

Searcy closing worries residents

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No date set yet for closing

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- Renee Dials

MT. VERNON, Ala. (WALA) - Some folks in Mount Vernon are worried about the future of the small town once Searcy Hospital shuts down.

Alabama Governor Robert Bentley made it official Friday when he announced Searcy will close as part of a long-term plan for the state's Department of Mental Health.

When Searcy Hospital closes for good, some fear the economic health of the community will suffer a major setback.

In addition to the 250 patients at the hospital, nearly 400 employees work at the state mental health hospital.

"To me, personally, I don't think it's a real good idea, its going to prolong so much for so many people to travel so far, it's going to cost a lot of jobs. I know people who've been there a long time," Kent Achols said.

Achols isn't the only person who knows someone working at the hospital. Searcy has been a major employer in the area for generations.

Margorie Boxly said she has family working at the hospital including a daughter who works there now.

"I think it's terrible. It's going to hurt the businesses; it's going to hurt the whole community," Boxly said.

"Personally, I hate to see it close because it's been here for so many years, and so many families around here depend on it for their income. It's been a great asset to this community. I hate to see it close," Otis Williams said.

Williams said many people work at the hospital their entire careers and generations have worked and retired there.

But, the closing comes as no surprise to another mental health provider in the area.

"We know that that facility up there is very outdated, and he had mentioned earlier, I guess last month, that they were planning on shutting down that state hospital as well as others," Tuerk Schlesinger said.

Schlesinger, the CEO of AltaPointe Health Systems says his agency will take on many of the patients who will be moved. They are the community provider in Mobile. He said they have somewhere around 55 percent of the patients in Searcy.

"And so, AltaPointe as the community mental health provider in this area, that provides outpatients residential and hospital services will increase our service provision in order to be able to take care of these people that are in the community," Schlesinger said.

The governor is also ordering construction to resume on a new 268-bed mental health hospital in Tuscaloosa after that project was temporarily halted a month ago.