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Axis Community Health doubles capacity for health care to needy

'Patients can feel good just by being here'

by Jeb Bing / Pleasanton Weekly

Axis Community Health has opened its new \$12 million health center in Pleasanton, a 24,000-square-foot complex on West Las Positas Boulevard that doubles service capacity for the more than 14,000 Tri-Valley low-income, uninsured and under-insured individuals it serves each year.

"This is a true milestone for Axis, for the people we serve, and for the many community members, government representatives and supporters who have helped make this project a reality," said Sue Compton, Axis' chief executive officer. "Access to care has taken a huge, wonderful step forward."

The conversion of the former commercial building involved a complete interior renovation in order to create 27 exam rooms, seven counseling rooms and ancillary service areas. The project was completed by INDE Architecture and general contractor Oliver & Co.

Some funding for the \$12 million project came from Alameda County, the cities of Pleasanton, Dublin and Livermore, and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. The remainder is being financed through The California Endowment and Capital Impact Partners.

Axis also raised \$1.7 million for construction through a capital campaign, and it is now raising an additional \$300,000 for medical equipment and furnishings.

Major campaign supporters included Kaiser Permanente, Palo Alto Medical Foundation, Stanford Health Care-ValleyCare, Fremont Bank Foundation and HEDCO Foundation, an organization that helps make fundraising more effective.

Axis also has additional medical clinic sites, including one in downtown Pleasanton on Railroad Avenue and one at Livermore's multi-services center, as well as two behavioral health sites and a Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program site. All of those sites remain open.

Founded in 1972, Axis provides quality, affordable medical, mental health and substance abuse services that promote the well-being of all members of the community. In the last year, Tri-Valley residents made more than 100,000 visits to one of Axis' five locations.

Compton said Axis brings access to affordable, quality care to thousands in the Tri-Valley who otherwise would not be able to receive primary and preventative care.

"When people are able to stay healthy, they can go to work and school which helps families thrive," she said. "Access to care also reduces the number of acute episodes requiring hospitalization for chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes. Avoiding high-cost



Dr. Dawnell Moody, chief medical officer at Axis Community Health, joins CEO Sue Compton in front of the nonprofit agency's new \$12 million health center in Pleasanton, a 24,000-square-foot complex at 5925 W. Las Positas Blvd. that doubles service capacity for the more than 14,000 Tri-Valley individuals it serves each year. (Photo by Valerie Jonas)



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Axis Community Health doubles... <http://www.pleasantonweekly.c...>

emergency care is good for families and the community."

Building a new health center has been Axis' goal for many years.

Even with its two facilities in downtown Pleasanton and Livermore, with 22 exam rooms combined, it wasn't enough.

"We did everything possible to increase the number of service visits," Compton said, "adding evening and Saturday hours, hiring more providers, moving administrative services off site to create more clinical space. But we simply couldn't serve more people without more clinical space."

Axis went from serving 10,000 medical patients in 2011 to currently serving 14,000, while needs assessment data show the number of low-income and uninsured people in need of care is more than 20,000. Axis expects to serve 20,000 patients within a few years.

"We are doing a lot of outreach to let people know they can now gain access to health care with us," Compton said. "We struggled for many years, while this project was in development, to see as many people as we could in our limited space, but could not meet everyone's needs."

"We now have enough exam rooms to eliminate any delays in getting care, so now is a time to let people know they have this wonderful service available to them," she added.

The location at 5925 W. Las Positas Blvd. in Hacienda is ideal for patients. The street is a major thoroughfare, BART is close and there is bus service. That helps because an increasing number of Axis patients are coming from Dublin and Contra Costa County, so this new site is well-located.

The Axis multi-services center in Livermore and its Railroad Avenue site in Pleasanton serve behavioral health needs and WIC nutrition services. Both are operating at full capacity.

The new Axis center is light and spacious. Great attention was given to designing a place that is welcoming and soothing. Architects used nature as their theme, incorporating the curves and colors of the Tri-Valley's surrounding hills.

"It has been our goal all along to create a center where our patients can feel good just by being here," Compton said.

The new site is fully operational and offers primary and preventative medical care and mental health services for all ages. Services include pediatrics, internal medicine, family practice, women's health and care for chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, hypertension and asthma. Other services include nutrition consultation, case management and health education.

Enrollment services are provided for patients as well, which provides access to Medi-Cal and Covered California insurance plans. Axis is the certified enrollment entity for Covered California in the Tri-Valley. Staff at the site includes more than a dozen physicians and nurse practitioners, as well as mental health professionals, nurses, registered dietitians and support staff.

The new facility also has on-site services that Axis didn't have space for before, including a lab for blood draws and a patient pharmacy for medication refills. There is a spacious classroom for patient health education.

A key opportunity in building the new facility was designing the space specifically for patient-centered care teams, a care model that supports patients in meeting all of their care needs.

For example, Axis has integrated counseling services at all its clinic sites, wherein doctors and mental health counselors work together to develop care plans that treat the "whole" person. To facilitate this model, the new clinic has team rooms, rather than private offices, where providers and staff work side-by-side, which facilitates communication and achieves better health outcomes for patients.

Axis' campaign committee is working to raise an additional \$300,000 to cover costs for remaining medical equipment and furnishings. Contributions can be made at www.axishealthcampaign.org.

Though this project is complete, Axis won't be resting for long. It has already started working with the Tri-Valley cities to see how affordable dental services can be brought to the area. As it is, low-income residents must travel to Oakland to get dental care, and the waiting lists are very long.

"Since dental care affects many other health indicators, we are hopeful that we can make these services available locally in the next few years," Compton said.

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