



# The Daily Astorian



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## Clinic experiences growing pains

*So many patients need care that health center is moving to bigger digs*

**By JOSEPH GAMM**

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ALEX PAJUNAS — *The Daily Astorian*

Jim Coffee, executive director and CEO of Coastal Family Health Center, gives Alyce Burgess, the health clinic's board chairwoman, a tour of the center's new facilities on the third floor of the Park Medical Building. The move from Columbia Memorial Hospital will increase space from 2,500 square feet to more than 6,500.

Coastal Family Health Center is bursting at the seams.

The clinic has a new-patient waiting list of nearly 400 people who want to get into the system.

At approximately 2,500 square feet, its Columbia Memorial Hospital location - where the clinic has been since 2003 - isn't nearly big enough anymore.

So, the clinic is moving across the street to the third floor of the new Park Medical Building - between Exchange Street and Marine Drive - overlooking the Columbia River.

With this move, the clinic will expand to over 6,500 square feet, and go from six examination rooms to 15.

Jim Coffee, CFHC executive director, said the national model is three exam rooms for each medical provider. Right now, the clinic has one exam room for each provider.

The clinic treated more than 2,400 patients in 2006, accounting for over 11,000 office visits. With more space, in 2008 the clinic expects to see more than 3,000 patients, and have as many as 20,000 office visits.

The clinic will increase from 21 employees to between 25 and 30.

Coffee said the move will have a huge effect on the organization and the community.

"As providers of care for uninsured and underinsured, we'll take care of just about anybody, regardless of their ability to pay," Coffee said.

He said directors of the clinic looked at their business and saw they weren't meeting the community's needs.

But the clinic can't just go out and buy what it needs. Coffee said the clinic charges on a sliding scale, dependent on the patient's ability to pay. He said the clinic is different from most medical offices. Payments for services often come nine months after the service is provided from the U.S. Office of Rural Health - a division of the Department of Health and Human Services.



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Jesus Nava, left, and Quirino Luis, both from Woodburn and working for Delta Drywall, utilize stilts to move around the hallways of the future home of Coastal Family Health Center inside the Park Medical Building, installing grids for acoustic ceilings.

"We have to be really frugal and efficient. We really have to spend a lot of time making purchases," Coffee said.

Coffee said the clinic usually buys reconditioned equipment, and often relies on the generosity of other health providers. He said, for example, some of the examination tables the clinic started with were provided by CMH as they were replaced by new tables.

"We have to replace things as they fall apart under us," Coffee said.

He said - in good times - the clinic saves money as a reserve.

The clinic has begun its annual fundraising campaign. Coffee said he hopes organizers can raise about \$30,000 by Dec. 1, and \$100,000 by March 1 for equipment and furniture.

Coffee said it's slow going because the application for a federal grant is due. The clinic receives \$481,000 through the grant each year.

Alyce Burgess, the chairwoman of CFHC's board, said one of the fundraising events that will take place is to auction off 500 tickets for an August cruise.

She said the clinic needs to outfit 15 exam rooms. Using refurbished equipment, it costs \$4,300 to outfit a room. Using new equipment, it costs \$5,000.

The board has challenged staff to raise money to buy and name a room. Burgess said operators of the clinic welcome members of the community to volunteer for either of two committees - the Fundraising Committee or the Community Connections Committee.

Medical providers in the clinic are its revenue streams, Coffee said. The clinic uses one doctor, one physician assistant and four nurse practitioners to provide medical services. The doctor, Robert Peterson, oversees the health providers. Lesleigh Smith-Farhat - the operations officer, who is also a registered nurse - oversees the nurses, medical assistants and front desk.

Burgess said people need to be aware that CFHC isn't only for poor people. She hopes the new facility will act as a recruiting tool for new health providers and for new patients.

"Our new waiting room has one of the best views in the city," Coffee said. "There is no exam room in the U.S. with a better view."

Burgess said three of the existing providers came to Astoria for the beautiful community. She said the clinic helps attract providers by getting loan repayments through the federal government. Every year loans to two providers are repaid.

"Our staff are committed," she said. "They're committed to the community, they're committed to the clinic, they're committed to serve."

"Providing health care to people who lack it has been my greatest calling," Coffee said.

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