

Golisano Foundation giving Memorial Medical Center \$3.5M to build community health center

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Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center has received a gift of \$3.5 million from the Golisano Foundation to construct a community health center on the hospital's 10th Street campus.

The gift from the foundation — the philanthropic organization of billionaire businessman B. Thomas Golisano — will allow the hospital to expand several of its programs and will create a space for the medical center's Health Home program and partner organizations to connect with the vulnerable populations they serve.

Ann Costello, the director of the Golisano Foundation, said the foundation made the gift for the construction of the center — to be called the Golisano Center for Community Health — because many of the initiatives that the hospital has started in recent years align with one of the foundation's core goals, to provide help for the people that need it most.

“True healthy communities include everybody, especially those who are most vulnerable,” she said.

The hospital began its partnership with the foundation last year, signing on to the Healthy Communities Initiative, a global effort sponsored by the philanthropic organization in partnership with the Special Olympics aimed at improving coordinated care for people with intellectual disabilities.

Costello said the center will create a hub of coordinated care for people with intellectual disabilities and other vulnerable populations.

“(The) vision for this integrated health care center does exactly what the mission of the foundation has set out to achieve,” Costello said.



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Joseph A. Ruffolo, Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center president and CEO, and Golisano Foundation Director Ann M. Costello look over plans Wednesday morning for the new Golisano Center for Community Health after a press conference on the grounds where the new facility will be built, next to the Heart Center on 10th Street.

The planned 23,000 sq. foot building, with an estimated price tag of \$5 million, will also provide space for other hospital partners like Rivershore, Inc. and the YMCA. The center, which will be built on an empty lot next to the medical center's Heart Center of Niagara on 10th Street, will also include kiosks for community partners to help them better connect to patients.

Joe Ruffolo, the hospital's president and CEO, said the gift will help the hospital with its efforts to proactively address community health by aggressively pushing primary care and other preventative measures to cut down on emergency room visits.

"Memorial's ongoing transformation, moving away from a traditional hospital to a center for community health, we feel, is improving and sustaining the health and well being of our community," Ruffolo said. "Our transition places a very distinct emphasis on coordinating services for the most vulnerable population among us to prevent them ... from falling through the cracks."

The project is expected to break ground in the spring with a target completion date of December 2015, Ruffolo said.

The hospital is looking to other philanthropic groups to fill the funding gap on the project, he said though he was not willing to identify the those groups.

"We've approached other private foundations already and have had very, very positive discussions with them," Ruffolo said. "Obviously the Golisano gift gives us leverage that will attract and is serving as a magnet."

The Health Home program currently is housed in a space in the hospital parking garage building, but the program has grown rapidly over the first few years of operation.

"They have over 2,000 clients now that they're serving, so they've very quickly outgrown their space," Ruffolo said.

Ruffolo said he expects to add 10 more care coordinator positions at the Health Home program within the first year of opening.

"The ripple effect of all this is creating jobs in the emerging health care career fields," he said.

Amarpreet Grewal-Bath, the executive director of the Health Home, said the new center will help the program accomplish its goal of using primary care to lessen emergency visits by putting many of the organizations charged with caring for vulnerable populations in one place.

"Staff at our primary care center and our Health Home program are actively identifying patients that are in dire need of health care, behavioral therapies and other services," Grewal-Bath said.

The center will help to promote the type of collaboration between service providers that can work to keep those patients healthy and drive down health care costs, she said.

“The future Golisano Center for Community Health will allow providers to work together as a team to care for these patients with a comprehensive approach,” Gerwal-Bath said.