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Southwest Michigan

Local News

A bright new home for InterCare

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This is the main entrance to the new clinic. John Madill / H-P staff

Health system for the needy opens health center on M-139 Monday

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BENTON TOWNSHIP - When InterCare Community Health Network opens its new state-of-the-art health center to patients Monday, it will be the culmination of a long-held vision.

It will be two months shy of two years since, on Aug. 6, 2009, InterCare applied for federal stimulus money to build the health center, which will provide care to the most needy.

One of 600 applicants, InterCare was among 85 health centers nationwide to be awarded a grant. The new \$10 million clinic at 800 M-139 in Benton Township was made possible by \$8.5 million in stimulus money from what was formally called the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, combined with a Rural Health Facilities loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"We are thrilled," Velma Hendershott, InterCare president and CEO, said on a recent tour of the new health center. "This is for the whole community. It's been an amazing journey, a long birthing process, you might say."

The public will get its first look at the new facility at the corner of M-139 and Empire Avenue at an open house from 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony slated for 2:30. InterCare will open for patient care at 8 a.m. Monday. Hours of operation will be 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays, and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

InterCare is moving into the new 40,000-square-foot building from the Mercy Center in Benton Harbor, where it has occupied 25,000 square feet on two floors in separate wings. The clinic there will close at noon today.

"The new health center will improve patient flow, eliminate inefficiencies and enable us to serve more patients," Hendershott said. "We see approximately 50,000 patients throughout Southwest Michigan each year and we know that number is only going to increase."

InterCare, based in Bangor, provides primary medical and dental care for people of all ages, mostly poor people and those without medical insurance. The health system has been serving the Benton Harbor area since 1984. Hendershott said health centers like InterCare provide quality health care to people who otherwise would not be able to afford it. The centers help keep vulnerable populations out of emergency rooms, where care is much more costly, she said.

Phil Maki, treasurer of Southshore Companies in St. Joseph, was project manager. He said the project created 45-50 jobs during construction, which began last July, and most of the materials used in the building were manufactured within 200 miles of Benton Harbor. Owens Ames Kimball of Grand Rapids was the general contractor, and TERA Architects of Benton Harbor designed the energy-efficient building, which qualifies for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, certification.

Maki said the building includes solar panels that will generate up to 5 percent of its energy needs and a white roof that will reflect heat and light and pour more natural light into the building. It also has a rainwater-capture system in which rainwater from the roof will be stored underground to provide irrigation on the grounds.

A canopy of trees on one side of the building provides natural shade, reducing air conditioning costs. It also provides a pleasing environment for patients in any of the 18 dental stations, with windows facing the trees.

Light poles in the parking lot contain charging outlets for electric vehicles.

"The biggest difference for our patients will be the ability to integrate all services through one registration area," Hendershott said. "It's comprehensive and integrated rather than fragmented like in our old location."

Besides dental and medical suites, the building includes an employee cafeteria and a community room that can be used for staff training or community education programs. InterCare Community Health Network also operates fixed sites in Bangor, Eau Claire, Holland and Pullman. It also operates a migrant voucher program and two mobile units. InterCare is the fourth-largest provider of Women, Infant and Children services in the state and is involved in a variety of other programs. Patient demand is expected to grow by 35 percent in the next few years.

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