

## **New community clinic keeps health care within reach**

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THE OPENING of the Marin Community Clinics' new health center in San Rafael is an example of the caring and generosity that makes great things happen in our county.

For many years, the low-cost clinic has operated out of a "temporary" building next to Marin General Hospital. Over the years, the clinic has served as a critical safety net, helping make sure all people have access to medical care.

Last week, the clinic celebrated the opening of its new Canal Area health center, a crown jewel in the county's plan to turn the old Lucasfilm Industrial Light & Magic studios into a Health and Wellness campus.

The clinic's new center at 3110 Kerner Blvd. features 18 well-equipped examination rooms and a spanking new dental clinic.

The clinic places medical care and advice much closer to many of its patients. It also opens at a time when the need is great.

Medical care is in turmoil. National reform is desperately needed, but political consensus on this important issue has not emerged despite years of debate.

Meanwhile, with insurance premiums rising beyond many households' means and many physicians refusing Medicare-covered patients, more and more Marin residents are turning to the community clinic for care.

The growing need for the clinic is reaching higher up Marin's economic ladder.

Today, the clinic - which has its own staff of primary-care doctors, nurse practitioners and nurses as well as specialists who volunteer their time - serves about 15,000 patients per year.

The clinic says 85 percent of its patients hold jobs, but cannot afford health insurance. The number of Marin residents confronted by this dilemma is expected to grow. The nonprofit estimates its annual number of patients will grow to 18,000 to 20,000 by 2010.

In addition to the new clinic and retaining the Greenbrae site, the clinic also is planning to open a third site, in Novato, all goals of its \$9.8 million capital fundraising campaign.

That campaign has raised close to \$9 million, which is particularly impressive because 60 percent of the money is from individual donors.

Generous gifts from Dr. Melvin Grais, a retired Marin physician, and John E. and Helen K. Cahill, the longtime Kentfield residents whose donor-advised fund is managed by the Marin Community Foundation, are reflected in the new clinic bearing their names.

Longtime Marin dentist Louis Geissberger's generosity and commitment to the establishment of the new dental clinic will be reflected in its name.

The clinic's history has included financially precarious periods, but the community, from individual donors to doctors and nurses who volunteer their time and talents, have kept its doors open and built the local support needed to make its longstanding vision of opening a new facility a reality.

On July 21, when the new clinic officially opens its doors, patients will find a spacious new facility in a more convenient location.

The clinic's Greenbrae location is difficult to reach for patients who depend on public transit, often requiring marathon bus rides.

This much-needed expansion represents Marin's commitment to keeping good medical care within reach for its residents. The county's \$1.3 million contribution underscores the clinic's vital role in Marin's health-care network.

A larger clinic needs more doctors and nurses. Recruiting physicians to donate their time and skills is an ongoing challenge. But, a new facility should attract talented help.

The opening of the San Rafael clinic is a milestone in which Marin should take great pride.