

Lone Star's new medical center is up and caring

By RACHEL SLADE

It's three down, one to go at Lone Star Circle of Care's Lake Aire medical complex, where tiny hands ran along child-sized tables and adults settled into cushioned armchairs this week.

The expansive nonprofit clinic space serving the area's uninsured and underserved has seen patients through the pharmacy, psychiatry and behavioral health clinic, and adult clinic — temporarily housed in space for a senior clinic — for months. But with millions more in renovation and a bit of staffing musical chairs, Lone

Star opened its pediatric care space two weeks ago, followed it Monday with the debut of adult care in its allotted space and will complete plans on Tuesday, July 6 with the opening of the senior care clinic.

"We're very busy right now," Practice Administrator Shveta Bhambhani said as she watched patient after patient pass through the medical mall Monday morning. "Everything's going well and everyone's excited about the space."

Featuring 16 exam rooms in

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Ben Trollinger

Lupita Jaramillo, a medical assistant at the Lone Star Circle of Care pediatric center at Lake Aire, checks the heartbeat of 10-month-old Ariele Acuna this week.

CLINICS

CEO says facility is one any family would be proud to use

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pediatric and 14 in adult — up from 10 each in their old spaces — the paired clinics at Lake Aire are the first of their kind for the nonprofit system, linked in the middle by a shared nursing station and laboratory space. The idea was to utilize every square inch, Ms. Bhambhani said, and encourage providers in the adult clinic to learn more about specialized pediatric care. Between the two, the clinics also feature a staff training room, a team of eligibility specialists and Ms. Bhambhani's "favorite thing in the whole place": a central supply room.

With the capacity for 2,000 patient encounters a month in pediatrics and 1,500 in adult care, health officials say "the hub," funded by the Georgetown Health Foundation, is primed to be one of the most important medical destinations in the city.

"Part of our goal overall was to provide a facility anyone in the community would want to come to — insured, uninsured; somewhere anyone would be proud to bring their family," said Scott Alarcon, CEO of the Georgetown Health Foundation. "We didn't cut any corners in making this a really quality facility."

The Georgetown Health Foundation purchased the then-vacant Lake Aire shopping center in 2004 with the original concept of turning it into a comprehensive wellness center, an extension of the care offered at the Georgetown Hospital (before it was acquired by St. David's HealthCare four years ago). But after roughly two years of consideration, the Foundation's board members decided their assets in real estate could do the most good in collaboration with the program assets of Lone Star, which opened its first clinic in Georgetown in 2002.

"The idea isn't to duplicate, it's to build on what's already in the community and make it that much better — and that's what I think this collaboration was able to do," said Sam Schultz, the Foundation's CFO. "It's not always about writing a check; doing something like this gets you a little bit closer to the entities you serve."

By 2007 the collaboration between the Foundation and Lone Star had taken root, and the relationship was cemented the following year when the Foundation made its first substantial contribution to the clinic system: \$1 million in unrestricted funds.

Now, at a total project price tag of about \$7.2 million, the Lake Aire medical complex offers more than 4,500 square feet of senior clinical space, and more than 7,000 square feet each

of adult primary and pediatric primary care space. Those combined with a swanky "medical mall" entryway, 2,600 square feet devoted to a psychiatry and behavioral health clinic, more than 8,000 square feet of administrative space, the Lone Star system's largest Class A pharmacy, and St. David's Rehabilitation-Georgetown and Georgetown Community Clinic Dental Center nearby — all told more than 40,000 square feet — completes a massive portion of the Foundation's vision for a one-stop Georgetown shop for health and wellness.

"The original number on this space was that it could see 26,000 unique patients so, depending on the census numbers, that means a little over half of Georgetown could be served in this one facility," Mr. Alarcon said. "To me, that's pretty cool."

In the new digs the nonprofit's health providers have increased collaborative opportunities, Lone Star Chief Operating Officer Maureen Polivka said, and the chance to touch more lives in a streamlined approach to lifelong health. An integral part of the plan, she said, includes the psychiatry and behavioral health services available on site for consultation and treatment of any age.

"It is so intertwined; medical and behavioral issues," she said. "Coordinating care as a whole gives [patients] a better outcome overall for both mental health and chronic conditions, so I'm excited for that to be such a focus here . . . We even have a geriatric specialist to serve the senior population."

The focus extends beyond the walls of the clinic space as well; a core team of Lone Star medical and mental health leaders meet monthly to work at incorporating mental health screening tools into typical medical check-ups. Many outcomes, Ms. Polivka said, have already improved as a result.

The final piece of the building's puzzle will come together this fall in the form of three community rooms. The Foundation is still deciding how best to equip the spaces and organize their sign-ups, but once the rooms open they'll offer space for everything from meetings to trainings for Lone Star and other area nonprofits.

The community rooms also offer space to grow if necessary, Mr. Alarcon said; combined, their footprint is roughly the same as the adult clinic's, meaning they could be easily renovated to serve as additional clinic space if area growth warranted it.

"It'll just be a matter of how fast Lone Star grows and whether we need to make the switch," Mr. Alarcon said. "But for now we wanted to open them to the community organizations."

For more information on Lone Star Circle of Care, visit www.lscctx.org. To make an appointment, visit the website or call 1-877-800-LSCC.