

# Robot Delivers Meals at Boynton Hospital

by Mike Rothman

"Your delivery has arrived."

The electronic voice of a woman calls out to a unit at Bethesda Memorial Hospital in Boynton Beach to announce that meals have arrived.

The voice is that of the hospital's newest employee, Tray-C, a TUG robot, or automated transportation system for the delivery and tracking of hospital goods, meals and supplies.

Mark Weigel, the hospital's director of food nutrition services, said he budgeted \$29,000 a year for Tray-C.

"She never argues with patients, takes no breaks, is always polite and always on time," he said laughing.

Tray-C, produced by Pittsburgh-based Aethon Inc., has been active at the hospital since June 6, said Bobby Entwistle, account representative with the firm.

The TUG eliminates repetitive, mundane tasks, such as pushing carts and running errands, formerly done by employees.

"She has a laser module and light whiskers to help her navigate through the hospital and down the halls," Entwistle said.

He said Tray-C actually calls the elevator using a control box and knows how to enter and exit it.

Since the hospital has deployed the robot for food and nutritional services, the staff can focus mostly on patient care, said hospital spokeswoman Kiswana Russell.

The robot has a navigation system that allows it to make deliveries.

More than 100 hospitals nationwide have deployed Aethon's robots, Russell said.

Weigel said he chose to take on Tray-C because it is the wave of the future.

"You have to try technology and see if it works for you," he said. "It is like buying your first computer and getting everyone accustomed to it. In 10 years, this thing will be walking and talking to everyone."

Tray-C can carry up to 14 trays at once and has a docking station to charge in the hospital's kitchen. It moves at a rate of 23 inches per second.