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## Kilgore OKs funding for hospital ER

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A 24-hour emergency room is set to open by next year in the city's only hospital.

The City Council on Thursday approved spending \$300,000 toward the project. Kilgore has been without an ER since Laird Memorial Hospital closed its emergency services in 2007. Laird, now Allegiance Specialty Hospital, will be renovated and used to house the new ER.

The Roy H. Laird Foundation is putting up \$675,000 of its money for the new ER and additional adult psychiatric service at the facility and asked the city for the additional money. Kilgore's City Council called Thursday's special session to hear the foundation's proposal. The city's portion of the funding will come from money set aside for such projects, City Manager Jeff Howell said.

"(Those funds) are there specifically for improvements to our buildings, and this is our building," Howell said.

Other than the ER, 19 more beds will be added to the psychiatric care unit at the hospital. Good Shepherd President and CEO Ed Banos said the hospital caters to geriatric patients only, and the new beds will be used to treat adult psychiatric patients.

"There is such a demand in East Texas for psychiatric services, many hospitals will look to us when the facility is opened," Banos said. "Adult psychiatric care is the biggest need we see. Unfortunately, there are not enough beds to treat them. Most state facilities are full."

Banos said he has been in the area for only two years, and he saw that Kilgore needed advanced health care. He assured the council the care provided in the new ER will be equal to any other emergency room Good Shepherd operates.

The foundation's financial adviser, Pamela DeCeault, said the foundation has been receiving smaller and smaller

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disbursements since 2008, because of a waning national economy and sinking prices in the oil and gas industries. She said the renovations will severely reduce the foundation's finances.

Mayor Ronnie Spradlin said he was on the board when the hospital closed its medical services in 2007. "I think this is a banner day in Kilgore," Spradlin said. "I wouldn't have given you all a snowball's chance of reopening the hospital."

Spradlin ended the session with, "The motion carries, and we have a hospital."

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