

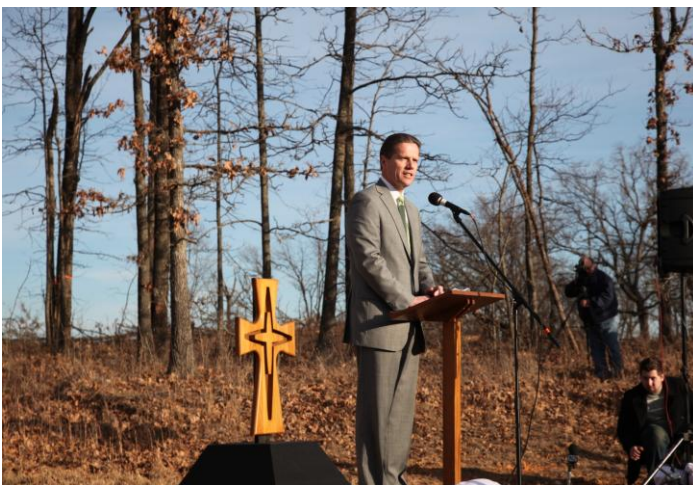
ONCOLOGY ISSUES

Endings & Beginnings

By Monique J. Marino, Managing Editor

On May 22, 2011, a tornado destroyed St. John's Regional Medical Center in Joplin, Missouri. Undeterred, St. John's continued to treat patients in its community—first at a temporary hospital, also called a “Field Hospital,” that was up and running one week after the storm. Erected on 54 acres of hospital-owned land directly across the street from the tornado-ravaged St. John's, the Field Hospital, a tent-like structure, was replaced in August 2011 by a 60-bed modular, hard-sided facility. Then, in April 2012, Mercy Hospital Joplin (formerly St. John's Regional Medical Center) opened a 150,000-square-foot facility, doubling the hospital's bed size. While the structure is permanent, it will only be used during the three-year interim until the new hospital is complete. The new name is part of a system-wide rebranding effort.

Meanwhile, across the street, work continues. Crews started work in late December 2011 on building abatement, clean out, and salvage. A team from Mercy searched the hospital to retrieve any keepsakes in good condition, including Bibles, artwork, memorial plaques, stained glass, and marble. The team even recovered three time capsules from the property. One buried when the hospital was built in 1968, one when the east tower was completed in the 1980s, and one that marked St. John's 100th anniversary in 1996. Other pieces of the hospital were salvaged for a real-life science project of sorts. Many windows and pieces of plastic piping from the sprinkler system were saved so they can undergo testing to see how they weathered the storm. It's knowledge that's hard to gain outside of a situation such as this one.



The battered St. John's saw its first wrecking ball Sunday, January 29, 2012, in a symbolic strike that was part of a special Demolition Ceremony. In all, five buildings across 55 acres—totaling more than 1.2 million square feet—are being demolished and cleared. The easiest way to bring down a building of this size is by implosion. However, that isn't possible here due to old lead mines beneath the ground. Instead, specialized grappling equipment that reaches up to 15 stories high is being used in the demolition effort. Today, the only structures still standing are the two main hospital towers. The demolition process is expected to be complete in September 2012.

Today, as buildings are being torn down and sites cleared, Mercy is at work restoring the land. The ground is being graded, seeded, and made ready for redevelopment. Mercy donated 13 acres to the Joplin School District for a new elementary school that will replace two schools destroyed in the tornado. This month, construction on that project began. The new hospital will be located at the intersection of I-44 and Main in Joplin, just about three miles south of the old hospital. Slated for completion in early 2015, Mercy Hospital Joplin will have 327 inpatient beds with a planned expansion of up to 424 beds.