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Welcome to the *Benton Spirit's* HEALTH PAGE

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EXPANDED INTERCARE BUILDING READY FOR BUSINESS ON M-139



InterCare CEO Velma Hendershott, left, presents a special plaque to U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow's West Michigan office manager, Mary Judnich.
Ralph Helbutzki, Spirit Correspondent • June 09, 2011

With the snip of a scissors, InterCare Community Health Network declared its new, expanded 40,000 square foot health clinic at the corner of M-139 and Empire Avenue ready for business on Saturday. Benton Harbor Mayor Wilce Cooke and longtime InterCare CEO Velma Hendershott joined State Senator John Proos, Benton Charter Township Supervisor Nora Jefferson, and other assorted local dignitaries – including members of the project's design team – for a ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house intended to show how far the organization has come in reaching its goal of making health care accessible to everyone.

InterCare broke ground for its new Benton Township site less than 10 months ago, on Aug. 12, 2010 – after deciding it had outgrown its previous home at the Mercy Center, on the corner of Agard and Weld streets, Hendershott said. "Some of my staff might tell you, I've actually been a little obsessed with this since the beginning," Hendershott said. "And they might be right, to some extent. Now, it's so hard to believe that, here we are – and the reality is right before us."

In his own comments, Cooke recalled InterCare's beginnings in Hartford, followed by its move to downtown Benton Harbor, and the Mercy Center. "Now, they have their own beautiful building – that speaks volumes for (local) health care. That is one of the premiere issues of our society today – individuals being able to have access to good, quality health care," Cooke said. "Health care is one of the professions that has sustainability."

Having spent 42 years as an emergency room nurse at Lakeland Regional Medical Center, Cooke said that he naturally holds a strong interest in health care. "It's a great profession, I tell you. You have a great feeling when you help someone else, someone else who can't help themselves," Cooke said. "I would endorse anyone in the audience who would like to go into the health care profession. Again, we have to talk about, and commend, InterCare – I'm glad they're here."

The new clinic began accepting patients on Monday. Patients will experience an expanded, ecologically friendly building that's designed to "create a calm, healing atmosphere, and take

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- City and Police Auction - June 8, 2011

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- Beat the Rush - Enroll Your Child Now for First Chance
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Health

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History

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- South Bend School Corp. Superintendent James Kapsa Retires
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Game On Children @ Benton Harbor Public Library

Fri, Jun 17, 2011 from 11:00am - 1:00pm @ Benton Harbor Public Library

Game On All Ages @ Benton Harbor Public Library

Fri, Jun 17, 2011 from 1:00pm - 2:00pm @ Benton Harbor Public Library

Game On Teens @ Benton Harbor Public Library





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maximum advantage of natural light – as you'll see, when you tour the building," Hendershott said. About 50,000 patients per year visit the Benton Harbor site alone, "and we know that number will increase in the next few years – so we certainly need every inch of this space, and then some," she added.

InterCare has provided primary medical and dental care since it opened in 1972. Besides Benton Harbor, InterCare offers sites in Bangor, Eau Claire, Holland, Pullman and Sparta – and employs about 400 people between them, according to Darryl Day, board treasurer. About 45 to 50 jobs were created in the construction, for which Owens Ames Kimball (Grand Rapids) served as general contractor, an InterCare news release said. TERA Architects (Benton Harbor) designed the facility, and Southshore Companies (St. Joseph) was the owner's representative, and project manager. Most of the actual construction materials were also manufactured within about 200 miles of Benton Harbor.

"This Health Center Belongs To The Community"

At first, InterCare's board considered a standard build-to-lease scenario for the construction costs, Hendershott said. But that plan became moot after InterCare successfully applied for an \$8.5 million American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) grant to cover most of the cost, Hendershott said. InterCare was one of only two health centers in Michigan, and 85 throughout the nation, to receive these dollars from a pool of roughly 600 applicants, she added. A U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Health Facilities loan will be used to cover the remaining \$1.5 million cost.

InterCare plays a vital role as part of the community health center movement – which began nearly 50 years ago, to help vulnerable populations get health care they could not afford otherwise. "Community health centers serve as a safety net for 20 million patients in the U.S.," Hendershott said. "By keeping patients healthier – and out of emergency rooms – community health centers will save more than \$120 billion by 2015. I cannot stress enough, this health center belongs to the entire community. This facility is here for you. The care you receive here will be of the highest quality."

Mary Judnich, who manages U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow's West Michigan office, accepted a special plaque saluting her employer's longtime support of community health care. Stabenow couldn't attend Saturday, but did videotape a special message. "It does like seem yesterday, I was here for the groundbreaking," Judnich said. "Integration of care, and efficient care, in this new clinic will benefit the patients and staff. But we also know, it's the heart and souls of the medical providers – and the staff – that will bring this building alive, and continue the wonderful care that InterCare provides for their patients."

"This Building Is Full Of Light And Energy"

Patients visiting the new clinic will encounter a dramatically different facility than the Mercy Center – which featured two co-located sites in separate areas of the building. Instead, they'll see an expanded reception area, and waiting spaces, outfitted with children's seats, and TVs – that are intended to promote a warmer, more welcoming feel. Restrooms will have children's sized toilets, and changing areas.

Accessibility and openness are hallmarks of the new design. Instead of being shut off in a room by themselves, dental patients in the 18 operating stations will look out through floor-length windows, noted Mamie Yarbrough – one of several tour guides on hand for Saturday's open house. In keeping with those ideals, the dental stations don't have any doors, as well. Employees using the new nursing stations will also be able to look out through windows, and see what's going around them.

There will also be a special community room for meetings, training sessions and other types of events, Yarbrough said. "I'm sure that they'll (the users) be able to get in touch with InterCare, and see what they can use. In the last two or three days, they've (management) been doing a lot of different things with different people," Yarbrough said. "One day, we practiced on the employees – we showed them around, but couldn't hold onto them. They wanted to see: 'Where's my area?' So I let them go!"

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On the ecological side, TERA sought to gain points for LEED certification – an acronym for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, according to InterCare's release. Major elements include a rainwater capturing system, plus solar panels, sun shades, and a white roof. The panels will generate up to five percent of the building's energy needs, while the roof "will reflect heat and light and pour more natural light into the building's windows," said Tracy Ezell, of TERA.

The building materials are expected to last 25 years, and are part of the actual structure, eliminating the need for materials like drywall, the release said. In recognition of increased demand for electric cars, the parking lot's light poles will contain special charging outlets. "This building is full of light, and energy – it is a pleasurable place to come as patient, and a pleasant place to work for the staff," Day said.

InterCare Community Health Network, 800 M-139, is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday and Wednesday, and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

For more information about programs and services, call (855) 869-6900, or visit intercare.org. For more details on the community health center movement, visit nachc.com, or mpca.net. The latter addresses are sites for the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC), and the Michigan Primary Care Association (MPCA), to which InterCare belongs.

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