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## Moriah will finally get new health center

By LOHR McKINSTRY, Staff Writer

MORIAH -- This town's dream of a new Health Center building for residents is about to become reality.

Construction bids will be sought in March, with groundbreaking to follow.

The new facility is very much needed, said Dr. John Rugge of Hudson Headwaters Health Network, the non-profit organization that runs the Moriah Health Center.

"(This) truly ushers in a new era of health care for us."

More than 40 percent of the population it serves lives below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

Mortality rates in the Moriah vicinity are 17 percent higher than the state average, Rugge said.

"Clearly, this area will benefit from stable, long-term primary care."

Rugge, chief operating officer of Hudson Headwaters, said they operate 12 health clinics throughout the Adirondacks.

"We have a lot of experience serving small, rural communities. Our mission is providing community care, and that's where we focus all our efforts."

The town recently purchased land in the Moriah Business Park for the new Health Center, just south of Pre-Tech Plastics.

The Moriah Health Center is now in temporary quarters at the Moriah Community Building in Mineville, after the center's previous building was closed by the State Department of Health in 2004.

The town reached its goal of \$1.2 million for the new Health Center, Scozzafava said.

"We'll go to bid in March. We will break ground in the spring."

The Health Center had been designed at 5,000 square feet.

### 2006 GROUNDBREAKING

Scozzafava said he didn't know what size Health Center would finally be built, but was glad it was finally happening.

"We'll definitely be breaking ground in 2006. This is a godsend to this community. It's due to the efforts of a lot of people."

Hudson Headwaters Health Network began operating the Health Center in January 2005. Before that, a town non-profit corporation and then Inter-Lakes Health of Ticonderoga ran the facility.

"We have to meet high health standards, and we have to make sure the community has direct input into how the Health Center is run," Rugge said.

### GRANT FUNDING

The town formed a Moriah Health Center Advisory Committee and named Moriah resident Sharon Callahan to the Hudson Headwaters Board of Directors.

Hudson Headwaters Health Network has a federal grant of \$435,600 to help run the Moriah Health Center.

The construction money for the new Health Center is 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 \$150,000 local match in services.

"We've reached a positive outcome for Mineville Health Center and the local community," McHugh said in a written statement.

"Access and availability of care is critical to area residents. I'll continue to work alongside local leaders and other elected officials to do what I can to secure funding for the project."

It was Hudson Headwaters that coordinated all the funding efforts, Scozzafava said.

"It could not have been done without them. We'll be able to provide top-quality health care for the residents of this community."

The Moriah Health Center, 942-7123, is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

### SELLING OLD BUILDING

The Health Center was notified by the State Department of Health in 2004 that it must move to better quarters and affiliate with an established health-care facility to prevent being closed down.

The town would like to sell the old Health Center building, which was a hospital for Republic Steel when the iron mines in Moriah were in operation.

A sale would have to follow a deed restriction limiting the building to public use or health care, however.

"That's going to make it harder to sell," Scozzafava said. "We have offered it to entities that did not want it."

The town asked High Peaks Hospice if it wanted the building, but Hospice moved into rental space in downtown Port Henry.

Republic Steel gave the building to the town in 1972, and neither Republic Steel nor its successor, Witherbee Sherman Mining Co., exist today.

"That might make it possible to remove the deed covenant," Scozzafava said. "The town attorney is looking into it."

Town Attorney William Potskowski is researching the possibility of a State Supreme Court proceeding to remove the restriction.

Scozzafava said the town has to have an appraisal done on the old hospital, then it can seek bids to sell it, subject to a permissive referendum.

"It could be used for many things, just not a health center."

The old town highway building at Moriah Corners was once vacant but is now home to the Olde Mill Restaurant.

By this time next year, the new Moriah Health Center will be open and taking patients, Scozzafava said.

"We're excited. It will be a great asset to this community. This center will belong to the people of Moriah for perpetuity."

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