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merging it with Charlotte Hungerford, even of building an entirely new facility located somewhere between the two hospitals. There was also a growing community reaction against these two ideas. The Board of Selectmen moved to inform itself and the community about the problems the Hospital faces, now and possibly down the road, and to develop solutions to keep the Winsted Memorial Hospital in Winsted, serving Winsted and the communities it has traditionally served.

The Importance of Community Involvement: Stepping back from the immediate situation of a hospital under siege, it is instructive to ask how a proud community which established so many fine institutions in the latter part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century, the hospital among them, loses control of any one of them?

The Basic Problem: An historical review reveals that loss of control stems from lack of identity of community and what it needs. In earlier days, Winchester/Winsted residents could visualize their needs as a community and establish institutions to meet those needs. Somewhere along the line, the people abandoned their rightful responsibility for shaping a community identity. Lacking a defined identity, a vacuum is created in which officials, specialists and other individuals defined need apart from the citizenry. The crisis at Winsted Memorial Hospital can be seen as a symptom of community disarray.

Without a steady, substantive involvement, there were fewer ways to understand the problems facing the various institutions of the town, including the Hospital, and to solve them as a community.

Basic changes are made without the benefit of sustained public discourse to define the character as well as the needs of a community. So the loss of institutions continues, either physically, such as the court which used to be based in Winsted; or through regionalization such as the YMCA, now the Northwest Y; or through the reorganization of the schools by educational experts at the expense of neighborhood schools (now becoming fashionable again); or through the destruction of historic buildings and along with them institutional history.

This process of disintegration of community began a long time ago. One contributing factor is the increased number of people who commute to work, because there is insufficient economic activity near home. In the past, Winsted was considered "panic-proof" for the variety of its business and industries. A consequence of commuting is less time for people to become involved in their community. Infrequent attention to its institutions reduces the opportunity to nurture them and to make sure they continue to meet the needs of the community. People become detached from the communities where they live and attach elsewhere, such as joining HMO (Health Maintenance Organization) at their workplace.

With the moves toward centralization and the idea that bigger is better and away from self-sufficiency came a loss of self-confidence that the people can define their destiny and their needs. There was no community discourse to test the resolve of a community to define itself.

The scene is not entirely bereft of noteworthy initiatives by imaginative individuals; community-oriented citizens have left institutional legacies which endure. The Northwestern

Connecticut Community College is one example. Celebrating its twenty-fifth year this fall, the College has become a force in the lives of many area residents. A second example is Regional Health Services which brought a number of health groups into a coherent whole. Dedicated individuals built an organization which responds to the health care needs of many in their homes. Incorporated in 1973, Regional Health Services is now in the midst of enlarging its headquarters in Winsted.

These two exemplary initiatives met basic needs, one for education, one for health care. Had they generated vigorous community discourse at the time it would have helped build the public confidence required for people to define their present and future. What kind of community do people value is a question for all of us, since what happens affects all of us. It is important to rebuild the foundations of community discourse and restore community self-confidence. The hospital crisis offers an opportunity to accomplish this goal through regular public involvement in hospital affairs.

The Winsted Memorial Hospital and its community: The Winsted Memorial Hospital, established at the turn of the century by farsighted citizens, was known for years as the Litchfield County Hospital. In fact, it was the first hospital in Litchfield County. Charlotte Hungerford Hospital came along in 1917, some some seventeen years later. It is easy to take such an institution for granted. It is more difficult for its stewards, the people, to nurture it. For many years, the service community took the hospital for granted. Fewer people were involved in its