

Hospital's new chief financial officer offers a wealth of experience

By Amber Hanneken
Staff Writer

HUGO — Choctaw Memorial Hospital's newest chief financial officer is a familiar face from the past.

Mike McKenzie moved to Hugo with his family when he was in the third grade. His parents owned a ranch north of town and he graduated from Hugo High School in 1961. His seemingly ordinary beginnings eventually led him to a successful career in accounting, retirement in Mexico and eventual return to the city he loves.

"I found out I got a heck of a good education here in Hugo," McKenzie said. "I went out into a little bit bigger world, bigger cities, bigger companies. I didn't have any trouble competing."

McKenzie attended Oklahoma State University for his first year of college, but because his parents moved to Texas, he transferred to University of Texas at Austin to avoid out of state tuition fees. His undergraduate degree was a bachelor's in business administration with a major in accounting. He was married to Linda in 1967 and had three boys.

McKenzie attributes two jobs in preparing him for the hospital's CFO position. He worked for US Brass Corporation in Plano, Texas, a small to medium sized manufacturing company, where he headed the cost accounting department and later transitioned into system controller for four years. After working for US Brass for eight years, McKenzie started up his own accounting practice in Plano, Texas. He ran that business for 18 years before retiring in December 1997.

McKenzie and his wife took their retirement in central Mexico, south of Guadalajara.

"We moved to Mexico just to experience a different lifestyle and different culture," he said. "My wife had liked to vacation there a number of times."

Eventually, changes in Mexico made the McKenzies want to move back to the United States. In 2007, he returned to Hugo with Linda after about 40 years of absence.

"When we decided to come back to the states we said, 'where?' and this was home to me despite all the time away," McKenzie said. "I spent a number of formative years here from third grade through high school. I had lived in the big city and I couldn't go back to that; so here we are."

Despite being retired, when McKenzie was approached by a member of the Choctaw Memorial Hospital Board of Trustees about an open CFO position, he accepted and began the interview process.

"When I told my clients and people I knew



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MIKE MCKENZIE is the new chief financial officer of Choctaw Memorial Hospital. McKenzie grew up in Hugo and after years away returned to the city to continue his retirement. His love for accounting and the community brought him back into the work force.

that I was going to retire, they said, 'you can't stay retired, you love work,'" McKenzie said. "By going to Mexico, it wasn't a problem. In Mexico they will not allow you to do a job that takes a job away from a Mexican national. But having come back here, all the sudden retirement kind of choked around my collar a little bit, I wasn't productive and I missed accounting."

McKenzie said the position is challenging and a bit of a learning curve for him because Medicare, Medicaid and government involvement add a level of complexity to the job.

"It's a different ball game," he said. "The accounting is still the same but the position itself is really two positions, and because of the size we don't have two people handling it."

One side of McKenzie's job deals with the accounting function, being a controller. He is responsible for producing financial statements and checking that they are correct. If the numbers aren't correct, then management can make bad decisions.

"You can make a bad decision even in the best of times but you don't want it to be because the numbers were bad. That's something you can control," he said. "My job, as the controller function, is to give them good

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clean numbers."

The other side of his position is the financial aspect, which involves taking the numbers and analyzing them to take a step further like buying equipment for the hospital and seeing what the future financial forecast will be. He, along with the board of trustees, decide what the hospital can do with the numbers.

McKenzie's immediate plan is to learn the nuts and bolts of the controller side of his position. He will be using software to convert raw data into financial statements and once he's past that point, he can do analytical work. In the long term, he hopes to create a financial plan for the hospital that avoids surprises.

"Nobody in management likes surprises, certainly the board of trustees does not like that sort of thing, and it's going to be my job to try and avoid those surprises," he said.

"There may be times that you say, 'hey, we've got tough times coming,' but forewarned you have the opportunity to try to do something about that."

He said that this position is a lot more fulfilling for him than public accounting because it mainly deals with taxes.

"Accounting, certainly on the complexity of this particular position, is a challenge, it's stimulating, and so that part I'm going to thoroughly enjoy," he said. "When I was approached, it was seconds before I said, 'Wow a chance to put a little back into the community,' and I don't want to be flowery about that or anything. Basically, what a heck of a deal; I get to do a very complex accounting job and analytical forecasting job and I get job satisfaction from believing in what I'm doing for who it's going to serve."