

Sale of Mobile Surgical Unit has St. Johnsbury Exec and Shriners Smiling

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by Jacob L. Grant, Staff Writer

ST. JOHNSBURY – Few words were uttered amidst the satisfied grins Thursday as the Mount Sinai Shriners toured a mobile surgical unit built for their organization by Rick Cochran and his 11-year-old company, Mobile Medical International Corp.

The tour of the unit and a display of the company's other products were part of an open house to celebrate the delivery of the unit to the Shriners for use at their hospitals.

Cochran, a Walden resident, lead the tour.

"This is really the first time, in a way, we've really done this," he said, speaking of the sale of the unit – a 53-foot trailer which is hauled by a truck and has actually been in use since 1997.

The unit was upgrade and restored to nearly new condition for the Shriners, he said. Cochran said he is impressed by the Shriners, "the only organization in the country that provides 100 percent free care."

Shriners Potnetate Leo Laflamme, who went on the tour, said a lot of people find "free" too hard to believe. Either they don't believe it or they assume that the treatment isn't good. But Laflamme and other Shriners present expressed confidence the new unit would put such suspicions to rest.

The unit is literally a hospital on wheels, the third mobile surgery facility that Cochran's company has manufactured.

Cochran developed the concept of a "mobile ambulatory surgery center" and set out during the early 1990s to launch it into practical application.

He said his company has put numerous custom-designed mobile medical facilities in operation in various locations around the world. From mobile surgery units, to mobile diagnostic units, to mobile breast care centers, mobile laboratory and pharmacy units, mobile intensive care/patient recovery units and mobile ophthalmology units.

The concept was slow to catch on and Mobile Medical faced many financial difficulties, but Cochran persisted in his determination to find markets for his products.

The Shriners' mobile surgery unit was driven out of the company's facility on Route 2 Thursday night, headed for Tampa, Fla., where it will go to the International Shriners Annual Convention the first week of July. The unit will be on display and then will join the Shriners Fourth of July parade.

Following this event, the mobile surgery unit will travel to California where it will also be displayed at the local Shriners Hospital in Sacramento.

Finally the unit will head to Honolulu, Hawaii where it will be used during a two-year renovation of a nearby hospital.

Laflamme said the use of the unit will shave approximately 18 months off construction time.

The unit is expected to return to the mainland for either follow-up hospital renovation efforts at other Shriners hospitals or to participate in a rural outreach program to provide services for children in under-served areas.

Thursday's tour also included a look at some of Mobile Medical's latest technology, including new medical units for the military that have an auto-leveling feature and integrated LED lighting.

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