

Published July 30, 2007 10:56 am - Patients expected to be seen in new health facility by February 2008.

## Moriah Health Center construction under way

**By LOHR McKINSTRY**  
Staff Writer

MORIAH — The new Moriah Community Health Center could be open and taking its first patient by the beginning of next year.

That's not bad for a town that almost lost its local health site three years ago.

Moriah's drive for a new Health Center started when the State Department of Health said it would no longer certify a health facility in the old Republic Steel Hospital in Mineville.

The 1911 building was falling apart, state officials said, and couldn't be renovated to meet modern building codes. The cramped facility had a leaky roof, broken steps, missing floor tiles and 1950s examination tables, among other obsolete equipment.

keeping up services

The Town of Moriah couldn't afford the \$1.2 million it would take to build a new Health Center, Town Supervisor Thomas Scozzafava said.

He said he had just taken office as supervisor on Jan. 2, 2004, when the phone rang with bad news about the old Health Center.

"One of the first calls I received was from the State Department of Health. They were adamant we needed to do something about the status of the (then) Mineville Health Center."

The town managed to get it moved to the Moriah Community Building next door, as a temporary measure, and contracted with Inter-Lakes Health of Ticonderoga for physician coverage. It had been operated by a town non-profit corporation, Champlain Health Concerns.

The name changed to Moriah Community Health Center, and in January 2005 the town switched to Hudson Headwaters Health Network for medical services.

Hudson Headwaters spokesman Howard Nelson said they're now accommodating 5,000 patient visits a year in the temporary quarters.

"We'll have the capacity to do more than that in the new facility. This is something the people of Moriah will find incredibly valuable. It's been a long time coming."

More space

The Health Center will have 4,750 square feet, which will include five exam rooms, a treatment room and a counseling room, plus offices and a waiting area.

The new Health Center should be ready to take patients by February 2008, Nelson said.

The Health Center is staffed by Dr. C. Susan Freyhofer and Nurse-Practitioner Laura Wilkinson. The phone number is 942-7123, and it's open weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

"We couldn't have done it with support of Tom Scozzafava, the IDA, Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward, Sen. Betty Little and Congressman (John) McHugh," Nelson said.

"They beat the bushes and got the money for this. They really helped the people of Moriah."

A site in the Moriah Business Park in Mineville was selected for the new Health Center, and the groundbreaking was held earlier this month.

#### Money awarded

The construction money for the new Health Center comes from a Small Cities Block Grant of \$400,000 through Congressman John McHugh (R-Pierrepont Manor), plus an additional \$300,000 in building aid from McHugh and \$99,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Sen. Betty Little (R-Queensbury) and Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward (R-Willsboro) secured a state grant of \$250,000 for the new building. Another \$150,000 is coming from the U.S. Economic Development Agency, with a \$150,000 local match in services.

"This would not have been possible without all the different funding sources we used to build this," Scozzafava said. "This was a real team effort to secure the necessary funding so we can build the center."

In addition, the IDA and the town were awarded \$389,000 by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration for multiple infrastructure improvements to Moriah Business Park, IDA Co-Director Jody Olcott said.

"That was necessary to attract new, viable businesses to Essex County. That includes the construction of the new Moriah Health Center."

#### HARD WORK CITED

IDA Acting President Anthony Glebus said Olcott and Co-Director Carol Calabrese are doing a great job.

"Some of these projects are quite monumental. I've heard nothing but good things about the IDA and what they do for Essex County."

The town owes a debt of gratitude to the IDA staff, Scozzafava said.

"Without the assistance and help of the IDA, we would not be constructing a new Health Center," Scozzafava said. "Jody and Carol did a tremendous amount of work. I'm very excited about this."

The need for a community health facility started in 1971-72, when the town's iron mines closed.

“Once Republic Steel pulled out and left the area, we were without a physician,” Scozzafava said.

“Moriah is a community of 5,000 people, so health care is absolutely critical. You’d have to travel a great distance. It creates a real hardship.”

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