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S.E. Side digs in for hospital

By [Scott Huddleston](#) - Express-News

With help from hundreds of neighbors carrying their own shovels, local leaders broke ground on a new hospital at Brooks City-Base.

Officials said the facility will replace Southeast Baptist Hospital and will be run by the same staff, retaining its sense of community and professionalism. Its new name was unveiled Saturday: Mission Trail Baptist Hospital.

Dr. Nick Shannon, the only physician still practicing at Southeast Baptist since its opening in 1971 at 4214 E. Southcross Blvd., recalled when much of the area was undeveloped.

The Southeast Side has grown, especially in recent years with the opening of a Toyota plant and the evolution of Brooks, a longtime air base where World War II pilots trained.

With the Air Force scheduled to leave the 1,400-acre base within two years, the hospital's long-awaited construction has been viewed as a crucial building block in the conversion of Brooks to a mixed-use technology, retail and business park. Issues such as zoning, location and funding for streets had delayed the hospital project.

"We're especially excited today, because it was announced in the newspaper seven years ago that this hospital would be built," Shannon said during the ceremony.

The hospital, to be built by the Baptist Health System and completed in June 2011, will have three stories and 81 beds, but could expand to up to six floors and 300 beds. All patient rooms will be private.

The building's design by Earl Swensson Associates is intended to maximize patient comfort by using natural light and views; acoustic materials that reduce noise; and spacious patient rooms where family members can stay overnight.

Since there are no other hospitals in the city's southeast quadrant, the site's proximity to Interstate 37 also is a plus, officials said.

Michael Zucker, the health system's senior vice president, said the name change links the hospital to its South Side location.

"Incorporating Mission Trail into the new hospital's name signifies commitment to community and respect for the history and culture of the area, and reinforces the hospital's mission of healing," Zucker

said.

The hospital initially will have a staff of about 300, but is expected to eventually employ up to 800. Officials haven't determined how the existing hospital will be used, but have considered offering assisted living for senior citizens and imaging, rehabilitative and urgent care services.

Baptist officials declared "All Hands In" the theme of the groundbreaking celebration, and invited surrounding businesses and residents to bring their shovels. With a prayer and spade full of mud because of recent showers, about 100 of the more than 500 people in attendance turned dirt for the new facility.

Many then stayed for a healthy lunch of fruit and whole-grain pasta, free health screenings and distribution of H1N1 flu mist.

Graham Reeve, the health system's president and CEO, said building a hospital to be run by a staff that already embodies a teamwork ethic will ensure that patients get the best available care.

"At Southeast Baptist, nothing stands for 'all hands in' more than the culture of that facility," Reeve said.

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