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# New clinic a bigger and better prescription

By Joe Tash  
2:00 a.m. July 17, 2009

VISTA — To CEO Barbara Mannino, the Vista Community Clinic's new, 12,000-square-foot health center represents the first phase of a master plan designed to keep up with a rapidly expanding patient population.

To family physician Brian Bedolla, the building — twice the size of the outdated clinic it's replacing — means he and his colleagues will be able to see more patients.

But to Roseanne Daniel, an Oceanside mother of two who works as a waitress and housecleaner, the clinic, which opens Monday, symbolizes something much more personal: "Peace of mind."

Today, the clinic's staff will close the doors of its old workplace on Thunder Drive in Vista for the last time. This weekend, staffers will work feverishly to pack up personal belongings, equipment and supplies and move everything to their new home, a mile to the east at 134 Grapevine Road, near West Vista Way.

Mannino said the clinic, which cost \$6 million, will have the capacity to serve about 16,000 patients per year, or about 50,000 patient visits. In all, the Vista Community Clinic serves about 53,000 people a year — a total of more than 200,000 patient visits — at its five locations in Vista and Oceanside.

The clinic was founded in 1972 in leased space at a Vista animal shelter. It now operates on a \$27 million annual budget, which comes from a variety of sources, including public and private insurance, grants, donations and payments made by uninsured patients.

"We feel like we've come a long way, baby," Mannino said as she sat in a chair still sheathed in plastic in the clinic's waiting room.

The two-story clinic, with a Spanish tile roof, includes a pharmacy, rooms for hearing and vision tests for children, a women's center, numerous examination rooms, a meeting room where educational classes can be held, and offices with windows for the medical staff, which made do with a converted closet at the old clinic.

The building was designed with energy-efficient lighting. Prescriptions and lab work will be handled electronically on its computer system. Within the next 18 months, the clinic will move all of its medical records to an electronic format, Mannino said.

Daniel, who moved to North County two years ago from Ohio with her husband and two sons, said her family doesn't have health insurance, which she said is "disheartening."

She and her family have visited the clinic on Thunder Drive for all types of medical needs, from treatment of the flu to a badly cut hand. Daniel said she was trying to open a window that was stuck, and her hand went through the glass. She required seven stitches, and praised the care she received.

"They got me right in, they were great about it and very comforting," Daniel said.

Based on the clinic's sliding scale, she paid \$75 for her treatment. She later brought in home-baked cakes as a thank-you to the clinic staff, and said she planned to bring in brownies this weekend to cheer up staff members during their move.

"I've been to some places, just because you're low-income and you don't have insurance, they treat you with less dignity, and that's not right," Daniel said. "I've never experienced that (at the Vista Community Clinic) ever."

About two-thirds of the clinic's patients are uninsured, although most are working, Mannino said. North County has a higher percentage of uninsured people than other parts of the county because the area has more small businesses and agricultural employers that don't provide insurance to their workers, she said.

The other one-third have some type of public insurance, such as Medi-Cal, Medicare or Healthy Families, Mannino said. Patients without insurance are charged on a sliding scale based on their income. Fees for a clinic visit typically run from \$30 to \$50, including lab work and most prescriptions.

Bedolla is one of the doctors moving from the Thunder Road clinic to the new facility. Thanks to the new clinic, the organization will be able to hire more medical staffers and expand its array of services, he said.

"With the financial problems, more and more people are falling through the cracks and relying on clinics like ours to meet their medical needs," Bedolla said.

The clinic's staff is looking forward to working in the larger building.

"It's going to be a very challenging weekend, I believe," Bedolla said. "We have our work in front of us, but everyone is very excited."

## DETAILS

New Vista Community Clinic opens

When: Monday

Where: 134 Grapevine Road

What: 12,000-square-foot health center with a pharmacy, hearing rooms, women's center, examination rooms.

Cost: \$6 million

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The number of patients seen by the Vista Community Clinic has steadily increased over the years, both because of North County's population growth and more recently as the recession has caused people to lose their jobs and health insurance. In 2008, the clinic saw a 10 percent increase in patients, Mannino said.

A 2006 study commissioned by San Diego County concluded that by 2025, the county will need an additional 21 community clinics to keep up with demand.

The Vista Community Clinic raised \$4.3 million in donations to build the new facility and made up the difference from its building fund, Mannino said. It also has bought property adjacent to its clinic on Vale Terrace in Vista and plans to build a health care campus on the site at an estimated cost of \$35 million.

Community clinics provide care for many of the 47 million Americans without health insurance, Mannino said, adding that organizations such as hers are closely watching the health care debate in Washington, D.C.

"We believe we are positioned to be major players in health care reform," she said.

Joe Tash is a freelance writer in Oceanside.

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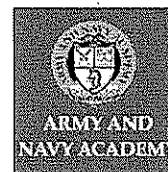


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