In 1903, Stumptown came alive near a pristine lake in Northern Montana. James J. Hill, president of the Great Northern Railway and developer of the Glacier National Park system of hotels and chalets, made the decision to reroute the rail line north to the foot of Whitefish Lake, where it continued west and then north into British Columbia. The result was a new Western town was born, and the railroad decided it needed a doctor.

When the train carrying Dr. Hugh E. Houston came over the Great Divide, "A Century of Healthcare" began for the northern residents of the Flathead Valley. Two young nurses from Chicago came along with Dr. Houston to help heal the sick and injured, but it wasn’t an easy life. They braved out-of-season snowstorms, forest fires and train derailments. A place was needed to care for people in the new Stumptown, so a hospital was built that became the first “Center of Healing.”

In 1904, a forest fire destroyed much of what was Stumptown, but spared the small Whitefish Hospital. In 1908, Brakeman Colin W. Smith was grateful. He was injured at a washout at Rondo, Montana, and brought to Dr. Houston’s hospital for care.

By 1914, the staff had grown to three capable nurses: Edna Trapp, Loretta Smith and Alma Nilsson Quinlan.

Trains were running north to Canada and south through Kalispell to Missoula in those days, connecting the nations to the logging and mining communities of Northern Montana. Injuries were common and kept Dr. Houston and his small nursing staff busy day and night.

The lighting was dim, the rooms drafty and the medicines scarce. Lifestyles were rough, and the people of Stumptown worked hard. Nurses had to boil their clothes and starch their uniforms. They pressed their aprons and caps with heavy hot irons heated on woodstoves. The nurses pulled their hair back and pinned on their white caps, proudly beginning the new tradition of patient-centered care.

As progress continued in the Flathead Valley, James Hill thought of ways to increase interest in passenger travel on the northern railroad. At about the same time, George Bird Grinnell and others were working to protect the wilderness that is now Glacier National Park. With the line established through Whitefish from the west, people could now come from both sides of the country by direct rail to experience the beauty of Northern Montana. Hill and others developed a system of grand hotels and alpine chalets to attract wealthy passengers who traveled by horseback, stagecoach or on foot. In 1910, The
Glacier Hotel and The Many Glacier Hotel were opened. With the increase in visitors to the area, the need for Dr. Houston’s hospital continued to grow as well.

In 1912, the ownership of the small hospital that served the north valley was transferred from the Great Northern Railway to Mr. and Mrs. Peter Gutensohn and J.A. Sampson, placing the future of the new town’s medical care in the hands of its own community members. That tradition continues today, as North Valley Hospital is a non-profit, community hospital with a service area that stretches from Glacier National Park through the Canyon communities and into Columbia Falls from the east, and on to Eureka and the Canadian border to the northwest.

Members of these communities come together year after year to support the hospital with hours of volunteer service and fund-raising efforts. The hospital is served by a volunteer board of directors, as is the North Valley Hospital Foundation. Whether someone travels by rail as in 1905, or arrives at Glacier Park International Airport for a visit, the staff at North Valley Hospital is ready, 24 hours a day, to meet patient needs.

Some say the beauty of the Flathead Valley inspires people to be kind to one another. Some say the mountains in Glacier National Park inspire spiritual renewal and healing. At North Valley Hospital, the Planetree model of patient-centered care is a complement to those ideals. Planetree is a non-profit organization that works with large and small hospitals and health-care centers throughout the country to develop and implement patient-centered care in healing environments. It is dedicated to the furthering of humane, nurturing and compassionate health-care environments that support the process of healing. Planetree’s core components address the needs of the whole person—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

In 2004, there were over 42,000 outpatient visits to North Valley Hospital and 1,500 admissions. With each visit, the opportunity to give patients and their families the kind of personal caring that Planetree exemplifies spills over into the lives of the people it touches. Massage therapists on-site offer complimentary 15-minute massages for new mothers going home with their babies. Prior to a scheduled surgery, patients are offered massage therapy to improve circulation, reduce stress and promote well-being.

In-hospital committees consisting of medical professionals, community members and staff encourage holistic practices and evaluate outcomes of complementary therapies. Artwork in the hospital hallways and harp music introduce healing and comfort to the environment. A dog visitation program, staffed by certified volunteers, schedules weekly visits to the hospital. Clergy is on call for patients and families, and a chapel is available for prayer or meditation.

In patient-centered care, empowerment is also encouraged. A Community Health Resource Library, staffed by trained volunteers, includes books on a variety of health-care subjects. Internet access is also available with links to current health-care web sites.

Cuisine on Call provides a menu of healthy meals for patients or family anytime. The Valley Café at North Valley Hospital is open to the public for breakfast and lunch, serving creative, healthy cuisine.

Travel to the north valley communities has changed significantly since Dr. Houston and his nurses first arrived. Just as the Burlington
The hospital Guild was formed in 1949 to cheer patients and raise hope. Now known as the North Valley Hospital Auxiliary, community volunteers continue to raise hope into the new century.

Northern Railroad recognized the need for a new hospital in 1905, the communities of the north valley recognized the need for more physicians with differing specialties and a new hospital 100 years later.

On May 12, 2005, a groundbreaking event launched North Valley Hospital into “A New Century... A New Way of Healthcare,” and the Foundation committed to raising $6.3 million toward that goal. The New Center of Healing will be a $30-million facility designed to grow with the communities surrounding it. Constructed on one level, the 82,350-square-foot facility will have a helipad, additional covered ambulance bays, a separate entrance to the Outpatient Surgery and Birthing Center, and high-speed Internet access in patient rooms. Views in the direction of Glacier National Park from patient rooms allow patients to take in the natural beauty of the area during treatment and healing. The 45-acre site provides patients and their families with outdoor rest and relaxation areas, as well as a place of recreation for hospital staff. Visitors and members of the community will enjoy the hike/bike trail, which will connect the new hospital to other areas of the city of Whitefish.

Although the new hospital will be comprehensive in its ability to meet the needs of the north valley communities, outreach is still vitally important. The Columbia Falls Physical Therapy Clinic and Lab Services, offered at the Professional Center, and the North Country Medical Clinic in Eureka, staffed by two internal medicine physicians, provide quick access for the medical needs of people in those areas. During the winter season, the Big Mountain Outpost Clinic provides urgent care services, including X-ray imaging to winter sports enthusiasts needing an on-site diagnosis.

North Valley Hospital’s care for the community is evident in the services it supports: The Shepherd’s Hand Clinic, a non-profit weekly clinic, offers free medical care for those who cannot afford medical insurance; transportation needs for medical appointments are met by contributions from North Valley Hospital to the Agency on Aging and Eagle Transit; CPR, Safe Sitter and cancer support groups are provided; families are strengthened by Mother to Be classes; free community education classes are provided regularly by North Valley Hospital physicians who speak on a variety of subjects in an up-close and personal format with time allotted for questions.

The North Valley Hospital Auxiliary contributes scholarship funds to area students wishing to continue their education in the area of medicine. The Auxiliary raises monies to support the hospital and operates the hospital gift shop. They also volunteer their time at other charitable events throughout the year.

The North Valley Hospital Foundation exists to support all the benefits the hospital provides to the community, particularly in their
efforts to raise funds for new equipment, to apply for grant monies and to lower the building and loan costs for the new hospital.

When Doctor Houston brought his medical expertise to Stump Town, he could scarcely imagine the impact the little hospital would have on so many generations. Today, the medical expertise and technology provided at North Valley Hospital is equally profound. One such innovation is the Radiology department’s PACS (Picture Archiving and Communication System), which stores and transmits images such as X-rays, ultrasounds and CAT scans to physicians via the Internet. PACS provides access to physician offices and homes, allowing 24-hour consultation in emergency situations. Images such as mammograms, pregnancy ultrasounds or X-rays of bone fractures may be transferred electronically, making diagnosis and consultation possible with physicians beyond the hospital walls.

The PACS is just one of many innovations now available that go well beyond the dreams of those who formed the communities of Northwestern Montana. But the dreams in the hearts of those who live here continue to be profound, while the spirit of caring increases for everyone touched by North Valley Hospital, whose mission is “to collectively serve as a catalyst for healing of the mind, body and spirit in a patient-centered environment, and commits to stewardship of health-care resources in order to continually improve the health of the communities we serve” well into the next 100 years.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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