

Vecinos spending \$5.6 million on services for low-income residents

Vecinos, a free and charitable clinic providing bilingual primary and behavioral health care in western North Carolina, is leading a \$5.6 million effort to better serve the region's uninsured and low-income residents by bringing multiple health and social services under one roof.

On Friday, the clinic finalized the purchase of a 15,000-square-foot building near downtown Franklin that will become the Community Health Hub, home to medical, dental, and behavioral health care, domestic violence counseling, legal services, and community advocacy – all offered on a bilingual basis.

“The uninsured and low-income population in

western North Carolina, in particular the Spanish-speaking population, faces significant barriers to accessing health care,” said Marianne Martinez, Vecinos’ executive director. “The Community Health Hub will allow our neighbors to conveniently receive coordinated and streamlined, high-quality services for free in their language.”

Vecinos’ focus since its founding in 2004 has been on serving farmworkers, but the clinic increased its community outreach in 2020 in response to COVID-related health care needs. The experience led Vecinos to change its charter to expand its mission and inspired the Community Health Hub concept.

In addition to Vecinos, named for the Spanish word for “neighbors,” coalition partners utilizing the Community Health Hub will include:

- Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic, which will continue providing dental care at its clinic in Cashiers and add four dental operatories at the Franklin location
- 30th Judicial District Domestic Violence-Sexual Assault Alliance in Waynesville
- El Centro Comunitario of Macon County, a Hispanic community advocacy group
- Asheville-based Pisgah Legal Services, which provides legal services to low-income people
- Dogwood Health Trust in Asheville provided a

temporary bridge loan to finance the cost of the building purchase. The coalition is launching a \$5.6 million capital campaign to repay the loan and fund required renovations to the facility. The projected opening date for the Community Health Hub is early 2024.

Vecinos and Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic are members of the North Carolina Association of Free and Charitable Clinics, a network of 72 clinics offering high-quality primary, specialty and behavioral health care, pharmacy, and other services to uninsured and underserved residents at little or no cost to patients.

“Free and charitable clinics play a vital role in North Carolina’s health

care safety net and are on the forefront of innovations like the Community Health Hub,” said CEO Randy Jordan. “This initiative shows how clinics are collaborating with each other and other partners to expand access to health care and other services for the underserved and historically marginalized mem-

bers of our communities.” Vecinos will keep its current clinic and office location on the campus of Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, where it saw 732 patients in 2021, and will be able to serve an additional 2,000 patients a year once the Community Health Hub is fully operational.

WCU’s children’s camp starts July 25

Western Carolina University’s Division of Educational Outreach will be offering a new kid’s camp entitled, “Writing in Nature” from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. July 25-29.

Sue Wasserman, this year’s Writer in Residence for the Great Smoky

Mountains National Park, will lead the camp.

“While wandering along stream banks and wooded trails, the children are encouraged to see nature in new ways as well as find their beautiful voice for fun writing, photography and drawing activities,”

said Wasserman.

Campers will go to various location on and around WCU’s campus to do writing and nature themed activities.

Materials will be provided for each camper. Parents/Guardians are encouraged to bring a change

of clothes to pick up for water activity days.

This camp is designed for ages nine – 12 and is \$179 per camper.

For more information and to register, visit wcu.edu and click on “Day Camps” or call 828-227-7397.

SCC’s Upward Bound program helps high school students pay for college tuition

At Southwestern Community College, passion for student success knows no bounds.

The college’s Upward Bound program serves as a preparatory program for area high-potential, high school students who may not have previously considered college as an option after high school.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the program recently received \$1.48 million in funding for another five years. The program has been active at SCC since 1999 and is overseen by Director Annette Kesgen with assistance from aca-

demic advisors Erica Muse and Cheryl Renfro.

The grant re-application process involves creating a proposal by collecting data about the region, and this process occurs every five years.

“Upward Bound isn’t just a program, it’s a community,” Muse said. “As an alumnus, I can honestly say it shifted my trajectories and provided a pathway to college access. I feel incredibly fortunate to have returned home to work with these students – thankfully, my experience has come full circle. Each student that crosses the stage at graduation has already impacted

the world.”

Like Muse, Renfro is also a former Upward Bound student.

“Upward Bound changed my life and gave me opportunities I would not have had without my own advisors’ support,” said Renfro. “I am honored to be part of such a strong program at SCC and have the chance to give back and encourage our future leaders.”

Among the services provided by the program are tutoring, advising, college visits, an annual summer institute hosted at SCC’s Jackson Campus and other activities designed

to inspire participants to pursue higher education upon graduating from high school.

For more information about Upward Bound, contact Kesgen at akesgen@SouthwesternCC.edu or 828-339-4281.

Cashiers Education Corner

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Historical View



File photo

Main building of the High Hampton Inn. The hotel captures a blend of natural building materials in keeping with being one of the most rustic inns of western North Carolina.

Historical View highlights photos from throughout Cashier’s colorful history. Submit your own photo by emailing editor@crossroadschronicle.com, mailing them to P.O. Box 1040, Cashiers, NC, 28717 or bringing them to our office at the Shoppes on the Green on U.S. Hwy. 64 West.

CONCERTS: JULY 15-18



Friday, July 15 – 6 PM, Highlands
 Saturday, July 16 – 5 PM, Cashiers
 The Ulysses Quartet



Sunday, July 17 - 5 PM, Highlands
 Monday, July 18 - 5 PM, Cashiers
 The Gryphon Trio

Highlands-Cashiers Chamber Music Festival

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