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teers - and our mission of serving the people in our community," said Sister Mary Renetta Rumpz, the hospital's president, in a press release. "St. Mary Hospital and the community will benefit from the resources of an outstanding Catholic health system."

The hospital is expected to adopt the new name of St. Mary Mercy Hospital, Sproul said. It will also get a new chief executive officer, and Sister Renetta will assist in the transition period.

The Felicians will continue to operate, separate from the hospital, their other Livonia health-care facilities: Marywood Nursing Care Center, for people who need skilled nursing care; Marybrook Manor, an assisted-living

center; and Angela Hospice.

The Felicians also plan to start a new foundation that will serve the community in the areas of education, child care, care of the elderly, social services and health care. Details on the foundation will be announced later, Sproul said.

St. Mary, which celebrated its 40th anniversary last year, is a 304-bed community hospital and one of Livonia's largest employers, with over 1,500 workers.

The Livonia Province of the Felician Sisters is one of 12 provinces of the order, based in Rome and formally called the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Felix. There are about 2,400 Felician sisters worldwide.

Livonia's Felician sisters also run Madonna University, Lady-

wood High School, the Montessori Center of Our Lady and, with the Archdiocese of Detroit, the Senior Clergy Village.

The Detroit Regional Community of the Sisters of Mercy is part of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. MHS, founded in 1976, is the seventh-largest Catholic health-care system in the country and the 14th-largest overall, with 32 hospitals.

MHS reported 1999 operating revenue of \$2.6 billion, and charity care and community benefit spending of \$117 million.

By April, MHS is expected to join with the Holy Cross Health System to create the third-largest Catholic health-care system in the country.

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"What's come out of it has been a very cooperative relationship between Sunriss and the Players," Hadley said, noting the company has gone so far as to lend financial support to the theater project. "We got a lot of cooperation from the neighbors too, as far as the planning."

It's that kind of community spirit the Players hope to carry into the actual building project. For one thing, members and patrons alone won't be able to shoulder all of the \$1.5 million cost.

As with all good partnerships, the effort will be made on a two-way street. What the community gives to this project, Hadley said, will come back to it. The returns are expected to take the form of cost-effective meeting spaces, a flexible stage open for dance or performance recitals, workshops for businesses and a summer theater program for area youth.

"The key to all this is in our name," Hadley said. "We're a community theater. We hope to give back to the community from a resource standpoint."

An indicator of initial community response was the large turnout at a recent Chamber of Commerce Morning Connection. More than 70 people showed up

at 8 a.m. on Jan. 12, specifically to learn more about the Players.

"The nice thing about this event was that it attracted a different audience than our usual events," said Chamber President Carleigh Flaherty. "We promoted it as an opportunity for business people to come out and get a sense of what the Players had coming up. We were very pleased with the turnout."

There were a lot of people who had seen shows at The Players, and that was really gratifying," Hadley said of the event.

In addition to a local effort that may even include some city funding, the project has been bolstered by a \$65,000 state grant. Planners also hope they can reduce the cost, with the economies of scale that come with building two facilities at the same time, Hadley said.

The last show in the old building, "Kiss Me Kate," will close May 27. On June 3, The Players will host a fund-raising gala, and then begin gutting the barn. They've already begun to weed through costume and property collections, and all lighting and equipment purchased over the last couple of years have been made with the idea of someday occupying a new building.

There won't be a whole lot more space, Hadley said. Patrons have been clear about wanting to maintain the intimate atmosphere of the barn. The back row will even be a few inches closer to the stage, and seats are on a sloped floor to improve sight lines.

Lifts at the front and rear of the building will make it accessible for members and theatergoers.

Hadley said The Players' vision for their new facility includes use by the entire community, and he urges people to get involved and find out what the company has to offer.

"There's really a hunger for ways to be creative and ways to express yourself," he said. "It's not just a bunch of nuts or egotists looking to show off. People want to do a good job. There's a lot of work, dedication and professionalism that goes into it."

The Players will host a benefit performance of their next production, "Of Mice and Men," on Feb. 4, at the Barn. Tickets are \$50 and funds raised will benefit the Capuchin Soup Kitchen.

For tickets or more information about The Players or the building project, call (248) 553-2866.

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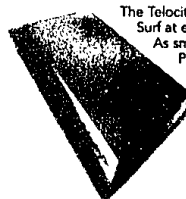
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