

Tree removal begins at Salem Hospital

Natalie Pate, Statesman Journal 6:35 p.m. PDT June 10, 2015



(Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

Work to cut down a signature white oak tree on the site of the former Oregon School for the Blind began Wednesday, June 10, and will continue for a day and a half.

"It's a very sad day here at the hospital," said Sherryl Johnson Hoar, a spokeswoman for Salem Health, parent company of Salem Hospital and owner of the blind school property.

An eight-foot split was discovered Monday. Exactly when the split occurred and its cause remained unknown, but experts, including the city of Salem's urban forester, determined the tree to be hazardous.

The oak is about 100 feet tall and could split and fall unpredictably at any time, putting anyone within reach of its branches at risk, Hoar said.

That includes construction workers, who are busy building a Salem Hospital rehabilitation facility on the property.

The facility will include a new outpatient rehabilitation center and adaptive playground. Work began on the project in January. Since, the hospital has been met with opposition to the 50 trees they've had to remove from the site. This tree, however, was not supposed to come down.

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A worker with Elwood's Tree Service breaks down a tree that has to be removed for safety concerns in a construction site at Salem Health on Wednesday, June 10, 2015. (Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

Hospital officials had hoped to make the oak a key feature of the facility grounds; architects had incorporated the 200-year-old tree into the design and location of the rehab center.

"We are deeply disappointed. It is one of the most beautiful trees on site," Hoar said. "But with the instability, we had to clear the tree, otherwise it just wouldn't be safe."

Elwood's Tree Service of Salem is doing the tree removal. Preservable wood from the tree will be sent to Zena Forest Products, which specializes in refurbishing white oak wood for sustainable flooring and lumber.

Kerry Carpenter, the hospital's facilities manager, said they are looking for another tree to place in the same location.

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Branches are cleared from a tree that has to be removed for safety concerns in a construction site at Salem Health on Wednesday, June 10, 2015. (Photo: ANNA REED / Statesman Journal)

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