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Monterey Peninsula Foundation invests \$800,000 for health care in Santa Cruz County

By Jondi Gumz

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SANTA CRUZ -- The Monterey Peninsula Foundation, which puts on the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am Golf Tournament, is investing \$800,000 to bring health and dental services to people in Santa Cruz County who could not afford that care before.

The Santa Cruz Women's Health Center will receive \$450,000, with \$300,000 toward a \$3.4 million project to open a second clinic in Live Oak and \$150,000 for operations.

Dientes Community Dental Care will receive \$350,000, with \$250,000 toward building a \$3 million clinic expansion in Mid-County and \$100,000 for operations.

Foundation chief Steve John, formerly owner of Ocean Honda in Soquel, is familiar with the two health care providers, saying, "Both organizations have proven track records of providing key services to our residents."

Santa Cruz contractor Bogard Construction is undertaking both building projects, which have the same architect, Wald Ruhnke & Dost of Monterey, which closed its Santa Cruz office in wake of the economic downturn.

In Santa Cruz County, only three dentists accept Denti-Cal, a program with 6,800 children ages 5 and younger enrolled, for a ratio of one dentist to serve more than 2,200 youngsters, according to the advocacy group Children Now.

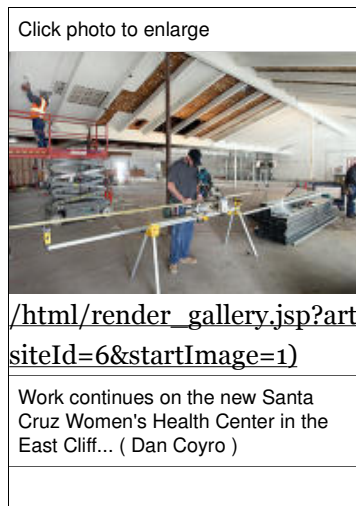
The expansion, with a more efficient layout, aims to serve more youths. That project is set to start in January; Bogard is recruiting subcontractors now.

Dientes is raising funds for that project and for a four-chair dental center in Watsonville and dental service at the Homeless Services Center in Santa Cruz.

"There are two weeks left to make a big impact," said Dientes spokeswoman Sheree Storm, welcoming end of the year contributions.

The Santa Cruz Women's Health Center, which took over space from the Claudio Franca Brazilian Jiu Jitsu school, Dr. Rachel Abrams and qigong master Lee Holden in the East Cliff Village Shopping Center, reports construction is progressing for the new clinic.

Leslie Conner, director of the Santa Cruz Women's Health Center, expects the facility will open in the spring, offering mental health and substance abuse counseling, prenatal education and pediatric care, plus on-site blood work.



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"The opening of our second clinic, serving women, children and men, is particularly critical now as thousands of local residents will be newly insured and seeking a medical home in 2014 thanks to the Affordable Care Act," she said.

With the doors being opened to men, a new name is in the works to reflect the change.

Those looking for doctors with the Santa Cruz Women's Health Center on www.CoveredCA.com (<http://www.CoveredCA.com>) should know they are in two of the three networks in Santa Cruz County.

"Our health center is part of the provider networks for Blue Cross Anthem and for Blue Shield," Conner said. "We do not have a contract with Health Net yet, but are negotiating."

Not all the SCWHC doctors appear in the Covered California physician directory.

Dr. Kristina Muten and Dr. Wendy Stickels are there, but Dr. Maria Mead and Dr. Elisa Breton are not.

Conner said she expects the provider directory to be updated with a listing for Santa Cruz Women's Health Center, "which will be much easier for people to identify us."

She said people can choose Dr. Muten and then be linked to other SCWHC providers, which include nurse practitioners and physician assistants.

"It's important for us to be on Covered California," Conner said noting most patients will qualify for Medi-Cal, which serves people with income of less than \$15,857, but if a patient's income rises above that point, he would have to switch into a subsidized health plan. "Obviously you want continuous care."

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