

Rahe, Stern will serve four more years on hospital board

Written by Chris Lee

Incumbents Gary Rahe and Harlan Stern were the only two candidates to file self-nominations for the Tuesday, May 8 East Phillips County Hospital District election.

With the same number of candidates applying as there were seats, the election was canceled by designated election official John Ayoub—having been authorized to do so by the board of directors.

Rahe is just finishing up his first four-year term while Stern has two years experience under his belt. Stern was appointed in 2010 following the resignation of Ray Malleck.

Due to the cancellation of the election, both are elected to serve another four-year term on the EPCHD board and will be sworn in during the May 22 regular meeting.

Additional EPCHD board members include president Steve Young, Steve Deaver and Sheryl Farnsworth.

Gary Rahe



Rahe was first elected to the EPCHD board in 2008 and feels things have gone very well. As a member of the hospital board, he noted there is a tremendous amount of learning that takes place—not only within MMH but with health care overall.

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“I wasn’t surprised there was a lot to learn. The amount of information you take in is pretty amazing,” Rahe said.

Rahe said he felt it would’ve been a disservice to the community and hospital to not run again. He feels the first term on any board is a time for learning and gaining experience.

He now looks forward to continue working with the other board members on issues and to see the solutions.

The greatest driving factor for Rahe is “the satisfaction of knowing that as a board, we can make a difference for the quality of life through health care in this community.”

“I’m learning to enjoy it more and more,” Rahe said.

Over the last few years, Rahe said he feels the board has really grown and understands its role much better.

Rahe stated his appreciation for the piece Stern brings to the board. “He’s really added a nice dimension,” Rahe said of Stern’s background and administrative knowledge.

EPCHD board members have really ramped up their community outreach efforts over the last year, and Rahe believes it is something they have to continue. He gives a lot of credit to Farnsworth who has led them through the community linkages outreach project.

“We’ve got to continue to engage the community and share information for us to understand where we can improve our facilities,” Rahe noted.

Getting information out to the community is important, but at the same time, bringing information

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back is, too. Rahe said he feels people aren't afraid to talk to him about issues. Good or bad, he wants to hear them.

Looking ahead, Rahe is excited about the facilities study they are undertaking and coming up with a long-term plan. "How do we utilize even better what we have?"

He also noted these are some very uncertain times with regard to the direction health care is heading. The nationwide cost and quality of health care are two things that worry Rahe.

Another issue that has bugged him is physician recruitment. "It bothers me that I look at communities around us, and they're having much more success than we are."

Rahe has lived in Holyoke since 1975 where he has served as the pastor at Zion Lutheran Church. He and wife Diane have two grown sons: Josh, who lives in Calhan, and Ben and wife Sandra of Holyoke. They have four grandchildren.

Rahe also said Holyoke should be thankful for the quality of facilities and staff that is offered. "I think we're very blessed."

Harlan Stern



Noting there has been a big learning curve during the first two years, Stern is ready to continue and spend some more time on the EPCHD board.

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Stern noted he feels he will be more effective with two years under his belt. He said it's a little tough to find oneself in a position where numerous acronyms are used—as it is with the hospital.

“I really enjoy it,” Stern said. “I think it's very educational.”

“I think we work real well together,” Stern said of the current board. “The thing I appreciate about the board is that everybody is willing to speak up and express their concerns and not just rubber stamp everything.”

Stern is looking forward to working with the board to help resolve any issues or concerns the community has about the organization. One area where he feels the board is really working hard is the community outreach they have been conducting.

Through this they can identify areas that need improvement. Physician recruitment is an area numerous smaller hospitals around the country are facing, according to Stern.

“My goal is to continually see how we can improve and make it as user friendly as we possibly can,” Stern said of his next four years of service to the organization.

Stern spent 31 years as president/CEO of Holyoke Co-op and Grainland before retiring in 2009.

Heading into his first two years on the EPCHD board, Stern had little experience in health care, and his only experience included his personal trips to the doctor and time spent putting together a self-funded health plan for Grainland.

In addition to his 31 years at Holyoke Co-op/Grainland, Stern has also been involved with Lions Club and nearly 30 ag-related boards in which he said he has chaired a third of them.

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Stern and wife Mona have been in Holyoke since 1978. Their family includes son Ryan and his wife Lathy and their daughter Melia; son Trent and his wife Jill and their children Anna and twins Rhylan and Dylan; and son Troy, who died in 1982.

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