

Care Point Health and Wellness Center showcases modern facility

TaMarlyn Waters, Democrat staff writer Published 7:27 p.m. ET Oct. 26, 2017 | Updated 8:09 p.m. ET Oct. 26, 2017



(Photo: Hali Tauxe/Democrat)

The new Care Point Health and Wellness Center is a medical home away from home.

Deep and muted shades of gray coat the walls. It's contemporary decor is a stark contrast to sterile medical clinics. Stone and warm wood partitions add elements of nature inside the lobby. A towering tree features as its centerpiece.

Designers were mindful of patients at every turn. An assortment of seats, some with tall backs and others at bar stool height, are grouped in clusters. Patients and visitors can be seated comfortably while they wait.

On Thursday, a select group of business and nonprofit leaders, board members and others were invited to see what Big Bend Cares, a small regional nonprofit, built with a \$15-million investment.

"There was a tremendous team that did all of this," said Rob Renzi, the nonprofit's executive director. "I don't know anything about building anything. So with them, it's just been fabulous."

For Renzi, it was gratifying to finally see the 27,000-square-foot building become a reality. During his initial job interview, he was tasked with shepherding a plan for a new facility that would serve the nonprofit's needs and the greater community.

Care Point is located at 2200 S. Monroe St., across from the Big Bend Cares office on South Magnolia Drive. The primary care facility's offerings include dental, lab work, mental health services and pharmacy provided by Mail-Meds, which takes the guess work out of taking daily medications with its custom packaging design.

A one-stop shop is the goal, which could be especially attractive to residents without cars or who rely on city buses. Other features include 10 exam rooms and free WiFi, along with select computers for public use.



President and CEO of Mail-Meds Mark Theobald at Care Point Health & Wellness Center on South Monroe Street Oct 26. His company will be partnering with Care Point to operate a full service pharmacy on-site. (Photo: Hali Tauxe/Democrat)

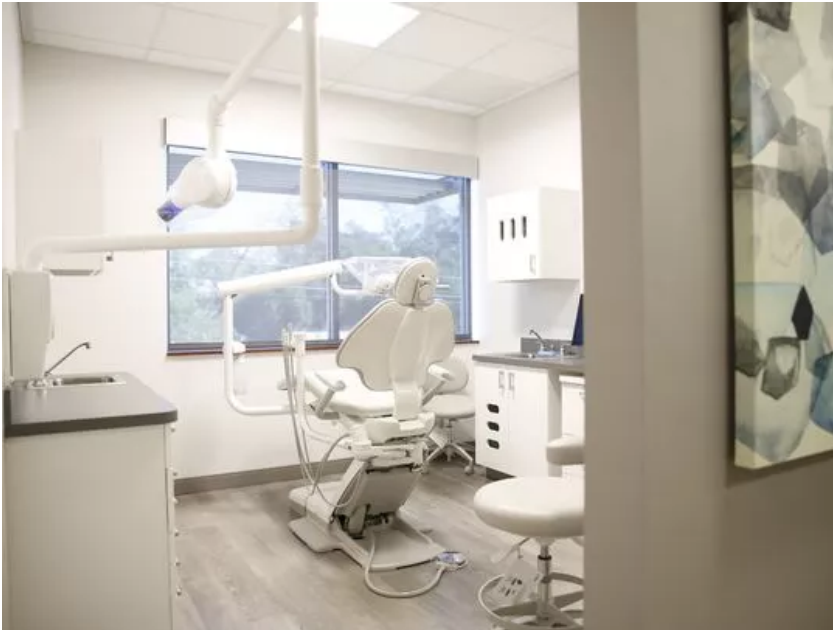
Several partners have teamed up with Care Point: the Apalachee Center for mental health services, Bond Community Health Center, Patient Care from Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare Family Practice and Florida State University College of Medicine. Care Point providers anticipate an influx of patients and are still looking for additional partners to come on board. Prenatal and emergency services are not provided.

"This is amazing," said Katrina Rolle, president and CEO of the United Way of the Big Bend, which provides funding to Big Bend Cares. "I think to have something like this in our community and the services it will provide in our community is just wonderful."

Last year, Big Bend Cares served more than 1,000 patients living with HIV and AIDS with counseling and a menu of support services.

Renzi said Care Point will become an economic driver once it injects 100 new jobs in its first year. In addition, Big Bend Cares owns other nearby parcels on the blighted block that could be used for development, including a coffee shop one day if someone is interested.

Starting Friday existing clients of Big Bend Cares will be the first wave of patients to be served at Care Point. While located on Tallahassee's south side, the new facility is open to anyone in Tallahassee and the region.



The dental suite at Care Point Health & Wellness Center on South Monroe Street, pictured Oct 26.
(Photo: Hali Tauxe/Democrat)

A community open house is planned for Nov. 4, which will provide tours, more information and kid-friendly activities. New patients will be accepted starting Dec. 1.

Throughout the grand opening ceremony, speakers drove home a universal point – all insured and uninsured patients can receive services at Care Point.

That particular message was most likely an attempt to dispel rumors by some activists who claimed low-income and indigent residents will be turned away. During Thursday's event, a demonstration of fewer than a handful of protesters took place outside the building.

"It's not the time to talk about that. I'm just here to celebrate this today," Renzi said in response to the protest.

Care Point was funded through an \$8.5 million loan, private donations and fundraisers, such as the annual Artopia event that showcases and auctions pieces by local artists.

The primary care facility received \$1.5 million in funding incentives by the Community Redevelopment Agency, which was used toward construction costs. Critics chided the CRA for funding the project.

Care Point caught the attention of County Commissioner Bill Proctor, who held a news conference with local activist Dr. Ed Holifield in February to blast the environmental cleanup. A few months later, the Department of Environmental Protection told Big Bend Cares it was signing off on the nonprofit's clean-up order.

As chatter throughout the building ebbed and flowed Thursday afternoon, those who'd been working for years to see this day marveled at what they witnessed. They saw a building unmatched by anything on the south side.

Said Carla Cummings-Morey, board president for Big Bend Cares for the last two years: "We have been in the process of wanting this for our community. We deserve this here on the south side."

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