



WellSpan Waynesboro Hospital founded on community support

Waynesboro, Pa. – The Waynesboro community has a long history of coming together in times of need.

For WellSpan Waynesboro Hospital, that history spans all the way to its founding a century ago in response to the Spanish flu pandemic.

Today, the community is again coming together to support the hospital with donations of food and supplies for hospital staff.

Dick Marks, who chaired the WellSpan Waynesboro Hospital board and now serves on the WellSpan Summit Health board, said this community spirit was obvious from the first time he stepped foot in Waynesboro as the executive director of the newly constructed YMCA in 1975.

“We thought we’d stay just a few years but soon realized this was the place we wanted to raise our growing family,” Marks said. “People cared for one another. They were hard-working. Their institutions were important to them – church, YMCA, schools, the hospital. Local people were involved in their institutions, and we wanted to be as well.”

The Spanish Flu

Exactly 100 years ago this month, the community was preparing to launch a public fund-raising campaign to establish a hospital.

But the push for a permanent hospital in Waynesboro actually began in earnest two years earlier in 1918 as an influenza pandemic spread across the world.

In Waynesboro, schools and churches closed, along with “moving picture houses” and other entertainment venues. Physicians in the Waynesboro area set up makeshift hospitals inside the firehall and YMCA.

In January 1919, the committee running the emergency hospitals met to discuss establishing a permanent hospital in Waynesboro. Dr. J. B. Amberson and others cited lessons learned from the influenza pandemic.

The following month, members of the public and religious, civic, fraternal, and industrial organizations met at the Waynesboro YMCA, and led by local businessman J. H. Stoner, the community began laying the groundwork for a permanent hospital.

Community Response

On June 1, 1920, the public campaign officially launched with a goal of raising \$300,000. The campaign started with more than \$170,000 already pledged.

Newspapers kept tallies of individual pledges and support from businesses and civic groups. Citizens National Bank set up a special fund for community members to contribute. Civic clubs and the Waynesboro Chamber of Commerce donated time and money to the cause.

The Arcade theater on Main Street hosted a benefit recital with renowned mezzo-soprano Barbara Maurel and violinist Sascha Jacobsen. The Lutheran Church organized a play at the high school auditorium with all proceeds benefiting the campaign.

At the end of the drive on June 7, the community had exceeded its goal, raising more than \$327,000 – or roughly \$4.2 million in today’s money. More than 3,000 local residents had subscribed to support the hospital fund.

The 35-bed Waynesboro Hospital was dedicated on October 2, 1922, with thousands touring the new hospital building.

Community support did not end there. The hospital held a Donation Day on Nov. 2, 1922, when residents dropped off fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as towels, clothing and other supplies.

The Record Herald account remarked, “in a short time these shelves were laden with capacity with products of many descriptions and the receivers were compelled to use the floor.”