

# Village Views

## Trying to Save Our Hospital

by Jeffrey Kaplan, Mayor, Village of Ellenville

Ellenville Regional Hospital is on Life Support. For the second time in five years we find our hospital on the verge of bankruptcy, and this time there does not appear to be a white knight ready to rush in and save our hospital from closing. It appears that the only way to avoid closure will be for our Village, Town, County, State, and Federal governments, together with our School District, to move forward with grants, service contracts, and low-cost loans, together with community support. Yet the question still remains: will this be sufficient to save our small rural hospital from extinction, or is the closure of this hospital inevitable? I am uncertain of the answer, but feel we must make every effort to give our hospital a chance to survive.

A large part of the problem is the manner in which people obtaining medical services has drastically changed over the years. In the 1950s and 1960s, medical services were provided locally to all of the residents of our township, as well as neighboring townships, with few venturing out as far as Kingston or Middletown to seek medical services. This in turn resulted in Ellenville Hospital referrals from residents using local doctors as well as the many summer visitors to our area.

We cannot rely on the assumption that local residents will stop seeking medical services outside of the Ellenville Hospital area, resulting in significantly greater referrals to our hospital. Instead, if we are to avoid the errors of the past, our hospital administrators must determine which services they can offer that will be used by area residents. I would hope that there are state and federal grants available that could underwrite a study that would assist the hospital in providing and marketing appropriate medical services to our community to increase the likelihood of our hospital's financial viability and survival.

I have spoken with many of our elected officials as well as community-minded people, all of whom share a common goal to do whatever is necessary to keep the hospital doors open. We can only hope that the new hospital administration will take to heart the problems that have resulted in the hospital's two bankruptcy filings. Even if we are fortunate enough to keep the hospital doors open, unless the financial fortunes of the hospital change dramatically, this may result in a short-lived victory. ☆

(The following is a letter sent by Mayor Kaplan to the Town and School District Boards.)

Our hospital is in dire straits. Unfortunately, this time there is no White Knight on the horizon. Unless we are committed to explore all available options as expeditiously as possible the hospital will have no alternative but to permanently close its doors. I'm sure we are all aware of the prohibition that each of our Boards has regarding all donations even to the worthiest causes. As such we must be creative in our approach to find programs and services that the hospital can provide which can be done with public funding.

Initially, our respective Boards can, by resolution and outside contracts, ensure that all medically-related services paid for by the Village, Town, and School District – including drug and alcohol testing and physicals – are done at the Ellenville Hospital. Additionally, various health programs sponsored by the Village, Town, and School District are provided by the Hospital, including classes in nursing, parenting, teen-age pregnancy, nutrition, and mental health services. Village, Town, and School District employees requiring physical therapy can also be encouraged to use our hospital facilities.

While, as a first step, I would normally suggest representatives from the Village, Town, and School meet to discuss various options and avenues, I would propose instead, to show our full support and resolve that a historic meeting of the Boards of the Village, Town, and School District be scheduled immediately, inviting the Public to attend and participate.

Thereafter, I suggest that the Boards consider using the Hospital for its outside contracting for medical services. A resolution to this effect has already been passed by the Village Board at its February 9<sup>th</sup> meeting.

I sincerely hope that you will join the Village in its resolve to consider every avenue possible in an effort to save the Hospital. Village Manager Elliott Auerbach will be contacting the School District and Town in the next few days in an effort to coordinate a mutually-agreeable date for a Public Hearing.

If we pool our resources and commit ourselves to this project I believe we can be successful. And I feel certain that this time we can not simply sit back and wait for others to be our saviors. ☆

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