

READY TO REBUILD



PHOTO PROVIDED
A 70,000-pound hydraulic excavator takes down a section of the porch and steps at Blue Ridge Community Health Services in the first step of demolishing an old clinical building in order to build a new facility.

Crews demolish health clinic

Special to the Times-News

The bright yellow, 70,000-pound hydraulic excavator sat yards from the aging brick structure, its diesel engine growling low threats.

The old building offered a sense of resignation, windows and doors already removed for recycling. The mechanical beast descended its maw on the outside porch, and the wood splintered like toothpicks.

It was a time of celebration as well as reminiscing for the staff of Blue Ridge Community Health Services, who watched the destruction from a safe distance. A new building will be constructed in its place, and more than 50 employees chanted “Go! Go! Go!” as the old gave way to the new with the first demolition strike to the former BRCHS Family Practice building.

While music blared, employees danced and laughed with each other, welcoming a new phase for the 45-year-old nonprofit. Cheers and applause peaked when Chief Executive Officer Jennifer Henderson emerged from the vacant building wearing a hard hat

and wielding a sledgehammer. “This event marks the beginning of new possibilities built on the foundation of our history,” she said. “This structure has impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of patients over its years.”

“It is slightly above freezing, it is not snowing or sleeting, and the wind is below 5 miles per hour,” said Steve Kirkland, chief development officer, in opening the program. “Welcome to spring in western North Carolina.”

Out with the old

The core structure of the old facility is a farmhouse more than 60 years old. The farmhouse had undergone numerous updates and repairs over the years, including the addition of trailers attached to the original structure more than 25 years ago.

Over time, structural conditions grew so bleak that the facility was evacuated in July 2009, leaving a huge gap in the effective delivery of health care in Western North Carolina.

Reminiscences about the

building ranged from the irrelevant to the reverent. Kirkland related memories shared with him by staff, which included drawing blood by natural light when the power went out; a surprise visit inside by a possum; delivering a baby in the parking lot; staff and patients huddled in a wet basement during a tornado warning.

The building itself suffered as it aged. There were leaks with every rain, unstable floors and a 96-foot handicap ramp that threatened runaway wheelchairs. Employees in attendance recalled how many rooms of the building their offices occupied over the years. Daniel Benavides, outreach liaison, counted his seven different office locations in the building over the 17 years he has worked with BRCHS.

Milton Butterworth, director of community relations, spoke of the beneficial presence of the building over the years.

“As we say goodbye today, it is easy to be thankful for all the building has meant to us,”

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he said. "When this property was secured over 20 years ago, it gave our mission a longtime home. On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of people who have looked for care under this roof, thank you. So many giving people work or have worked here, and all are making a difference today in the communities around us. They have been a part of making the Blue Ridge story inside these walls; from them, we say 'goodbye.' May the old building's story, its spirit, and the mission all be passed to the new."

E. Luke Greene Co. is performing the demolition.

"Everything possible is being recycled," said Ted Dwornick, general superintendent. "Steel will be reused; bricks will be used for clean landfill. The Greene Company employs green methods of demolition."

In with the new

The demolition and construction of the new facility will take 12 to 15 months. Project costs are estimated to be \$4.9 million with revenue generated through the combination of a pending capital campaign and debt

service.

The new 27,000-square-foot facility will house family medicine and pediatrics, and mental health services, as well as space for various medical support services, including pharmacy, radiology and laboratory services, which are being planned in collaboration with Pardee Hospital. Dental services will continue to be provided at the William Stokes Dental Center on the BRCHS campus.

Room to grow

The new building will allow BRCHS to increase its family practice providers from six to eight immediately, with room for two more should the need grow. Three pediatricians will be on site, with room for one more provider in the future.

In addition to an increase in treatment rooms, the plans also include an enhanced on-site pharmacy that is expected to dispense 30,000 prescriptions per year, three times the volume being provided at their current pharmacy at an off-site location.

If you would like more information about BRCHS, write to P.O. Box 5151, Hendersonville, NC 28793, call 692-4289, ext. 2509 or visit www.brchs.com.