

MGH, MedStar merger officially announced

■ **Montgomery General officials say hospital will remain an integral part of the greater Olney community**

BY CONTESSA CRISOSTOMO
STAFF WRITER

Montgomery General Hospital and MedStar Health officially announced their merger Friday morning during a celebration to break ground on their expansion project at the Olney hospital.

"We've made a lot of strides and now we're taking another significant step forward," Peter Monge, Montgomery General president and chief executive officer, told the more than 100 elected officials, dignitaries and hospital staff who attended the event.

Monge noted that the non-profit community hospital that was founded in 1918 by well-known local doctor Jacob Bird would remain focused on the community.

"We will go about business as usual, but now we can move quickly on things," Monge said. "We have more money to work with."

The same Montgomery General doctors, nurses and therapists will be on hand to treat patients, hospital officials said.

"What MedStar will bring is the best resources, medical education, research and put it in the hands of the caregivers," said Kenneth A. Samet, MedStar



CHRIS ROSSI/THE GAZETTE

Kenneth Samet (left), president of MedStar Health, and Peter Monge (center), president of Montgomery General Hospital, shake hands after a ribbon-cutting ceremony Friday morning to celebrate the partnership between the two healthcare organizations.

Health president and chief executive officer.

County Council President Michael J. Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown said the hospital's merger and expansion project is an "important next step in the evolution" of Olney.

"The hospital is one of the centers of the community," Knapp said. "It is important to take the next step in the evolution."

Knapp presented the hospital with a proclamation along with Councilwoman Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett

Park.

"This is the future and the past brought together," Floreen said.

The 149-bed hospital will add two buildings in its \$30 billion expansion project: a three-story building that will double the hospital's emergency department and a two-story building for administrative offices.

Hospital officials said the current facility was built to treat 35,000 patients a year. The expansion will allow for 60,000 patients a year.

The expansion will also allow the hospital to convert nearly all in-patient units to pri-

vate rooms, move outpatient services to more accessible locations, construct a new and much larger cafeteria, provide required additional parking, and retain flexibility for future needs, hospital officials reported.

Montgomery General officials announced last March that they were looking to partner with another hospital or healthcare organization, citing concern over finances and overtures from potential partners.

"We had a number of difficult years, but now things have turned around and we are profitable," Monge had said in making the announcement. "But when you're not profitable, it forces you to look at alternatives."

The hospital decided in October to merge with MedStar Health of Columbia, a \$2.9 billion organization of seven other hospitals and healthcare services in the Baltimore-Washington area.

Construction is expected to begin next month and be completed by 2010.