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Construction under way on new Bryce Hospital

Hospital's replacement on schedule; Partlow buildings part of design

By Lydia Seabol Avant, Staff Writer

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TUSCALOOSA | Construction on the new \$81 million psychiatric hospital that will replace Bryce Hospital is under way.

A new access road off Helen Keller Boulevard has been completed leading to the construction site, said John Ziegler, spokesman for the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

The foundation of the 225,000-square-foot building is under construction, he said.

Large excavators are now digging and concrete is being poured at the site.

According to the Department of Mental Health, construction is on schedule for the 268-bed facility to open in May 2013.

The building is being built on the front 20 acres of the former W.D. Partlow Developmental Center campus. Partlow, which previously served people with intellectual disabilities, closed Dec. 28. The new psychiatric hospital will incorporate most of the existing buildings at Partlow, including an old administrative building that has been vacant for more than 20 years.

Although the Partlow campus lost many trees during the April 27 tornado and the vacant administrative building received some roof damage, it is structurally solid, Ziegler said. It will be a featured building incorporated into the newly built hospital structure.

"The building has been in the plan since the inception of the project," Ziegler said.

Because the building was originally constructed using columns instead of supporting walls, it allows the interior to be completely reconfigured, he added.

The building has been designed using "evidence-based design," which means that everything from the color of the walls to the layout of the building has been researched and tested to ensure that it is efficient and the best use of space for its purpose. The architecture firm selected by the state, Sherlock, Smith and Adams, worked with a national expert on the design of psychiatric hospitals for plans for the new facility.

The new psychiatric hospital will replace the 150-year-old Bryce Hospital, which was bought by the University of Alabama in 2010. UA is also managing the construction of the replacement hospital for the mental health department.

The university wanted the land for expansion, but Bryce will continue to operate until the new hospital opens next year.

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Construction work continues Friday on the new Bryce Hospital on the former Partlow campus in Tuscaloosa.