

Lakeway set to get area's newest hospital

Private group plans to open 100-bed acute-care hospital in 2011

By [Mary Ann Roser](#)
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Another hospital is planned for Central Texas, this time in the western part of Travis County, rather than in busy Williamson County, where three hospitals have opened in the past year.

Lakeway Regional Medical Center will be part of a 54-acre development at 3000 RM 620 South. The official groundbreaking is Saturday, said Dr. Sam De Maio, an Austin cardiologist who is chairman of the private development group building the hospital, Lakeway Regional Medical Center Development LLC.

It will be part of a development that will feature restaurants, stores, a hotel, day care facility, medical offices and a rehabilitation hospital.

Lakeway Mayor Steve Swan said he believed the development would be the largest built in city. The total project has an estimated value of \$250 million.

The hospital will have 70 to 80 licensed beds and 25 emergency room beds, De Maio said. It will be 70 to 80 percent owned by physician investors and will serve the fast-growing Lakeway, Bee Cave and South Lake Travis areas, said De Maio of Capital Cardiovascular Specialists.

It will be a general hospital that takes "all comers," not a specialty hospital that caters to well-heeled customers who come for elective procedures, De Maio said.

"We'd be just like Seton or St. David's in the middle of town," he said.

The hospital is expected to open in 2011 and will have an emergency department, outpatient services, heart care, women and infant services, cancer services and critical care.

Meanwhile, the Seton Family of Hospitals is planning a hospital for Hays County, and another hospital is planned for Marble Falls.

Not too long ago, the Austin area had too few hospital beds for its booming population. Today, some of the new hospitals in Williamson County are not meeting expectations for patients.

"At some places, it's more than we expected, and in some places, it's less than we expected," said Greg Hartman, a senior vice president for the Seton Family of Hospitals, which owns the Seton Medical Center Williamson County and jointly operates Cedar Park Regional Medical Center. "It's a mix."

But Hartman said he doesn't think Central Texas is in danger of overbuilding. Based on population growth projections and demographics, Hartman said, there is a continuing need for more hospital beds.

"I don't know about that specific location," Hartman said of Lakeway, "but in terms of the Central Texas region ... we definitely think we need more hospital beds."

De Maio said he had no doubt the Lakeway hospital was needed and added that city officials proposed the idea.

Swan said city officials "probably encouraged a medical center of some sort, but I don't think we did any significant pushing."

A hospital will become crucial as the population continues to grow, he said.

De Maio had been an investor in the Hospital at Westlake Medical Center but ended his association there when he became involved with the Lakeway project.

He is recruiting doctors to join the hospital staff and said "most of primary care doctors in Lakeway have invested in this project."

Courtesy of JB Goodwin