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**Fourteen years in the making,  
Grandview Medical Center prepares to open**

*From visionary to vacant, HealthSouth hospital revived as Grandview*

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by Amy Yurkanin

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama – Eight years ago, the half-built digital medical center on U.S. 280 appeared to be as dead as a body cooling in the hospital morgue.

Launched in 2001 as a state-of-the-art digital hospital for orthopedic surgery and rehabilitation, the project basically stopped two years and \$200 million later, in the midst of a fraud investigation at parent company HealthSouth.

It sat empty for years, and then sold to Daniel Corp., a real estate company. That company then sold the hospital shell to Trinity for the bargain price of \$43.5 million.

And now, in a revival that's as dramatic as anything that happens in the ER, the new Grandview Medical Center is preparing to see its first patients on Saturday.

So what will it mean for healthcare in Birmingham?

The new facility is located in one of the fastest-growing corridors in Alabama. The residential population living within a half-mile of 280 grew from about 9,100 in 1990 to 14,000 in 2010, according to regional planning commission estimates. Retail and business growth in that area has also exploded.

Now many of those residents, and other people living in North Shelby County, will have a hospital a lot closer to home.

The move is also beneficial for Trinity, which will now be known as Grandview Medical Center. The aging facility had been built in 1966 to serve the booming neighborhoods around Eastwood Mall. As the years went by, the mall closed and much of the growth in the area moved south, to the 280 area, said J.M. "Mickey" Trimm, a hospital consultant and professor at UAB's School of Health Professions.

"I think they are following their customers," Trimm said.

The effective life span of a hospital is about 40 years, and the cost to build a new one can top \$400 million, Trimm said. So Trinity got a good deal with the purchase of the old HealthSouth building, which it completed at a much lower cost than building from scratch.

Keith Granger, CEO of Trinity/Grandview, said the new hospital was constructed as a modern facility – with technology and outpatient services built into the design. The older facility was becoming more and more difficult to update, he said.

“We’ve had a house that served us extremely well for 50 years,” Granger said. “But in those 50 years, we saw multiple additions. We saw one unit added to another unit. And again, it might be like starting off with a two-bedroom house, but by the time you get up to five bedrooms not everything flows exactly the way you might want it to be.”

In 2001, the proposed Digital Hospital, which was a collaboration between HealthSouth and Oracle, was an idea that was ahead of its time. Aaron Beam, the former CFO for HealthSouth, left the company in 1997. But even then, plans were in the works for a massive hospital designed for high-tech equipment and remote information access. Although HealthSouth CEO Richard Scrushy has bad qualities – which led to a felony conviction and prison sentence – the hospital is a testament to his vision, Beam said.

HealthSouth was a leader in offering outpatient and rehabilitation services. Outpatient procedures will comprise an estimated 60 to 70 percent of the services at Grandview, Granger said.

The placement of the hospital was also well thought out, Beam said.

“Geographically, there was a need for a hospital in that area,” he said.

For years, other hospitals in the area fought the deal – most notably, Brookwood Medical Center and St. Vincent’s. Brookwood executives estimated that the opening of Grandview could cost them as much as \$17 million in annual business.

Since the end of the legal battle in 2013, Grandview has transcended much of its history, which includes the HealthSouth fraud controversy and the long legal battle with nearby hospitals. Here’s a brief timeline that includes the hospital’s highs and lows:

**March 26, 2001:** HealthSouth Corp. and Oracle Corp. announce a partnership to build a “digital” hospital. Construction is projected to take between two and three years. Features will include technology allowing doctors to remotely access patients’ electronic medical records.

**Sept. 12, 2001:** HealthSouth obtains special exemption from state approval process for new hospitals. Other hospitals later file suit over the deal.

**Nov. 28, 2001:** HealthSouth executives, including Richard Scrushy, hold a groundbreaking ceremony for the hospital.

**March 19, 2003:** HealthSouth and its CEO, Richard Scrushy, are charged with fraud in a scheme that involved falsifying \$1.4 billion in profits. The company’s stock plummets and the fate of the digital hospital falls into doubt.

**March 26, 2003:** Two years to the day after announcing plans to build the digital hospital, the construction company building the facility halts all work on the project. The hospital was 40 percent complete at the time.

**Jan. 24, 2008:** HealthSouth agrees to sell its headquarters and unfinished digital hospital to Daniel Corp.

**September 2008:** Executives from Trinity Medical Center announce plans to buy and finish the digital hospital, after abandoning a plan to build a hospital in Irondale.

**Nov. 19, 2010:** After regulators approved the hospital, executives for Brookwood Medical Center and St. Vincent's Health System announced plans to file a lawsuit to keep Trinity from moving to 280.

**May 17, 2013:** Trinity finally wins legal battle to move to 280. Soon after the decision, construction started again at the site.

**July 31, 2013:** Officials announce a name change. As soon as the move is complete, Trinity Medical Center will be known as Grandview Medical Center.

**Oct. 10, 2015:** Grandview Medical Center will start taking patients at 6 a.m. Patients at the Trinity campus in Crestwood will be transported by ambulance to the new facility all day. Trinity Medical Center will close its doors after the last patient has been moved.

Granger has moved a hospital before. In 1983, he led the relocation of Flowers Hospital in Dothan, which was carried by ambulances in one day – as is the plan for Trinity.

“I would say that probably the thing that is most distinguishing now – 30 years later doing this move – is probably the evolution of technology, particularly the information technology side,” Granger said. “In this case, we’ve got to maintain those electronic capabilities at [Trinity], move that patient and make it seamless for that electronic record to follow the patient.”

He said moving a hospital is a lot like moving a home. Except in this case, the hospital had to fight in court to win the right to move.

“We never had people fighting to keep us out. We had our competition wanting to keep us out, but we never had neighborhoods wanting to keep us out,” Granger said.

For the last three months, employees have had the opportunity to spend time at Grandview to orient to the new facility. There will be a period of adjustment as staff members adjust to their new digs, but Granger said he hopes it won't be noticeable for patients as the team settles in.

“They are going to have to learn that, you know, maybe my socks are not in the third drawer to the right, maybe they're now over to the left,” Granger said. “There will be a lot of that familiarization that will happen. Again, anytime you go into a new facility, you have to kind of learn your way around.”