

## Searcy Hospital Closing Impacts Community



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(MT. VERNON, Ala.) - It's hard to find someone in the small town of Mount Vernon who doesn't have friends or family working at Searcy Mental Hospital.

"A lot of local people are employed there," local pharmacist Margie Wiley said. "Families, households of four and five probably work at the same place."

Opened in 1900, the hospital has become a major employer and cornerstone of the community with a population around 1,600. But now, with the state announcing they're shutting Searcy Hospital down and laying off its 390 employees, there's a good deal of concern among residents and the mayor.

"It's going to impact us tremendously," Mayor Jerry Lundy told

LOCAL 15 News.

Lundy says he attended a luncheon at the hospital on January 31, and there was no indication of the closure whatsoever.

"We're all shocked right now," Lundy said.

Lundy said approximately half of the 390 employees live in the town of Mount Vernon. The mayor hopes those laid off won't have to move elsewhere to find work. He's also concerned about the economic impact on local businesses frequented by employees.

"[Hospital employees] spend money at our gas stations, restaurants and pharmacy," Lundy said.

Wiley, a pharmacist at Mt. Vernon Pharmacy, told LOCAL 15 more than half of their business is from the hospital.

"[Business] is probably going to drop off," Wiley said.

Mae Young, now retired, worked at Searcy for more than 25 years.

"It hurts," Young said of the closure. "There's a big need for that place here, because I know some people who are residents up there."

The hospital is set to close by Sept. 30.

"We haven't felt the impact yet," Lundy said. "They'll be downsizing until then, and I imagine it will sort of be a domino effect."

Lundy says he plans on hiring laid off security officers from the hospital onto the Mt. Vernon police force. The mayor also says historical preservation of the facility is key, and he will be working with the local historical society to get the ball moving.

Patients from the facility will be transitioned into community-based treatment.

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