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The Sun (Baltimore)

August 17, 1997, Sunday, CARROL EDITION

SECTION: LOCAL (NEWS), Pg. 1B

LENGTH: 656 words

HEADLINE: Treasurer Dixon's grit and power led to new ambulatory care center; Wife's breast cancer focused him on health issues facing women

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BODY:

Carroll County General Hospital's new ambulatory care center stands as a testament to the determination of state Treasurer Richard N. Dixon.

Dixon, a former state delegate from Carroll County and budget committee chairman, used his power to secure \$ 1.2 million in state money to support expansion of the hospital's emergency room and the building of a women's health center.

"I said if we didn't get the money, I was going to block everyone else's money, and as chairman I could do it," Dixon said. "Sometimes you have to exercise some muscle."

Yesterday, Carroll County General paid tribute to Dixon's effective fund-raising with the dedication of the Richard N. Dixon Building.

The facility, at 291 Stoner Ave., Westminster, houses the hospital's new outpatient surgery center and will be the home of the women's health services center, scheduled to open at the end of the year.

"Generally, people don't have a building named for them until they're dead and buried," Dixon said. "It's especially delightful to see your name on a building and have it used by people while you still have the years to enjoy it."

A variety of outpatient surgeries will be performed at the 18,700-square-foot ambulatory care center, including biopsies and laser procedures used in gynecological, ophthalmological, orthopedic and podiatry cases, said Rebecca Vasse, assistant vice president for patient care services.

Vasse said the outpatient center will allow Carroll County General to handle its growing caseload of surgical procedures.

In some cases, because of a shortage of operating room space, the hospital cannot accommodate all surgery patients and must send them elsewhere for medical care.

"We can't contain it here in the hospital; there's just too many cases," Vasse said. "Sometimes we can't get the cases scheduled quickly enough to relieve a patient's pain or anxiety."

Vasse said that between 4,000 and 4,500 outpatient surgeries will be performed at the center the first year. Cases with complicating factors still will be handled in the hospital.

For example, many gall bladder surgeries could be performed on an outpatient basis.

But if a patient has heart disease or is taking medications, he or she would be admitted to the hospital for longer monitoring.

"It will depend on what is the best care for patients," Vasse said.

The Richard N. Dixon Building stands on the former site of the Carroll County Health Department. Over the past year, the building was gutted to make way for the ambulatory care center.

The facility features four large operating rooms designed for minimally invasive surgical procedures, a post-anesthesia care unit and a two-bed recovery room for pediatric patients. The waiting area has a playroom for children with a large-screen television and videocassette recorder.

The project cost \$ 5.5 million, with construction accounting for \$ 3.6 million and equipment and furnishings estimated at just over \$ 1.8 million.

The women's health services center, which will be on the building's first floor, is scheduled to open in November or December.

The center will offer diagnostic services, including mammography, breast imaging, cardiac testing and bone-density screenings.

It also will provide programs addressing health issues such as premenstrual syndrome, nutrition and menopause.

Dixon took a personal interest in obtaining \$ 480,000 in state matching funds for the women's health services center because of his wife's battle with breast cancer.

A mammogram caught the disease early, and Grayson Dixon underwent several months of successful radiation treatment at Greater Baltimore Medical Center.

Dixon said the experience demonstrated the importance of regular testing for breast cancer.

"We really need a facility to provide this kind of care to women in Carroll County," Dixon said, "and that's why I worked so hard on this."

Pub Date: 8/17/97

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, SUN STAFF : 1996, Richard N. Dixon, state treasurer, helped secure \$ 1.2 million for ambulatory care center.

LOAD-DATE: August 21, 1997