

My Turn

Union on mill levy: 'We ask for your yes vote'

Gina O'Hara

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In the late summer of 2013, Holy Cross Hospital experienced a serious layoff of nearly 10 percent of employees who provided direct care and support to the patients of Taos County and surrounding area. The layoff also forced a reduction in many services that our community counted on to have available locally (vs. traveling to Santa Fe or Albuquerque).

Holy Cross Hospital employees, represented by the Taos Chapter of District 1199 NM of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, came together with people in the community and asked locally elected officials to help investigate what caused this reduction in services and workforce, and determine pathways to get the hospital back on its collective feet. The Taos Town Council, the mayor and Taos County commissioners held a series of open meetings with citizens, employees, hospital administrators and board members.

After several weeks both the county and town agreed to appoint a Taos Hospital Health Study Group. This group has met diligently for more than two years, learning what went wrong (example: a reduction in state reimbursements of millions of dollars), exploring ways to stem the shortfall of resources for the short term, and trying to develop and navigate a path to make the hospital whole and growing again as the provider of acute and related hospital care and as the county's largest private sector employer.

Employees, like many residents, had suspicions and concerns that HCH was not managing the resources it had or communicating with the community in ways that inspired confidence.

But over the past two years significant changes have been made in the hospital administration. New hospital leadership has been more forthcoming with information; it is demonstrating an apparent commitment to transparency and a sincere effort to work with the community, potential patients, elected officials, those who provide direct bedside care and the support staff at the hospital to provide improvements and good stewardship of the resources it receives for services and care.

And through this two-year process — with the help of local officials, hospital board members, hospital employees and members of the community — the Study Group learned that our hospital cannot survive in the manner we need it to without continued financial support from the county.

Holy Cross Hospital is the one institution that has the potential to touch every Taos County resident's life in some capacity. Someone in your family, a neighbor, or a friend will need the services provided by Holy Cross Hospital.

We collectively agree to financially support our schools as a community; Holy Cross Hospital – in providing care to you and yours — also needs community support.

The Taos Chapter of District 1199 NM is a democratic organization, with the autonomy to address local issues that will impact the functioning and growth of our local hospital.

For Taos 1199 to take a stand on an issue like the mill levy vote, it does so with research, serious deliberation, and discussion. Then it votes as a body.

Last month 1199 Taos members voted on whether or not to support the mill levy. The overwhelming majority voted to take a public position asking voters to support their hospital by voting yes on the mill levy question. Some members expressed concerns regarding the past history at HCH, and said they still had reservations. But it is fair to say that almost everyone that works at the hospital is aware of the importance of HCH as a needed resource for residents. And most members agree that we need to see the hospital grow instead of shrink.

Therefore as the democratic organization representing employees who provide hospital support and direct care to you, your family, and your friends and neighbors, we – the Taos Chapter of 1199 Hospital Employees — want to remind ourselves and our community that we are all in this together.

While the medicine may be unpleasant to swallow, it is necessary in this moment to continue the growth of quality care and services at Holy Cross Hospital. We ask for your yes vote, and your support as a Taos County Resident, on this important issue.

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