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## **Carraway's star on the rise again**

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**THE ISSUE:** The century-old Norwood hospital shows signs of a healthy life after years of struggling mightily just to survive.

That the distinctive blue star above Physicians Medical Center Carraway is lighted and turning may be a good, ahem, sign for the north Birmingham hospital.

It had been a long time since the star turned over the Norwood campus. That there's even a hospital there for the star to rotate above today gives credit to a group of 52 courageous, ambitious doctors who simply didn't want to see the 100-year-old Birmingham health care landmark closed.

OK, those doctors weren't just acting out of benevolence when they bought the hospital out of bankruptcy last September. Carraway was a cheap prize, and no doubt the doctors are hoping their investment in the blue star turns into a pot of gold. There's nothing wrong with that, either, if those doctors can bring Carraway back from the brink and offer top-of-the-line health care in one of the city's poorest neighborhoods.

While Physicians Carraway isn't out of the financial jungle yet (or even that close to the edge, really), there are encouraging signals.

The hospital actually made a small profit in June - something not seen in years, and hospital officials are saying consistent profits are expected by fall, much earlier than expected. If that happens, it's an amazing turnaround for a hospital that's been losing money for years. The physicians also announced a plan to build a new hospital in northern Jefferson County. The group would not replace Physicians Carraway but, instead, would transfer unused beds from the Norwood hospital to the new hospital.

On Monday, Physicians Carraway launched a \$500,000 marketing and advertising campaign aimed at letting the community know about the hospital's new identity and to explain the owners' belief that a doctor-owned hospital will provide better care.

Maybe the most positive sign of the turnaround is that officials say Physicians Carraway is paying vendors on time and is current on all its accounts. That's possible because of new capital from the investors and savings from cutting operating expenses. One change that has helped cut expenses by about \$1 million a month is convincing doctors to use a single brand of particular products instead of using several brands for the same product.

That savings, along with an investment of several million dollars in the campus' building and infrastructure, indicates these doctors are planning to stay for the long haul.

That's great news for folks seeking quality health care, and also for the Birmingham area and hospital employees. The hospital provides about 1,000 good-paying jobs, and those workers are paying city taxes and spending most of their money in the Birmingham area.

It's been a long time, but Carraway's star is rising again.