

## Bryce deal approved by UA trustees

By Adam Jones Staff Writer

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TUSCALOOSA | University of Alabama trustees joined their counterparts at the Department of Mental Health and approved sale terms for the Bryce Hospital campus.

The trustees' executive committee, which acts on behalf of the full board, approved the purchase in a conference call Wednesday.

"This is probably the one accomplishment 100 years from now that we could ever think of as important," said trustee Finis St. John of Cullman, president of the board. "This is a great day for the University of Alabama."

Trustees agreed to buy nearly all of the Bryce Hospital campus for \$72 million and voted to spend another \$10 million on environmental cleanup and historic preservation on the property.

The state Mental Health Advisory board of trustees agreed to the sale terms at its meeting Dec. 30.

"We've decided we're going to do it and agreed on the price, and now all we have to do is work on the details," said John Ziegler, spokesman for the Mental Health Department.

The department is restructuring services for patients at Bryce Hospital by selling that property to the university. The money from the sale will enable the state to build a new psychiatric hospital in Tuscaloosa and expand community-based care statewide.

UA has agreed to pay for the property through royalties from oil, natural gas and coal reserves under university land throughout the state. A state bond issue will provide \$22 million to UA to help buy the Bryce land, which is adjacent to the UA campus.

The Amendment 666 Bond Commission, which is named after the state constitutional amendment that authorizes bonds for economic development, approved the bond issue in December. The bond money must be paid to a university, said Sen. Roger Bedford,

D-Russellville, a member of the bond commission.

The bonds should be sold in March, and the commission will meet after that to authorize the transfer to UA, Bedford said.

The \$10 million UA has committed in addition to the

\$72 million will be used restore the white, domed building on Bryce's campus along with environmental cleanup of groundwater contaminated when Bryce was essentially a self-sustaining city. That money will not be paid to the Mental Health Department, but is part of the purchase agreement.

It will be years before UA takes control of the property, since a new hospital must be designed and built before patients can be moved.

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