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## Saint Catherine Regional Hospital Growing Beyond 2013

(CHARLESTOWN, IN)—It's a typical day at Saint Catherine Regional Hospital in Charlestown and Merlyn Knapp, President and CEO, is racing down a hallway. He's responding to a code black – hospital lingo for 'violent patient.' By the time he reaches the Admitting department, staff have calmed the patient.

"This is a small hospital," said Knapp of the 96-bed rural Charlestown institution.

Management wear many hats. We pitch in whenever appropriate." For Knapp personally, that means filling the roles of operations officer and physician manager as well as overseeing finance and human resources, in addition to his responsibilities as chief executive officer.

"I like to think we are the little hospital that could," Knapp said, reflecting on his first year as CEO. Shortly after being named CEO, it was determined that a legacy of debt had burdened the hospital and threatened long term solvency. Saint Catherine's voluntarily declared Chapter 11 reorganization bankruptcy. "Since then, we've implemented a disciplined financial restructuring process," he said, "which has helped liquidity problems, the balance sheet and cash flow issues."

Many in the community wondered if the little hospital could continue. To be sure, veteran executive assistant Leslie Ingram has seen many ups and downs during her 20 years at the hospital. "I know this place can make it. The hospital is very much needed in this community. We have a dedicated staff that want this community to have this facility," she said.

Like Knapp, Ingram wears many hats, too. "They call me a jack of all trades," she said, "but we all work well together balancing everything. We are especially committed to recruiting more family practice physicians."

One of the team's first tasks was rebuilding essential services that produce revenue. Diagnostic departments such as the laboratory and radiology have improved and expanded testing. A previously inactive sleep lab is no longer dormant. A new Pain Management clinic treats patients every week. A hyperbaric chamber for wound care has reopened.

Meanwhile, geriatric services are the hospital's hallmark. "Our Behavioral Health unit offers inpatient geriatric psychiatric services. "We have the best care plan," Knapp said. "No one else can match it. Taking care of our elderly so they can live comfortably and function is vital, medically and socially," he continued. "It's one of the things we provide at Saint Catherine's that many other facilities do not. We fill a void. It's an immeasurable benefit to the community."

Another essential service is Saint Catherine's Emergency Room. Last March, when a category EF4 tornado struck the area, the Emergency Room treated numerous victims, including a critically injured patient who was then air flighted to University of Louisville Hospital for surgery.

Ginger Ottersbach, RN, was the Emergency Room manager the day the tornado hit. "I was there when one of our patients was air flighted to U of L, she said. "What's more, because many of the phone lines were down, none of the employees could reach their own families, so we took a moment and prayed. Then it was back to work. Our caregivers actually went out into the surrounding communities with the police to look for victims."

Meanwhile, more than 100 people took refuge in the hospital's basement. Saint Catherine Regional Hospital is a designated Safe Place.

Ottersbach, who was recently promoted to Chief Nursing Officer, has worked at Saint Catherine's 33 years. Starting as a nursing assistant, she eventually received her BSN degree. She continues studying for a master's degree in nursing.

Like Ingram, Ottersbach has seen many cycles at Saint Catherine's. "I'm claiming 2013 as the year for Saint Catherine Regional Hospital to grow," she said.

Similarly, the hospital's volunteer president, Sonja Kendrick, says the hospital is making progress. "I've been a patient here and the care is excellent. My husband was a patient here and in other facilities and no hospital is cleaner than ours. I think people in this community are better off if they come to Saint Catherine's."

Despite its progress, Saint Catherine Regional Hospital's financial health is still in the recovery phase, Knapp said.

"We rely on government health care funding like all hospitals. And because we're small, it has an enormous impact on our bottom line," he said.

Indeed, smaller hospitals are more sensitive to balance sheet and cash flow issues, requiring intensely intricate management, atypical for many experienced executives.

According to Ingram, one CEO left after only one month on the job. "So many

CEO's have come and gone, she said, "that I quit counting."

Since Knapp arrived full-time last Spring, the hospital has finally shown a positive bottom line in its operations; a first in many years.

He admits that he inherited years of decisions that adversely affected the business.

"Day by day, our team is creating a better hospital," he said. Board Chairman, Francis Conroy notes that operations look better. "We've seen a lot of progress in the last eight to nine months," Conroy said. "I'm optimistic."

Plans are to increase the Medical/Surgical program of the hospital. "We are a licensed 96-bed general acute care hospital," Knapp said. "As we continue to foster good will with our physicians, recruit new doctors and extend programs, we will have more employment opportunities. Currently, we employ 158 people; our payroll is 6.5 million annually. That's a big impact on a rural community. So, this hospital isn't just property, it's vital to the area economically and medically."

Looking to the future, Chief Nursing Officer, Ottersbach says her goal is to retire from Saint Catherine's. However, Knapp says he's not going to let her retire anytime soon.

"Saint Catherine Regional Hospital is growing beyond 2013," he said.