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## FSU explains partnership with hospital

By Ashley McKeen

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The Jackson County Chamber of Commerce's First Friday Breakfast hosted Dr. Daniel Van Durme of Florida State University's College of Medicine. Van Durme spoke on the importance of the new school to rural Florida hospitals.

Dr. Van Durme is professor and chair of the Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health, one of five academic departments in the FSU College of Medicine. Prior to his move to FSU, Van Durme practiced in south and central Florida.

According to Van Durme, FSU's program was the first new medical school in the United States in 20 years. It was a struggle to get it opened, he said.

Van Durme explained that back in the late 1990s, when talk of constructing the medical school first started, many in the medical field were opposed — including Van Durme himself.

"Honestly, there was a lot of opposition. Many medical professionals around the state thought we had enough medical schools, and believed that constructing one at FSU would be a waste of money," Van Durme said.

"But when the idea was heard by the Florida legislators, FSU officials assured us all that the school would be 'fundamentally different.'

"They wanted to focus on meeting the health care needs of the entire Florida population, by training students to serve rural and minority areas; this being a focus that other state schools don't have," Van Durme said.

With that, the legislature approved the college's development, under the condition that it keep true to its statement of being "fundamentally different" from other state medical schools.

FSU's program was then required by the state to incorporate rural health training. The university has since made it a priority area in the college's mission, according to Van Durme.

With the rural health training requirement in place, Van Durme says he's grateful for the resources of Jackson Hospital and its partnership, or "marriage," to the FSU medical school program.

Jackson Hospital in Marianna has served as a rural training site for the college since 2002.

In fact, Dr. Van Durme calls Jackson Hospital "the star of the FSU College of Medicine rural track program."

Students participating in the rural track program spend their entire third year of medical school at Jackson Hospital in a clerkship capacity. This clerkship offers training in family practice, internal medicine, general surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, as well as pediatrics. Dr. Steven Spence of Internal Medicine Associates serves as site director.

"The purpose of the program is to attract students to rural areas and get them to say, 'Hey, I really like this. I

would like to come back and practice here,” Van Durme said.

Currently, Jackson Hospital hosts three third year medical students, one of whom is Marianna native Philip Burke.

Van Durme also addressed the high cost of practicing medicine in Florida.

In the past, the state of Florida was notorious for being one of the easiest states for students to obtain a medical license. Because of this, Van Durme says medical liability insurance costs for doctors in Florida is among the highest in the nation.

Over the past 15 or 20 years, Florida has since become known as one of the hardest states for students to get a medical license. But insurance rates for doctors have not changed.

“Florida has a really hard time getting medical school students to stay and practice in Florida, due to the rates being so high. That’s just a reality,” Van Durme said. “And the areas that hurt the absolute most are rural areas.

“So our goal is to find a way to attract these students to the rural areas, and hopefully encourage them to practice in those areas once they graduate.”

In order to make rural areas more appealing to the students, FSU officials host a meet and greet event with community members and hospital staff.

“It’s imperative that the students meet their superiors and colleagues, as well as other people in the community,” Van Durme said. “Since they plan to call Marianna home for about a year during their training, we want them to feel welcome.”

This year’s meet and greet event will be May 25 from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. in the community room of the Hundnall building, located at 4230 Hospital Drive in Marianna.

Van Durme said all are welcome to come and meet the newest medical students set to study at Jackson Hospital this year.