

LOCAL

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Vista Community Clinic site realizing its vision

\$6 million medical facility scheduled to open in one year

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FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

VISTA — The Vista Community Clinic broke ground Thursday for construction of a \$6 million medical clinic at 134 Grapevine Ave.

The 12,000-square-foot building is scheduled to open next summer, and will replace a smaller, leased office on Thunder Drive in Vista.

The project is funded through grants and donations from individuals, businesses and organizations from throughout the com-

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— BARBARA MANNINO
CEO of the Vista Community Clinic

community, said Betsy Heighman, director of development.

The Vista Community Clinic, which serves low-income uninsured and Medi-Cal patients, runs a total of five offices and sees an estimated 51,000 pa-

tients each year in Vista and Oceanside.

An estimated 130 clinic staff members, volunteers and board members, residents and others involved with the project turned out in the late afternoon to listen to speakers and watch the ceremonial shoveling of soil.

"I'm ecstatic," said Chief Executive Officer Barbara Mannino, who has been with the clinic for 26 years. "It's been a long time coming. ... VCC's vision is to create access to health care for all."

► CLINIC, B-6



BILL WECHTER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

An artist's rendering of the new Vista Community Clinic is seen beside a group of clinic personnel and dignitaries at a groundbreaking ceremony Thursday.

CLINIC

Continued from B-1

"In the 38 years of our existence, we've worked to keep up with the community's rapid growth," clinic board of directors President Mike Hire said.

"Today, we embark on one more step to complete our mission."

Plans for the clinic began two years ago, "when we realized we needed a bigger facility to serve the community," Heighman said.

The office on Thunder Drive encompasses only 5,700 square feet, she said.

Clinic officials cited a report by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors that forecasts a population growth by 2025 that will require the addition of 21 community clinics throughout the county.

They say the Grapevine clinic will help meet the forecasted increase in demand.

"With the number of

uninsured (patients) rising every day, our new clinic will help keep people in preventive care and out of emergency rooms," said Kelly Moradel, the clinic's medical director.

She said the larger office will allow the clinic to double the number of doctors available at the Thunder Drive facility from three to six; and expand pediatric, family medicine and obstetrics services.

It also will house a pharmacy.

Clinic officials said the new site is in a federally designated "health professional shortage area," which includes the neighborhood served by the Thunder Drive facility.

The designation is given to areas that indicate an extreme shortage of medical professionals available and willing to serve low-income, uninsured residents.

In addition to serving residents in the Grapevine area, Heighman said the new office will continue to offer care to patients who



Personnel who will work at the new Vista Community Clinic facility, from left, are Dr. Brian Luschnitz, Veronica Castro, Maria Luna, Claudia Mondragon, and clinic manager Sonia Chavez.

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come to the Thunder Drive clinic, since it is less than a mile away.

"When looking for a new location, we were very careful to find a site that was close, so the patient population would not be disturbed," she said.

Thunder Drive clinic staff

members also will be transferred to the new clinic.

"I think this is going to be a good thing for the community," said William Marks, a family medicine doctor. "We deal with people with little or no insurance. With a nicer facility, we'll be able to help more people."