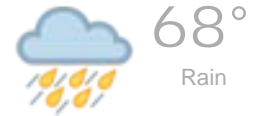




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## Clarinda Regional Health Center to provide 24-7 air ambulance service

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Posted: Thursday, June 14, 2012 10:39 am

By Bob Eschliman World-Herald News Service | 0 comments

CLARINDA – Clarinda Regional Health Center announced Wednesday afternoon a new partnership with Mercy Medical Center-Des Moines and Air Methods/LifeNet to base an air ambulance in Clarinda.

“When minutes matter for cardiac events, brain injuries or other traumatic medical emergencies, our area of the state will now have the benefit of a regionally-based air ambulance,” CRHC CEO Chris Stipe said. “This means southwest Iowa and northwest Missouri residents can expect an even quicker medical transfer to an urban medical center when specialized care is needed.”



Beginning in September, a fully staffed and equipped Bell 407 helicopter will be stationed either at the CRHC helipad, or at a maintenance hangar at Schenck Field-Clarinda Municipal Airport. It is expected to serve an area within 40-50 miles of Clarinda, stretching across southwest Iowa and northwest Missouri.

“This is a hugely exciting big step for not only Clarinda Regional Health Center but also for the community, as well,” Stipe said. “This means faster, better care, getting patients to the hospital of their choice in Lincoln, Omaha, St. Joseph or Des Moines faster than was ever possible before.”

The Clarinda hospital moved to its new state-of-the-art facility in January. At the time, the new hospital campus included a heated helipad with a heated pathway to the hospital's emergency department to allow for faster transfer of critical patients, even in the most inclement of winter weather.

The publicly elected CRHC Board of Directors also expressed an interest in securing a full-time ambulance service to serve all of southwest Iowa and northwest Missouri. Little did they know Mercy and Air Methods also were looking to provide community-based air ambulance service.

“Air Methods looked at what they've been doing –putting a helicopter on top of a medical center and flying off to

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wherever they were needed – and then looked at where they were making those flights to, and realized it made a lot of sense to position the helicopters where they're needed the most," Stipe said. "So, if you look at where we're at – we're flanked by I-35 and I-29 with I-80 to the

north – there are a lot of communities and hospitals to be served in a 40- to 50-mile radius."

Communities with hospitals in close proximity to Clarinda, including Shenandoah, Atlantic, Corning and Hamburg in Iowa, as well as in Maryville, Mo., will see an immediate impact from the new partnership. Patients will be transported directly to medical centers in Omaha, Lincoln, Des Moines and St. Joseph.

"It's important to note patients aren't going to just be flown to Mercy-Des Moines," Stipe added. "They will go to whichever hospital they need or want to go to."

CRHC, which is affiliated with Mercy through an administrative services agreement, will provide the facilities to house the air ambulance service. Mercy will provide the highly skilled flight paramedics and nurses that will make up the air medical staff. Air Methods will provide the pilots and mechanics needed for the service to operate.

"I can't guarantee these people – all of whom are going to be very highly paid – will all live in Clarinda, but they'll be close by," Stipe said. "This is going to have a huge impact on the local economy."

Mercy and Air Methods have been long-time partners, pioneering air ambulance service in Iowa. They recently partnered to provide a MercyOne helicopter in Knoxville, and when they learned CRHC also was interested in hosting an aircraft, discussions began in earnest.

"Our MercyOne air ambulance program has been very successful in terms of fast response times," Mercy Director of Emergency Transport Services Dan Keough said. "Although southwest Iowans and northwest Missourians are used to wonderful helicopter response from Air Methods/LifeNet services based in urban centers, this regional service will dramatically decrease response time to local hospitals. We are pleased to be able to expand our resources to this area of the state to enhance existing critical care air transport services by having a team closer to the patient."

Air Methods Senior Vice President Ed Rupert said the Clarinda-based flight program is a "win-win" for patients and for area hospitals who already use Air Methods/LifeNet services.

"Clarinda is geographically located between Omaha, Des Moines and St. Joseph, Mo.," he said. "So, from a flight time scenario, we felt there was an opportunity to serve this region better."

Stipe concluded by saying much of the credit for the new partnership needs to go with the elected board members at CRHC. He said their "progressive vision" for the future of healthcare in southwest Iowa led to the opportunity.

"Their vision really positioned Clarinda Regional Health Center well for an opportunity like this," he said. "We're elated that healthcare in the region is going to be so greatly improved by this partnership with two first-class organizations like Mercy and Air Methods."

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