WESTERN SIERRA MEDICAL CENTER OPENS NEW CENTER, EXPANDS SERVICES

19,000-square-foot Facility Allows Western Sierra to Meet Patient Growth, Add Specialists and Better Focus on Long-Term Mission of Improving Region's Health Care

GRASS VALLEY – Western Sierra Medical Center on Monday opened its long-awaited and much-needed new building in Grass Valley, a major milestone for the health center that provides comprehensive medical services to the region.

The 19,000-square-foot building – about 50 percent larger than the previous location – will allow the nonprofit to expand its services and improve health care in Nevada, Sierra and Yuba counties. Western Sierra handles care for about 20,000 patients per year, a dramatic increase from 2,000 a decade ago.

"This building isn't possible without the support of the entire community," Western Sierra Medical Center CEO Scott McFarland said during the grand opening celebration of the new building Dec. 15.

The new building allows the center to better meet the burgeoning demand for services – and its long-term mission.

Western Sierra provides comprehensive medical, dental and behavioral health care and emphasizes preventive care, education and empowering patients to make informed decisions.

"This symbolizes a new beginning, but, in reality, it's a commitment to our mission," said Western Sierra Chief Medical Officer Dr. Glenn Thiel.

Western Sierra has detailed a far-reaching goal to improve the health of its patients and the region, from developing a one-stop center for services to focusing on the diagnosis and treatment of disease as well as disease prevention and healthy lifestyles. The center continues to develop new ways to improve the health of patients, from case managers who closely track patients to introducing telemedicine, which greatly expands the rural community's access to specialists.

It's a big commitment for the center, the largest outpatient health care provider in Nevada County.

The building is a major step forward, with 28 patient rooms – six more than the previous location – as well as dedicated areas for maternity services and specialists. The new center also includes behavioral health rooms, a dental suite – featuring an area for children dentistry – and even an on-site lab and community room. In addition, a new Nevada County bus stop is at the entry drive through for convenient access for patients.

"We're very excited about what you're doing for the community," said State Sen. Ted Gaines, whose father-in-law and wife are from Nevada County, and have needed life-saving medical attention. "What you do in the rural community is critical."

Indeed, Western Sierra provides health care to about one of every three residents in Nevada County, said Grass Valley Mayor Jason Fouyer.

"The wellness of our citizens is what really matters to our community," he said. "This is really the heart of the community."

About 200 people, from community leaders to elected officials, attended the grand opening for the center, including a ribbon-cutting ceremony and tours of the new building.

"This is truly a facility that the community will be proud of," said incoming Nevada County Supervisor Dan Miller, the former mayor of Grass Valley. "This is a centerpiece for health care."

California Primary Care Association President and CEO Carmella Castellano-Garcia agrees, adding Western Sierra's new building and expanded services will serve as a model for the association's member organizations, which treated about 5.6 million Californians last year – or about one of every seven residents in the state.

"This new building will help Western Sierra Medical Center increases its services to the community," she said. "And these services are vitally needed, especially in the rural community."

In addition to providing health care, Western Sierra is a major employer in the region, with more than 90 positions, from doctors and registered nurses to support staff.

"We really have a vibrant medical community," Nevada County Supervisor Ed Scofield said during the grand opening. "This really adds to the economic engine of Nevada County."

Western Sierra executives considered 10 locations before choosing the Old Tunnel Road property that provides easy access to Highway 49, said project architect Brent Daggett. The property, adjacent to a major shopping center, offers mature trees and a slight slope – and more land for expansion, when necessary.

"We needed to design the building to grow with the population," McFarland said during a 45-minute tour for community leaders at the grand opening. The center has additional land available and the building is designed to expand, when necessary. Western Sierra has enjoyed 10 percent-plus

annual patient growth in recent years. "We've learned that we need to know how to expand rather quickly."

"The overall theme is access, for everyone in the community – all plans, all comers," said Thiel, adding the center gains about 65 new patients every week. "It's a challenge, but with the new space, we are able to meet that challenge."

The new building – about halfway between downtown Grass Valley and Nevada City in the Brunswick Basic Commercial District – has an energy-efficient design and numerous features, including energy-saving light fixtures, low-flow plumbing fixtures and a white roof that greatly reflects heat and reduces cooling costs.

In addition, the building was designed to make the most of natural lighting while reducing exposure to the summer heat, especially with only a few windows on the west side of the structure. And, long overhangs provide much-welcomed shade on the south, east and west sides.

Tru-Line Builders was the general contractor on the project. Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) Loan was the lender for the new building.

"This new building wouldn't be possible without the tireless work of so many people, from our board members to our staff," said McFarland, citing the building has been in the works for several years. "We're extremely proud of our accomplishments and the new building, but we're also always looking at how to improve our services and the health of the community every day."

About Western Sierra Medical Center

Western Sierra Medical Center provides comprehensive medical, dental and behavioral health care in Nevada, Sierra and Yuba counties**.** Founded in 1975, Western Sierra emphasizes preventive care, education and empowering patients to make informed decisions. Western Sierra provides services for the HMO and private markets, and to low-income and senior citizens. Western Sierra is the largest outpatient health care provider in Nevada County, where a new full service health center will meet growing demands in the community. You can learn more about Western Sierra Medical Center at www.wsmcmed.org and on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/WesternSierraMedicalCenter.

Photo and Caption:

California State Sen. Ted Gaines, Western Sierra Medical Center Chief Medical Officer Dr. Glenn Thiel and CEO Scott McFarland handle the ribbon-cutting duties during the grand opening of the new Western Sierra Medical Center building in Grass Valley.

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