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Health Clinic to serve low-income residents

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Posted By: Elishah Oesch

At a time when health care is a major issue and a major expense, some new help is on the rise.

In Benton Township, a 10 million dollar health clinic to serve low-income residents and migrant families will soon rise at the corner of M-139 and Empire Avenue. InterCare Community Health Network will break ground at 4 p.m. Thursday for the center.

It combines InterCare's two Benton Harbor clinics. The amount of clinic space will grow from 25,000 square feet to 40,000 square feet, allowing the Bangor-based nonprofit to accommodate more patients and services. "We clearly know that the health care needs in Benton Harbor are there. We see it every day," InterCare President and CEO Velma Hendershott said in a news release. The clinic is scheduled to open next year. The project will be funded with an \$8.5 million federal stimulus grant and a USDA Rural Health Facilities Loan. InterCare began 36 years ago, specializing in serving underserved populations in Southwest Michigan.

InterCare has been leasing space in the Mercy Center in Benton Harbor since 1991, and its staff is spread out on two floors in separate wings of the building. The new center will accommodate the latest in medical technology and make services more efficient. InterCare is one of only two health care centers in Michigan to get a stimulus grant. Only 85 health centers nationwide received grants out of 600 applicants, InterCare reported. Construction is expected to create up to 45 jobs, along with positions for three new medical providers, two dentists and additional mental health professionals, InterCare reported. Patient support jobs will be added. InterCare bought the 7-acre site from the House of David after considering two other sites. InterCare has worked for 27 months with Southshore Companies of St. Joseph through the planning and design process. "It has truly been a team," said David Kirshenbaum, Southshore's vice president. The company will work with InterCare through project completion. TERA Architects of Benton Harbor, led by Tracy Ezell, designed the building.

The building is going beyond current environmental standards, and will be 20 percent more energy efficient than a typical clinic of its type, Kirshenbaum said. Solar cells will be used to feed the electrical panels, and storm water will be stored underground for use as landscape irrigation. "It will be as green as we could make it," he said. The new multimillion dollar medical facility is part of a renaissance taking place in the Benton Harbor-area, along with the opening of Harbor Shores and plans for Whirlpool Corp's new headquarters, Kirshenbaum said.



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