

Bertrand Chaffee expansion targets primary care, imaging for rural area

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Nils Gunnensen, CEO at Springville's Bertrand Chaffee Hospital, president, said the intention is to improve access to primary care for residents of Southern Erie and Northern Cattaraugus counties.

With new state funding on the way, [Bertrand Chaffee](#) Hospital will expand its primary care practice and bring new specialty services to its Springville campus.

The hospital was notified Tuesday the state Department of Health had approved funding of \$11.3 million over five years to relocate its existing primary care center within a new multi-specialty, stand-alone health center and enhance other services. It's among **\$44.6 million awarded** for eight local projects through the Statewide Health Care Facility Transformation Program.

The biggest plan calls for shifting the practice from two sites within the Springville hospital to a 15,000-square-foot facility next door on adjacent real estate the hospital acquired this year. The property currently houses a former medical office building that would either be renovated or demolished if the hospital decides to build.

[Nils Gunnensen](#), CEO, said the intention is to improve access to primary care for residents of Southern Erie and Northern Cattaraugus counties.

"By putting them into a new, modern and efficient venue we'll be able to provide access to more patients and hopefully in a more streamlined and efficient manner," he said.

The grant also includes funding for several initiatives at [Bertrand Chaffee](#), including updating with a 3D mammography unit; installing a permanent MRI to replace a traveling unit that comes

in three days each week; a new nuclear medicine camera to support the heart center and cardiology practice; and a new electronic medical records system for the hospital and emergency department.

While it will be several years before the primary care facility is ready, the hospital expects to begin implementing the other parts of the project in the coming months. As it continues to develop the plan for the primary care space, it will also work with other providers to attract specialty services such as orthopedics, ear-nose-and-throat and pulmonology. It's likely some of those could come from Catholic Health: [Bertrand Chaffee](#) is an affiliate of the Buffalo-based system.

Gunnensen said he's also had preliminary conversations with Roswell Park Cancer Institute about bringing oncology services to the Southtowns area.

"We haven't really committed to a particular specialty group of practice, but want to have space where they can come on a rotating basis and serve the needs of patients in our community," he said.

The hospital will also have to determine a reuse for the space inside the hospital that currently houses the primary care practice, possibly for additional specialty services.

The hospital's application followed a strategic planning process and reflects growing service gaps in that outlying location, Gunnensen said. [Bertrand Chaffee](#)'s service area includes about 50,000 people. He pointed to the pressures felt by rural hospitals, including declining insurance reimbursements and a continuous need to upgrade technology.

"State programs like this one are vital in order to respond to community health needs," he said.

The primary care practice has been growing in recent years, in large part through the hiring of community-based doctors. The practice currently sees more than 8,000 patients and has nine primary care providers on staff.

With 24 beds, [Bertrand Chaffee](#) has an operating budget of about \$19 million for its hospital operations, plus a \$6 million nursing home on site. The hospital ended 2016 with a positive operating margin for the fifth consecutive year, Gunnensen said.

Specific plans for the different portions of the expansion will require approvals through the DOH.

Tracey Drury
Reporter
Buffalo Business First