



Tennessee City Management Association

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Paris honored with TCMA Excellence in Municipal Government Award

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The economic downturn has brought public-private partnerships to the forefront as a successful means to meet common project goals quickly and economically for communities throughout Tennessee. Paris and Henry County are certainly reaping the benefits of a partnership between Bethel University and Henry County Medical Center (HCMC), which has resulted in a \$13 million diagnostic center that serves both entities. Once Paris officials determined that both parties had individual expansion needs; the city went to work to help facilitate the partnership, aiding the project through financial support, organizing a planning committee of local officials and appointing a project coordinator to help bring the future development to life. As a result, the center is already bringing in more outpatients and students, while offering more education and employment opportunities to the Paris/Henry County area.

Paris will be recognized by The Tennessee City Management Association (TCMA) with an award for Excellence in Municipal Government, which will be presented on Tuesday, June 25, during the 74th Annual Conference of the Tennessee Municipal League at the Memphis Cook Convention Center.

The award is presented by TCMA each year to cities that operate with professional management and have increased the effectiveness of local government through the development of unique and creative programs.

In May 2010, Paris Mayor Sam Tharpe and Steve Prosser, Bethel University's director of development, had an informal conversation about Bethel's expansion issues on its McKenzie campus. The University's Allied Health program was short on meeting space, after experiencing 10 years of significant growth. The situation also affected the program's plans to expand its ongoing relationship with the Henry County Medical Center.

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While the University had considered leasing space in Paris, the short term nature of the health services program did not make that a feasible option. That's when Mayor Tharpe suggested a novel idea, finding out if the Medical Center had expansion ideas of its own, and if so, bringing the city and county governments into the discussion.

According to administrator Tom Gee, the Medical Center did indeed need an outpatient diagnostic center, but the one suitable site nearby was too large and costly. However, the possibility of two related facilities on the one property made the idea much more viable.

An exploratory committee was formed comprised of Tharpe, Gee, Prosser, Carl Holder, who at that time was director of economic development for Paris-Henry County, and County Mayor Brent Greer. The committee also held a community forum inviting all interested parties to hear a brief presentation about the proposed project, with an opportunity for public comments. The forum was attended by around 100 people, who endorsed the project concept unanimously.

The committee sized the project at 10,000 square feet for the diagnostic facility, 30,000 square feet of educational space for Bethel University, and a 5,000 square-foot section connecting the two. It was determined that the medical center would finance their portion of the \$13 million project and that the city of Paris would borrow \$6.5 million from the Tennessee Municipal Bond Fund to purchase and own the Bethel portion, with Bethel holding a 15-year lease purchase option on the facility. Holder, who was now serving as city manager, was appointed as the overall project coordinator. A2H of Memphis would serve as the project architectural and engineering firm, and Venture Construction of Atlanta was selected as the construction management firm.

A major item under consideration was a skywalk over US 79 spanning from the new facility to the medical center. After the opening of bids, it was considered too costly and omitted. However, the Northwest Rural Development Administration Office helped the city procure a zero percent interest Rural Economic Development loan/grant to build the skywalk and it was restored to the project scope. Since the diagnostic center opened in September 2012, the medical center has already seen a 12 percent increase in their outpatient screenings.

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Bethel has started the physician assistant classes and has a current waiting list --- indicating that the program's relationship with the medical center will continue to grow and flourish.

While the HCMC added three employees to the staff, Bethel anticipates it will hire 20 full-time and up to 25 part-time employees as they expand the offerings to include the University's Success Program. The program is tailored to persons in the workforce desiring to obtain a college degree.

As the medical center is Henry County's largest employer, and the medical-related development is the fastest growing, most stable portion of the local economy, a significant economical impact has already been made in the county and perhaps also the fulfillment of a dream -- to have a presence of higher learning within the county.

"The project is an excellent example of public entities working together with a private institution to the separate and collective advantage of both entities," said Mike Walker TCMA executive director. "It is our honor to award the city of Paris with the TCMA Excellence in Municipal Government Award."

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The Tennessee City Management Association is an organization of administrators and managers dedicated to professionalism in the management of local government in Tennessee. Its membership is 120 members strong.