,000

grant from Mark Reed's son, Bill Reed, president of the Simpson Timber Co. But it wasn't enough, and an "outside fundraising concern" that came to town wasn't successful, Curran said.

So "we decided we would ask our citizens to support the hospital by contributions," Curran said. "And that's what we did. And we had enough money on that and with a lot of volunteer work, we were able to get the hospital open and going."

But more help was needed to operate, Curran said. So since he'd helped get the bank owned almost entirely by local stockholders with a board who were local folks, many of whom had helped get the hospital established, Curran said he asked the bank for a line of credit to "tide us over until we get this tax money. We knew it was coming, but it'd be a while before we got it, and in the meantime, we had to exist."

"I knew that our financial statement in no way would warrant a normal loan or line of credit. But I thought that since we were all in the community together, all working together for the common good that they would support us until we got this tax money in," he said.

But a "hard-nosed" banker with no McCleary roots "put his foot down and absolutely refused. . .," he said. And the board didn't override him, said Curran, who described being "absolutely devastated," heart-

But there was a long shot, a man who had served on the Elma State Bank board, made up of some members who were sons of people that had helped open the hospital originally, and others that had some connection there," Curran said.

That bank approved of a line of credit, "and the hospital used that for a long time — and that's what saved the hospital," Curran said. "If we had not gotten that line of credit from the bank in Elma, the hospital would not be there today."

"I was very disturbed and very hurt because our own community would not support our hospital, but Elma did. Elma saved us," Curran said. Moreover, when the hospital began, he said, "there were a lot of people in Elma and a lot of businesses that contributed money to get us going. The Elma Lions Club donated the funds for the hospital's help pad, he added Tuesday. And "a lot of people in Elma have served on the board, such as Roy Musser. . . . He was on the board forever," he said.

"So this is not just a McCleary Hospital," Curran said. "It's a district hospital, and a lot of people don't recognize that and realize it. And I feel that it's time to set the record straight, let people know we've had all kinds of support from Elma."

Curran said the Oakhurst site the district is purchasing in Elma is a "wonderfully beautiful site for a hospital" with the "advantage of being within the city limits, having the utilities and things that we need," and it's easily accessible at the "hub of the highways."

"I approve of it wholeheartedly," Curran said. "And I will support it — simply because it's right."