

Cancer hospital opens in Valley

Facility aims to help patients and community

by **Elias C. Arnold** - Dec. 30, 2008 12:00 AM
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Cancer Treatment Centers of America's first hospital in the Southwest is expected to provide an economic boost for the Valley as it draws patients from across the region, according to economic-development experts.

For loyal patients, it's a priceless lifeline.

"Traveling when you don't feel good is probably the pits," said the hospital's first patient, John Dziejewski, a Glendale resident who had previously traveled to Tulsa, Okla., for treatment at a CTCA hospital.

CTCA, an Illinois-based, for-profit company, opened its Western **Regional Medical Center** on Monday in Goodyear.

"Contrary to what some of our friends were concerned about, this isn't somebody coming in here, slicing out of the pie," said Barry Broome, president and chief executive officer of the Greater Phoenix Economic Council. "This is someone coming in here, bringing more of the pie in and then making the pie bigger."

The hospital, southwest of Interstate 10 and Litchfield Road, is starting with 150 employees but expects to grow its staff to at least 400 in two to four years. Between payroll and spending, it is projected to pump \$53.1 million annually into **Goodyear**' economy alone, according to a study by Applied Economics of Phoenix.

The financial boon comes at a critical time. State and local governments are struggling with sharp declines in revenues and record-high unemployment.

The hospital welcomed its first patient Monday, but it has been putting down roots in the Valley for months, seeking to make an impact in the community. Like CTCA's three other hospitals - in suburban Chicago, Tulsa and Philadelphia - the Goodyear facility offers traditional and alternative therapy in a patient-friendly environment designed to minimize stress and maximize customer service.

Injecting dollars

CTCA's new \$107 million facility is part of more than \$2 billion in hospital construction in Arizona over the past few years. Goodyear officials say they are hearing from developers and tenants hoping to tie in with the hospital.

"We continue to get interest because of the

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fact that Cancer Treatment Centers has located here," said Harry Paxton, Goodyear's economic-development director.

CTCA expects to treat up to 300 patients a day in Goodyear and could be running at full steam as early as late January.

The 24-bed hospital plans to contract with local hotels for outpatient visits. Marriott is building a TownePlace Suites across the street, and two more hotels are planned nearby.

CTCA officials say patients travel an average of 500 miles for treatment at their hospitals. About 250 current patients live within the company's Western region, served by the Goodyear facility.

Patients' visits should offset some of the money Arizona loses each year when people seek specialized medical care out of state.

"We have about \$2 billion of health-care work in this market that leaves this region to go elsewhere because we're short health-care providers," Broome said.

Picking a site

Labor availability, proximity to the millions of people who live in Southern California and airport access helped Arizona secure a CTCA hospital, according to Dave Veillette,

president and CEO of the Goodyear facility. The facility is dubbed a destination hospital because it is expected to draw patients from across Arizona and surrounding states.

"When it came down to it, Phoenix became the Number 1 site," Veillette said.

On the West Coast, CTCA runs a clinic in Seattle.

Having a full-service hospital in Arizona will save Dziejatowski time and energy.

On Monday, the 55-year-old was in for an annual checkup after a bout with kidney cancer and nodules discovered in his lungs. He is cancer-free now, but during his treatment, he had to take up to four days off for each visit to CTCA's Tulsa hospital.

He called CTCA "an all-around better facility for cancer," but those trips were "very exhausting, very tiring."

CTCA looked at 37 sites in the Valley before selecting a medical campus in Phoenix, near Loop 101 and Thomas Road, in 2007.

Four months later, the company decided to build its hospital on 25 acres in Goodyear, which offered CTCA an \$85 million property-tax break.

Making connections

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Since announcing its plans for Goodyear, CTCA has made a point of giving back.

In November, the Surprise Tennis and Racquet Complex hosted the inaugural Cancer Treatment Centers of America Championships. The company is paying nearly \$600,000 under a three-year contract.

On Saturday, the hospital presented \$2,500 to 17-year-old Alex Bommarito of Gilbert, an aspiring pediatric endocrinologist. The money will pay for the diabetic teen's trip to the National Youth Leadership Forum on Medicine next summer in Boston.

Veillette said the hospital is involved in the community because it is "the right thing to do."

"You don't build good leaders by having them think you don't have to be involved," he said.

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