



## Lincoln Hospital is a community asset

By Mark Smith, Editor, Davenport Times

**(March 2003)** Monday night, a group of Davenport city officials and individuals involved in business here were challenged to come up with this particular community's strengths – assets that would be a drawing card for potential residents, investors and employers.

It didn't take long for someone to suggest that the presence of Lincoln Hospital in Davenport should be placed high on the list of community assets.

Not only is the hospital a major employer in Lincoln County, but it also is a dynamic symbol that we have of a fading commodity – medical care that is within reach in our own hometown.

In view of current economic conditions, it is a presence that we can no longer take for granted. The fact is, rural hospitals are beginning to succumb to the tightening economy that has shifted resources to the big city medical center monsters.

Rural facilities just can't keep up with the spiraling cost of providing care, especially when reimbursements from government programs hardly reach the 50 percent level.

We got a little scare early last week when we saw in a Spokane newspaper that because of the economic environment, "Lincoln Hospital may not be around much longer."

In our coverage of the hospital district board of commissioners' monthly meetings, we suspected that the Spokane reporter must not have heard something quite right, but we checked with administrator Tom Martin just to make sure.

Our hospital isn't in danger of imminent closure, he assured us. But, it is true that the money's tight, that expenses are exceeding what the hospital takes in strictly for health care services – and that if it wasn't for generous giving from individuals and memorial funds, and that the hospital operates as a public taxing district, well, things could be much different.

Martin was in Olympia recently lobbying for legislation put forward by our own 7th District State Rep. Cathy McMorris. HB 1162 would move our state to conformity with neighboring states and the federal government in providing reimbursements under the state's Medicaid program, like the feds do under Medicare.

Passage of the legislation would give a little breathing room for small hospitals like ours.

These community institutions not only provide employment for many in our area, but are a lifeline for those who fall ill or are injured and need medical care immediately. Many eventually go on to Spokane, to be sure, but the first line of medical defense for so many is right here.

We urge the Legislature to pass this bill and Gov. Gary Locke to sign it into law.

– *MLS*