Veterans Memorial Hospital

What started as a vision as far back as 1938, today continues to be a leader in quality health care in northeast Iowa.

Exceptional Care by Exceptional People
The drive to build the hospital started in 1938 after seven persons were seriously injured in a head-on crash near Waukon. The medical office of Drs. Rominger and Jeffries, located above what was Klenske Drug Store, was immediately furnished with beds so the seven victims could be “hospitalized.” That medical office continued to serve as a hospital when needed.

A short time thereafter, Drs. Rominger and Jeffries expanded and began a maternity hospital in a gray framed house in downtown Waukon.

In 1947, the City of Waukon purchased the land for the erection of the hospital. The community came together to raise funds to construct the building that would care for people for many years to come.
Veterans Memorial Hospital opened its doors on October 1, 1950, under the management of the Good Samaritan Society. It had an OB department, an operating room, and eight inpatient rooms with 12 beds on the main level and 14 on the upper level.
HOSPITAL ‘OPEN HOUSE’ ON SUNDAY

ALL READY FOR VISITOR INFUX 6-HOUR PERIOD

Attendants to Be On Hand to Tell Of Work Done

The final touches are being completed this week for the open house of the Veterans Memorial hospital on Sunday. The general public is cordially invited and urged to attend the event to be held 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. During that time, visitors will be allowed to visit every section of the hospital.

However, many of the rooms will be closed until as to some of the departments where work is being done. This is necessary to prevent any possible damage to the equipment or to the patients. Special provisions have been made to ensure the safety and comfort of the visitors.

C. H. Magruder, closely identified with efforts to bring a modern hospital to Waukon, hopes work will be under way by the beginning of the next fiscal year. He resigned from the local board some time ago. He is now a director of the Good Samaritan society which has taken over operation of the hospital.

Harry Hanes of Waukon, new chairman of the hospital board, has served many hours of volunteer time in preparing the hospital for opening. He is well-known for his efforts in this direction.

The hospital will be open for inspection. There will be special exhibits and laboratories which will be on hand to discuss the details of the hospital. Special interest will be paid to the nursing care which will be on display.

Republican Campaign Opened by Big Rally

NAME JUDGES, CLERKS FOR SCHOOL VOTE

New Pastor TALLE DECRIES U. S. ACTION, ASKS CHANGE

Other Speakers At County-wide

Father Baxter In Visit to Waukon

Mollie Williams Dies Wednesday
Vendors and suppliers from as far south as Cedar Rapids to as far west as Des Moines helped provide equipment and supplies for the hospital.
We Take Pride In Furnishing the Complete Kitchen Equipment For The Veterans Memorial Hospital Waukon, Iowa

We Specialize in . . .

CUSTOM-BUILT KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

OTHER RECENT HOSPITAL AND SCHOOL INSTALLATIONS
- Delaware County Memorial Hospital, Manchester
- Ringgold County Hospital, Mt. Ayr
- Adair County Hospital, Greenfield
- Independence State Hospital, Independence
- State Hospital and School, Winterset
- Buena Vista County Hospital, Storm Lake
- Kossuth and Cleveland Schools, Celina, Nevada
- Park Ave., Phillips and Meredith Schools, Des Moines
- Buena Vista College, Storm Lake
- Zita Club, Waterloo
- St. Cecilia Cathedral High School, Omaha

Economical, Efficient HOSPITAL OPERATION made possible by the correct selection of MODERN EQUIPMENT

HOCKENBERG'S Has The BEST And Largest Selection In IOWA

HOCKENBERG FIXTURE & SUPPLY CO.
209 Walnut Street DES MOINES, IOWA
IOWA'S LARGEST HOTEL AND RESTAURANT EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLY HOUSE
The operating room had the most modern equipment available at the time. From the table to the lights, it was all state-of-the-art.
This view shows the small room at the west end of the first floor corridor of the new hospital. Located at the far end of the surgical suite, this room contains special equipment for use in the operating room and houses sterile supplies of various kinds. Sterile water supply, autoclave, sterile linen and other necessities for surgical use are provided for in this suite.—Waukon Newspapers photo.
While there was a four-bed ward on each of the patient care floors, most rooms were semi-private with phones, a call light system, modern décor for the era and lighting.
The radiology department was also state-of-the-art. It was located in the basement of the new hospital and was easily accessible for all departments.
1950

FROM THE POSTCARD COLLECTION OF WALT SEARCY

IN OLD WAUKON...
Mary Riley, R.N., was a founding “mother” of Veterans Memorial Hospital, working as OB and Evening Supervisor from 1953 until her retirement in 1987. She assisted in hundreds of deliveries in our Maternity Services Department and always felt the care given at this hospital was much more personal than larger facilities.
“The Doctors worked hard for not very much pay and would sometimes receive a chicken in return for delivering a baby. Nurses weren’t paid by the hour like they are now. We were hired by the month and didn’t really receive any orientation. We just went to work, and we worked hard.”

“It was quite common to have a patient in the hospital for quite some time, maybe even for several months. That’s how we could operate in the 60’s and 70’s with just one RN on each floor because we didn’t have near the paper work as they do now.”

Dr. Clark W. Rominger
“It was quite common to have a patient in the hospital for quite some time, maybe even for several months,” adds Mary. “We didn’t have the insurance companies telling us how long we could keep a patient and our documentation was a fraction of what is needed today. We documented the facts and never had to worry about any lawsuits. That’s how we could operate in the 60’s and 70’s with just one RN on each floor because we didn’t have near the paper work as they do now.”

Esther Sunderman, RN
“I never wore a stethoscope. We were taught to use our eyes. We would walk in a room to visit a patient and just watch them to tell what was happening to them. I am so glad I got out of nursing before AIDS came along because I could never wear those gloves they have to wear now.”
“Dr. Jeffries would come into OB shortly after his patient was admitted into the hospital, change into his scrubs and sit in the labor room, cigar in his mouth, saying ’tell me when you are ready Mary and I will help you take her in.’ His mothers were never in labor long. He was there, in no rush. His moms were comfortable with him so they were relaxed—sort of an early natural childbirth process, really, before we were even using the words.”
“Dr. Clark R. Rominger was the one person who made this hospital. He was the most dedicated and wisest doctor I had the privilege to be associated with in the health field. Dr. Clark was on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. He was almost always cheerful and ready to come to stitch up a laceration, cast a fracture or deliver a baby. Dr. Clark was indeed one in a million.”
Until some of the ‘younger’ doctors came, Dr. Clark was the one on call, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. After calling him several times on our shift, it was really a penance for the nurse to call again. He was almost always cheerful and ready to come to stitch up a laceration, cast a fracture or deliver a baby. Dr. Clark was indeed “one in a million.”
Dr. B. J. Dillon was another founding physician who worked here until he was no longer able. His patients dearly loved him.
In 1962, Veterans Memorial Hospital had its first expansion. It added 15 more patient rooms, and another shower room on each floor.
Mary Brandt began her employment at VMH as a nurse’s aide in 1960. As an aide, she worked the medical floor, the surgical floor, and many nights in the obstetrics unit.

“I remember having as many as 14 babies in the nursery at one time, having to take care of them all myself,” states Mary. “That’s in the days when the Moms stayed a week. Just keeping up with the diapers, bottles and rocking of the babies was all I could get done in one night.”
“Eloise Meyer, the current Director of Nursing in 1967, said she thought I’d like to work in surgery, so I went and observed and the next thing I knew, I was on surgery call,” states Mary. “We didn’t have any pagers or cell phones like they do now. I can remember putting the phone in my open window, just so I could be outside a little, while I was on call for any emergency surgeries.”
Shortly after 1980, Mary applied for the position of Director of Purchasing & Material’s Management, after the current director, Carl Christianson, was elected to office. “Supplies were always tight and we never wasted anything,” adds Mary. “We even cut our heavy surgical rubber gloves apart and used them as rubber bands.”
Mary Brandt’s Memories

“It is really amazing how far this hospital has come over the years,” states Mary. “There are so many more services here now than ever before. It is really a nice hospital for this community to have.”

Dr. Louis Bray with patient.
The local ambulance service was managed by the Gilbert family until they turned it over to the City of Waukon in 1977. Hospital staff then began to manage the service. Local ambulance services who frequently bring patients to VMH include Lansing, Waterville, Harpers Ferry, Postville, New Albin and Monona, in addition to Waukon.
First Patient Flight

In 1962, the first patient was flown by airplane from the airport to a larger hospital for advanced care. Today they fly from a helicopter that lands right by the emergency department.
City of Waukon Ownership

On January 1, 1975, the City of Waukon took over the ownership of Veterans Memorial Hospital from the Good Samaritan Society.

Dr. James Stull
In 1976, the second expansion of Veterans Memorial Hospital occurred. It added the current Emergency Department, X-ray Department, and Large Conference Room as well as a new front entrance for the hospital.
New ER Rooms

Photo of the new ERI room following the 1976 building project.

Gwen Schroedel, RN in new ER
Erma Williams was hired in 1967 as the night time switchboard operator. She quickly assumed other duties, and in 1974 she became the Business Office Manager of the hospital. It was a position she held until her retirement in 1992.
Erma William’s Memories

“I remember that everything was done manually,” remarks Erma. “The auditors would come with a whole list of bills and we would manually have to search through them all and look them each up one at a time. But we always had a good CPA firm in Dubuque to call with questions, and they still do today.”
“I think one of the biggest improvements over the years is how the privacy of the patients is so respected,” adds Erma. “There never used to be any privacy in the business office like there is now. You can come and go from the hospital as a patient and no one knows you were there, unless you choose to publicize it. I feel fortunate to have worked here, and I have many wonderful friends and memories.”
In the early 1980’s, VMH entered the computer age. Mary and Erma selected the first computer system. “I’ll never forget when our hospital administrator decided the hospital needed a computer. The computer service was located in Winterset, Iowa, so we had to fly back and forth as we made our computer decision.”
Late 1980’s

As payment for health care changed, VMH also changed. Insurance companies were not allowing patients to remain in the hospital as long. In the early 1990’s, the upper level of the hospital was turned into an outpatient specialty clinic as it was no longer needed for inpatient care use.
On July 1, 1995, VMH began managing the Allamakee County Public Health Department. The office remained in the Allamakee Courthouse until the hospital’s building project was nearly complete in 2000.
A new Franciscan Skemp Waukon Clinic was built in 1998. The Clinic was later attached to the hospital during the hospital’s building and renovation project later that year.
In May of 1998, Veterans Memorial Hospital broke ground for its $7 million expansion and renovation project. Over $1.4 million of this expense was raised from the generosity of the area communities served by Veterans Memorial Hospital.

A new heating and cooling system was installed, a private bathroom built in each inpatient room, and a new Surgical Suite, Laboratory, Ambulance Port and CT Scanner were also part of this project.
Third Addition 1998-2000

This project allowed for one central heating and air conditioning unit replacing the 40 year old boiler system, allowing each patient room to have control of its own heating and cooling needs. The other main reason for the project was to add a shower to each patient room, replacing the single shower available on the entire patient floor. In addition, a new surgery suite and sterile corridor, laboratory, ambulance port and CT scanner were added to the hospital. Plus each area of the hospital was renovated in this project.
Construction Photos
Construction Photos
Before

Front Entrance

After
During Construction

Front Entrance

After
Emergency Room Entrance

Before

After
Patient Rooms

Before

After
Before

Nurse’s Station

After
Nurse’s Station

Before

After
Before

Nurse Report Room

After
Before

Emergency Room

After
Maternity Services

Before

After
Maternity Services

Birthing Tub

Nurse’s Station
Surgical Unit
Community and Home Care

Before

After
Laboratory Services

Before

After
Former Walk-in Coolers

Dietary Services

After
Before

Financial Services

After
Before

Switchboard

After
Before

Health Information

After
Administration
Before

After

Physical Therapy
Before

Boiler Room

After
Added in 2000 and dedicated in memory of Ingrid Dehli Hogan, a long-time VMH employee, a Chapel was added for patients and their families to reflect and have quiet time during the stay of a patient.
1998 Capital Campaign
Chemotherapy Services

Following the 2000 building project Chemotherapy patients were moved to the 3rd floor so that Becky Welper, R.N., Chemotherapy Coordinator, could administer chemotherapy treatments to our local cancer patients.

This room was redecorated thanks to the many local donations from patients and families who utilized the service.
Massage Therapy Services

In the fall of 2000, VMH began offering a new service, massage therapy and reflexology with certified massage therapist, Edna Wyninger. Complimentary massages are given to our OB patients in addition to our cancer patients.
VMH upgraded to a Paramedic Provisional EMS service in 2005. Paramedic service is the highest level of emergency service available in the State of Iowa.
VMH manages the Waukon Ambulance Service for the City. Local ambulance services who frequently bring patients to VMH include Lansing, Waterville, Harpers Ferry, Postville, New Albin, and Monona, in addition to Waukon.
2004 marked the upturn of our Maternity Services Department. From that year forward, we have had continued growth in our OB deliveries and over the last 5 years, we have had over 100 deliveries each year.

Dr. Dave Schwartz
In 2005, the Gundersen Lutheran Waukon Clinic was built and attached to the south end of the hospital.
Veterans Memorial Hospital was instrumental in beginning its weekend clinics in the late 1990’s for “non emergencies.” These clinics are still well utilized today every Saturday and Sunday.

Dr. Kenneth Olson
In 2005, a new diabetes education program began, and received national certification from the American Diabetes Association. Yet today, this program offers one on one or group education on the best way to manage diabetes. In addition, it was the first program to offer continuous glucose monitoring in the region.
In the fall of 2006, two rooms located on the upper level of VMH were turned into diagnostic sleep labs. These labs allow patients to spend the night sleeping while a highly trained sleep tech watches by computer and monitors their activity throughout the night.
In 2008, the VMH Nurses won the Community Services Award given by Community Connections.
In 2008 VMH began to offer nuclear cardiac stress testing. This testing can increase the likelihood of finding heart disease by 20% when compared to the traditional treadmill stress test.

Dr. Steven Perkins with patient.
In 2009, one of the outpatient clinic rooms was transformed into a beautiful pediatric exam room for both weekend clinic and ER pediatric patients. This room was redecorated with funds donated by the Ethan Troy Livingston family, in memory of Ethan Troy, who died of SIDS on Sept. 4, 2007, just three months after his birth.
In the fall of 2008, the Same Day Surgery was refigured and remodeled, allowing for 4 private patient bays.
Digital Radiology System

Dr. Andrea Venteicher with Maxine Thiele, X-ray Supervisor.

Fall 2009, VMH upgraded to a digital radiology system.
Physicians

While our physicians and providers come and go, VMH continues to strive to give quality, personalized health care, right here at home.

We promote our exceptional health care by exceptional people.

Dr. Richard Perry with former VMH R.N., Jane Hawes.
“You still get the best care here at Veterans Memorial Hospital. It is so much more personal here than it is in the big hospitals. Large hospitals use too many monitors and don’t allow the good one-on-one care the patients receive in Waukon. The building is incidental—it’s the people who are the important factor.”

Dr. Alden Wiley with patient.
In November of 2010, VMH staff won the national Press Ganey Summit Award for exceptional ER scores in patient satisfaction!
The “Caring for All” Donor Wall was constructed in 2011, and acknowledges all of the generous donors to the hospital since the capital campaign in 1998. The donor wall was designed to thank those donors who have contributed in one larger donation or those who have been regular, annual donors, and also recognizes memorial donations.