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Clinic prepares for move to larger quarters



Rich Talmo and Lynn Hunter team up on fundraising for North County Health Services. Hunter is director of Fund Development and Talmo is a Fund Development consultant for the organization. (Julie Gallant)

By **Julie Gallant**

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Once North County Health Services' new Ramona clinic opens, there should be ample room to expand from eight to 11 examination rooms and from two to four behavioral health rooms.

NCHS operates 13 clinics in San Diego and Riverside counties. The private 501(c)(3) nonprofit, known locally for its 217 Earlham St. location, purchased the former Sears building at 220 Rotanzi St. with an eye toward accommodating a growing number of patients in Ramona.

Its move from Earlham Street to Rotanzi Street is scheduled for the end of 2018. The new health center will be 8,682 square feet. Renovation of the building will begin once county permits are approved, but for now the project is limited to installing plumbing and electrical components.

Lynn Hunter, NCHS director of fund development, explained the organization's history and potential for growth at a recent Ramona Rotary Club meeting.

Hunter said NCHS had its start in Ramona more than 45 years ago. She said a small group of people purchased a van to be used as a mobile health care unit. Staff would drive to the fields to offer basic medical care to agricultural workers, she said. From there, NCHS moved into a

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“In 1974, NCHS moved into the building it’s currently in which has served us well on Earlham Street,” she said, noting that the clinic provides services to a growing population. “We’ve outgrown that building many times over. Because of the limited size of the building, we’ve not been able to maximize the opportunity to see more and more patients.”

NCHS maintains a mission to offer healthcare services to everyone regardless of their ability to pay, including people with financial and transportation limitations, the working poor, small business owners and the unemployed. The focus is on prevention and management of chronic diseases such as diabetes.

“NCHS helps patients create a healthier environment so they can stay out of emergency rooms,” Hunter said. “It provides managed care plans so patients are healthier.”

In Ramona, NCHS maintains 28 staff, and in 2017 the clinic served nearly 4,000 patients. Those patients were seen for 1,395 dental visits and 16,517 total visits that year. Its services range from pediatric care to adult medicine including women’s health care. It also extends to senior care to serve a growing senior population. NCHS offers dental care across age ranges, even to improve the dental health of unborn babies.

Care even encompasses behavioral health services to serve patients experiencing post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and depression. Additionally, chiropractic care is offered to help reduce the use of opioid prescription medication to treat chronic back pain.

Hunter credited NCHS’s former chief executive officer, Irma Cota, with growing the organization and investing in building purchases so the operations would not be subject to increasing rents. After Cota’s retirement, she was replaced by CEO Barbara Kennedy in March 2018.

Kennedy has more than 20 years of senior healthcare executive experience and recently served as president and CEO of Northern Arizona Healthcare Verde Valley Medical Center in Arizona.

More information about NCHS will be shared with the community at a gathering from 5 to 7 p.m. on June 28 at Turtle Rock Ridge Winery, 18351 Woods Hill Lane. Reservations are requested this week by contacting Jennifer Pena at 760-736-6710 or jennifer.pena@nchs-health.org.

NCHS is also planning a fundraiser, the 14th Annual Fore for Kids Golf Classic, on Aug. 21 at the Omni Resort in La Costa. For more information, contact Hunter at 760-736-8669 or lynn.hunter@nchs-health.org.

“In addition to philanthropic support, we’re really seeking grassroots support,” Hunter said. “This project is an opportunity to make a powerful statement for NCHS to help Ramona citizens.”

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