

Dominican Sisters Recall The Old Days

By BILL NEUBAUER
Sentinel Staff Writer

"You never saw so many babies. It was an epidemic of post-war babies. We had babies cradled in washtubs and drawers and even taped on the scales. We had 17 and 18 babies at a time in the old Sisters Hospital.

"Other babies, along with their mothers, were brought to us by ambulance after being born at the old County Hospital. We had two nurseries going. If I remember anything about the early days here, I remember the babies."

That's Sister Georganne Duggan talking last Friday in the administrative conference room at Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital.

Last Friday was the 38th anniversary of the coming of the Adrian Dominican Sisters to Santa Cruz to provide "skilled and loving care for the ill and injured, with sacred respect for life and soul, and the honoring of all the religions and nationalities among the young, old and in-betweens who come to the hospital."

The first hospital operated by the Adrian Dominican Sisters here was dedicated Sept. 14, 1941, as Sisters Hospital. The anniversary date falls each year on The Feast of the Holy Cross, so it's an easy date for the Order to remember.

Sister Georganne, a postulant, was among the small band of highly educated and trained women who came to Santa Cruz in 1941 to renovate, refurbish, re-equip and reopen the former privately-owned Hanley Hospital on West Cliff Drive. After a "year and a day" here she returned to the Motherhouse in Adrian, Mich. She was destined to be among the first Sister-registered nurses to serve here and later became administrator of the Order's second hospital here, Santa Cruz Hospital on Soquel Avenue . . . a building now known as Branciforte Plaza.

"The former Hanley Hospital was a total disaster," Sister Georganne recalls. "The hospital had been closed about 10 months. It was a bad scene. They even left the instruments unwashed. It took a couple of months of 16-hour days to get the place ready."

But under the direction of Sister Ann Patrick Shields, the first administrator, the job was accomplished in time for the dedication ceremonies.

About four hours later, Dr. A.E. Allegrini, still in practice today, admitted the first patient.

Sister Anne Herringer, R.N., has other memories of the early days. She came to Santa Cruz in 1945 and said with a smile, "We were everything in those days. I did general medical and surgical nursing, obstetrics, housekeeping. The Sisters lived in a wing of the hospital and we would even get the breakfast before

Sister Madonna recalls with a laugh, "We conned Bridgid into nursing because she was oriented to our hospital and broken in."

Sister Jane Celeste, provincial of the Holy Cross Province, also worked here as a nurses' aide in the obstetrics department.

It is important to the Adrian Dominican Sisters saga in Santa Cruz to know that the women have the capacity and the discipline to be or to become whatever they need to be to serve the work here. Sister Brigid got into nursing because that was the need. Sister Josephine Sullivan is a former teacher who returned to school to hone her administrative skills so that she could succeed the beloved and respected Sister Carolyn Harrison, "builder" of the Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital of today. Sister Madonna, the dauntless anesthesiologist of yore, became administrator of Santa Cruz Hospital in the 1960s and held the post until this hospital was absorbed into the present 150-bed institution. Now she works in Pastoral Care. Sister Anne, the former nurse and administrator, is now the Patients Representative at the hospital, and you will find Sister Brigid in the new outpatient building where cardiopulmonary and other work is done.

Yes, the hospital of today is different from that dedicated Sept. 14, 1941. So are the lives of the Sisters. Now they do not wear the flowing white habits of Yesteryear. They used to live in Sisters Hospital, then in a convent, but now they live in the community. There are now hundreds of health care specialists at Dominican, and they note with satisfaction that the vast bulk of them happen to be women, thoroughly educated and trained, professionals in every superb sense of that term.

Dominican now has millions of dollars worth of special equipment, ranging from brain and body scanners to ultra sophisticated laboratory equipment that makes hundreds of vital tests in just a few minutes, from sonar-type diagnostic devices to devices that can display your electrocardiogram as you are strolling around the hospital corridors or are enroute to the hospital by ambulance.

The new hospital and the equipment are in large part the donations of the community through the Dominican Foundation, the Founders Club and individuals, the Sisters state. They acknowledge gratefully that the wholehearted support of the community has helped to create the Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital of today.

Through that support, down through the years, the Santa Cruz area got an additional benefit not generally realized. In the early days Santa Cruz had no specialists, and such highly skilled people as orthopedic surgeons and neurosurgeons had to be "imported" on a case basis.



ABOVE — Sister

ABOVE — Sister Marie Brigid with one of the many babies born at Sister's Hospital in the mid-1940s.

RIGHT — Neatly manicured lawns and shrubs adorn the entrance to the old Sister's Hospital on West Cliff Drive.



LEFT — This is the exterior of Santa Cruz Hospital on Soquel Avenue, which — like Sister's Hospital — closed when Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital opened. The old hospital building is now the Branciforte Plaza shopping complex.



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Sister Anne recalls that the surgery was equipped with a screen door and the surgeons and nurses could look out and even chat with passersby, if they wished.

"We had no radiologist in Santa Cruz at that time," Sister Anne said. "An X-ray technician, Jay Gates, would look at the X-ray and tell the doctors if the bones were broken or not."

That reminded Sister Madonna Maier of the early days, too. Among other things, she is trained as an anesthesiologist. Sure, she gave ether, but as she and Sister Georganne said Friday, "Ether was going out by then, we were near the end of using ether. We used a mix, usually, and this was highly combustible."

Sister Josephine Sullivan, administrator of Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital, the successor to Sisters and Santa Cruz hospitals, noted that down through the years the Adrian Dominican Sisters have stressed the creation here of a health care complex equipped and staffed fully to meet ever-increasing requirements.

Hanley Hospital was planned as a 28-bed health center but it could and did hold 32 patients on many occasions.

Sister Anne, who later became administrator of Sisters Hospital, recalls, "There was always a Sister on duty around the clock, there were at least three bodies on each shift. We Sisters were involved in everything from obstetrics to medical and surgical nursing to operating the switchboard."

In reference to the old surgery, Sister Georganne said, "Some of the doctors remember that screen door and all that. But we never had an infection, while today we now have at this hospital an Infection Committee."

Sister Anne recollected, "We had an autoclave, of course. All our lab work had to be done downtown. Percy Campbell would come up to Sisters Hospital and draw the blood and do the lab work at Mission Street at the end of Pacific Avenue, near where the McHugh-Bianchi building was."

A major undertaking was the formation of a medical staff. On that staff, among the doctors now in practice here, were Allegrini, Dr. Luther Newhall, the first chief of staff; Dr. Mahlon McPherson, Dr. Philip Karleen and Dr. David Maeth.

Another Sister-nurse who worked at the old Sisters Hospital was Sister Marie Brigid, one of the so-called cheap laborers used in the early days.

Sister Brigid first began work at the hospital as a nurses' aide. She was a teacher at the time and was among many teachers who worked as aides here in the summer vacation period.

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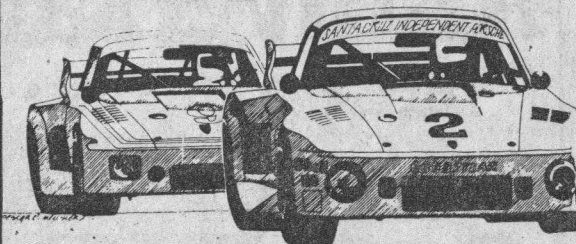
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But with the gradual creation of a major hospital equipped with technological equipment highly useful even to specialists, a big cadre of specialists located their practices in this area. It is rare, for instance, for a county the size of Santa Cruz to have the nuclear medicine capabilities to be found at Dominican and in the community.

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