



Community support has St. Vincent Hospital in Leadville back on solid financial footing

Randy Wyrick
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LEADVILLE — Leadville residents helped pull their hometown hospital back from the brink of extinction, and it's now doing fine.

More Leadville residents and other locals are using St. Vincent General Hospital, and that helped pull the hospital out of the tough financial spot that hammered so many industries when the economy tanked.

"The bottom line is that local people are using our hospital. We are truly thankful that more and more community members are seeking their health care here in Leadville and, by doing so, are contributing to the viability of their hometown hospital district," St. Vincent CEO Gary Campbell said.

ROCKY ROAD BACK

The auditors used the word "concerned" last year, and said it appeared St. Vincent would not be able to make it through the year, Campbell said. Their hospital district is 400 square miles, said Karen Onderdonk, St. Vincent Hospital's director of community development and the SVH Foundation.

"I cannot imagine what life would be like without a viable hospital," Onderdonk said.

The road to recovery was not easy, but was paved with community support. St. Vincent General Hospital District has struggled over the years and faced closure in 2014. The hospital's board of directors would hear none of that and rallied the community.

Faced with losing hospital care in their community, Lake County voters approved a property tax increase in 2015. All of that helped bolster St. Vincent's operations, Campbell said.

"We are thankful to the residents of Lake County and Leadville. That's their money that they work hard for. We keep that uppermost in our minds at all times," Campbell said.

An audit of St. Vincent's financials found that the hospital was up \$1.4 million in 2017. That lifted St. Vincent from \$596,877 in the red in 2016 to \$775,925 in the black in 2017.

"We are ever-mindful that our success directly relates to our patients' experience at St. Vincent Hospital and St. Vincent Medical Clinic," Campbell said. The average door-to-provider time is five minutes for the St. Vincent emergency room, the audit found, which also found consistent patient satisfaction scores of 90 percent and higher in the emergency room, inpatient unit and clinic.

THE WINS KEEP COMING

The St. Vincent General Hospital District was named the Special District Association of Colorado's 2018 J. Evan Goulding District of the Year, topping 1,800 Special District Association of Colorado members.

The hospital won the award for overcoming challenges in recent years and sustaining hospital care in Lake County. "The financial turnaround was part of it, but even more the connection that we have made with Lake County and Leadville," Campbell said.

St. Vincent hospital sits at 10,152 feet above sea level, serving Lake County and Leadville, North America's highest city. In 1879, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas, opened St. Vincent hospital to care for the hardscrabble miners who were drawn to Leadville.

St. Vincent Hospital offers eight inpatient beds, ambulance (countywide 911 response), emergency room, family medicine clinic, imaging, laboratory, physical therapy and visiting specialists.

The 2017 audit is available for viewing at the St. Vincent Hospital front desk or online at <http://www.leadvillehospital.org>.

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