

Interim CEO begins work at Holy Cross

By Andrew Oxford

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Phil Lowe began work as interim CEO of Taos Health Systems Monday (July 14).

The Utah native temporarily replaces Peter Hofstetter, who had served as CEO since 2009 before stepping down earlier this month.

Lowe most recently served as interim CEO of a hospital in Franklin, La. He was CEO of San Juan Health Services District in Monticello, Utah from 2009 to late 2013.

Having worked in rural hospitals for more than 30 years, he told *The Taos News* Wednesday (July 16) many of the challenges facing Holy Cross are not unique.

“This is nothing different than what I’m used to,” Lowe said when asked how he would address the hospital’s financial struggles, characterized by losses in recent years that have left the nonprofit with approximately 21 days of cash on hand and seeking to push out payments to vendors.

“Rural facilities struggle,” he added.

Controlling expenses while building strong services to reverse the migration of patients to health care providers in other communities are priorities, Lowe indicated.

Arriving amid heightened scrutiny of the hospital by local leaders, the interim CEO said he is committed to open communication about the nonprofit’s direction.

“The staff have ownership here and really want to make it thrive,” Lowe said. “The best we can do is to regularly update our employees. To communicate — that’s the really important thing. We should never have the employees wonder what’s happening.”

Only three days into the job, Lowe said he had yet to meet many local political leaders. Officials from Taos Health Systems and the union representing some of its staff are due to meet with county leaders Tuesday (July 29), however. Local 1199 is calling for the nonprofit’s board to place on hold its search for a permanent CEO “until there is an inclusive discussion of what greater Taos would like to see developed as a master plan for its acute care hospital,” according to a statement from the union.

Union leaders have raised concerns about Quorum Health Resources, a private contractor that recruited Hofstetter as well as Lowe and is now leading the search for a new CEO, arguing the process should be open to broader community input.

But Lowe sought to assuage concerns about Quorum's role in recommending a permanent replacement for Hofstetter.

"Quorum is only a consulting organization," he said. "The decisions are made here [in Taos]."

Whatever happens amid the political debate over the hospital's leadership, Lowe has a busy few months ahead of him.

Lowe said he was working toward a solution to meet demand for pediatric care amid the recent departure of a physician. Taos Health Systems will be expanding dermatology and occupational medicine services in coming months, he said.

"That's what I intend to do here — keep things going," he remarked.

Lowe holds a degree in Business Management from Brigham Young University and a Master's in Hospital Administration from the University of Colorado Denver. He has worked in Idaho, Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas. His wife still resides in Utah but he said he is undeterred by the travel required in balancing family with work and getting outdoors.

The board of directors may choose a new CEO by year's end, chairman Ron Burnham told

The Taos News last month.

About 20 candidates have applied for the post as of Wednesday, Lowe said.



Courtesy Taos Health Systems

Phil Lowe