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—Contributor.....Kevin O'Connor
—Contributor email.....kevinocconnorvt@gmail.com
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—Dateline.....Brattleboro
—Article Number:.....43637



Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 BMH, support staff avert strike by signing first contract

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2 Hospital also negotiates a contract with nurses' union
3 amid a time of financial tumult

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4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 Brattleboro Memorial Hospital and a union representing
6 its 280 support staffers have signed their first contract, avoiding a
7 threatened walkout amid a projected \$14.5 million annual
8 budget shortfall.

9 The two-year agreement with Brattleboro Healthcare
10 United workers, announced May 14, comes a month after
11 management at southeastern Vermont's main health care provider

12 successfully negotiated a separate contract with the 160-member
13 Brattleboro Federation of Nurses.

14 "These agreements recognize the hard work and
15 dedication of our employees while also reflecting the realities
16 facing healthcare organizations across the country," Dr. Tony
17 Blofson, one of the hospital's two acting co-CEOs, said in a
18 statement.

19 Unions for both the nurses and support staffers had
20 earlier voted for a potential strike "if necessary" after the hospital
21 proposed curbs on salaries and benefits to help balance its
22 current \$130 million annual operating budget.

23 The hospital went on to withdraw its planned wage cap
24 for nurses and to raise the minimum hourly pay rate for support
25 staffers to \$18 immediately and at least \$19 in October,
26 according to the unions.

27 "We're excited to finally have a first contract in place
28 and to get back to what we do best: providing excellent patient
29 care for our community," Kelsey Bean, a phlebotomist and
30 member of the Brattleboro Healthcare United bargaining team,
31 said in a statement.

32 The hospital and its workers began contract talks last
33 year, only to pause in the fall when state regulators questioned
34 the accuracy of the hospital's ~~current~~ budget — a move that led
35 to the discovery of the \$14.5 million deficit and to the exits of the
36 hospital's chief executive and chief financial officers.

37 Talks resumed this year, at which time employees
38 threatened to walk out.

39 In their statement, Blofson and fellow acting co-CEO
40 Elizabeth McLarney said the hospital "remains focused on
41 reducing its budget deficit through careful financial management,
42 operational efficiencies, and continued efforts to strengthen
43 patient volumes and services."

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