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Western Sierra Medical Clinic to open new branch in Penn Valley

The new facility of Western Sierra Medical Clinic will be located in downtown Penn Valley at 10544 Spenceville Road.

Western Sierra Medical Clinic will be opening a new branch in Penn Valley by the end of the year to provide a closer to home option for patients of the health center who live in that area of the community, officials said.

The new facility is located on 10544 Spenceville Road and is slated to open by the end of the year. Scott McFarland, chief executive officer of Western Sierra Medical Clinic, said an incentive for his decision is the large senior population in Penn Valley that often has to drive to Grass Valley for medical assistance.

“We’ve been in discussions with Penn Valley for years. We have currently around 1,500 individuals that live in Penn Valley and drive up to Grass Valley to come to this health center site,” said McFarland. “It may seem like only 10 miles away, but it’s 10 miles to someone who doesn’t drive, or who doesn’t have a car.”

The 3,650 square-foot new building is undergoing renovations. The clinic is also awaiting approvals from the state and the city, McFarland said. He expects to start with a limited site, but will continue to add more services.

Some services that will be provided are: primary care, pediatrics, dental and specialists, along with an onsite pharmacy. The clinic accepts Medicare, Medi-Cal, CMSP, Family Pact and most commercial insurances. In addition, officials said Western Sierra offers Medicare patients a fee based on their ability to pay for care.

“I think it’s a great idea. The closest one (clinic) is in Grass Valley. You wouldn’t have to go way out of town.” John Parish resident of Penn Valley

In terms of staff, clinic officials said the center would bring in specialized personnel based on the need of the community.

“We have some providers here (in Grass Valley). We also have some new providers coming, so we can put some providers over there,” said Dr. Glenn Thiel, chief medical officer of Western Sierra Medical Clinic. “Most likely that person will be a physician, but we are also looking at the probability of putting a nurse practitioner there, a very experienced person who knows their stuff. We’ll just have to see what the demand is.”

The new site will be located right across from a business center.

“People who come down to do business downtown can at the same time schedule a medical appointment,” said Nevada County Supervisor Hank Weston, who represents Penn Valley and who helped bring the new clinic to the community.

“Penn Valley really needs some jobs. It will also stir up the restaurants in the community,” Weston added.

According to a 2010 report from the U.S. Census, the total population of Penn Valley is 1,621, and 687 of the residents are age 50 or older.

“We do have a large elderly population in Penn Valley,” said Clayton Thomas, Penn Valley Fire Protection District captain. “And the typical medical condition of this population includes congestive heart failure, COPD, diabetes, high blood pressure, so those are all the types of medical conditions that clinic such as this would be treating.”

The Penn Valley Fire Station is also on Spencerville Road and is within walking distance to the clinic. Thomas said the station is staffed with at least one or two paramedics daily, so the response time to the clinic would be very short should the facility need them.

Louis Silva Jr., who has lived in Penn Valley for 12 years, said he welcomes the idea of a new clinic.

“We would like to have a regular doctor or a primary physician to see close by,” said Silva, a 54-year-old truck driver. “It takes twice as much gas to drive to the hospital in Grass Valley.”

“I think it’s a great idea,” said John Parish, also a resident of Penn Valley. “The closest one (clinic) is in Grass Valley. You wouldn’t have to go way out of town.”

Vicki Dudley, a cashier of a supermarket in Penn Valley who has lived in the neighborhood for 20 years, said things she would like to see at a new clinic are “an emergency drop-in, more doctors and quicker appointments.”

McFarland said there’s no plan to establish an emergency center at the new clinic at this point, but it’s something to consider.

“As the Penn Valley site expands, we are going to bring more services there,” said Thiel, “and we will try to bring as many there as we have here. If we can’t, people will still have access here.”

Western Sierra introduced an urgent care service in August at its Grass Valley location. The center operates 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday and offers no-appointment-needed, same-day health care.

Western Sierra Medical Clinic, a nonprofit health center, started in 1975 in Downieville through a community effort. In 2008, it opened a mobile clinic. In 2010, Western Sierra Medical Clinic merged with Miners Clinic in Grass Valley to form a third office. The organization currently serves 20,000 patients in Nevada, Yuba and Sierra counties.

But McFarland said the major focus right now is the Penn Valley medical center and listening to what the community needs.

Weston said he will hold a town hall meeting in Penn Valley in January and the new clinic will be a focus of the discussion. He also expects the staff from the center to do a lot of outreach in the next six months.

“The support of the community is really the driving force behind this,” said McFarland.

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