

East P.A. celebrates health clinic opening

By **Clair A. McDevitt**
STAFF WRITER

A EAST PALO ALTO MID balloons and music, the South County Community Health Center officially opened its doors Saturday — heralding a new chapter in cooperation between the medical clinic and nonprofit organizations that share the space.

More than 100 people swarmed the center's parking lot and facilities to enjoy an afternoon of music, as well as Latino, Pacific Island and African dancing, and a barbecue.

While most of the building has been occupied since late last year, the grand opening ceremony marked the end of a two-year quest to find a new location and make use of a \$1.9 million federal loan.

The clinic also offers space to several nonprofit agencies — including the Family Support Center of the Mid-Peninsula, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Pacific Islander Outreach, New Perspectives, El Concilio's Health Outreach Program, and One East Palo Alto — which lost their offices in the University Circle redevelopment plans.

"This is a beacon in the city, it's an example of collaboration and cooperation between the health center and the nonprofits," said Robert Lewis, executive director of the health center.

"We're working together to advance the community goal of providing excellent care to the residents of East Palo



JOHN GREEN — Staff

DORCAS CHENG, with the Peninsula Community Foundation, puts balloons up at the opening of the new South County Community Health and Resource Center in East Palo Alto.

Alto and the surrounding areas," he said.

In addition to receiving medical care, residents of East Palo Alto, the Belle Haven neighborhood of Menlo Park and unincorporated North Fair Oaks will be able to get a host of services in one place.

"This is a much better place (than our last site)," said Darryl Byrd, program director of New Perspectives, a youth development group that works with students from fifth grade through high school.

"With the other organizations, a number of our students are able to take advantage of mentor opportunities (and other services)," he said.

Though the nonprofits share office space at the site, it's comfortable more than crowded, according to Katie Fantin, the program director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

As she walked through the building, she pointed out the communal break room and the office cubicles cluttered with paper and computers. There's also a board room and offices for some higher-ranking staff, but Fantin said the shared space allows for a sharing of ideas.

"This is a great collaborative environment, it's a wonderful way of serving the kids," she said.

With several services in the same building, Fantin said, the groups were able to

refer people to one another. For example, a mother with several children could bring them to a doctor at the clinic and also learn about opportunities for her kids at New Perspectives or Big Brothers/Big Sisters, while getting information for herself on the Family Support Center.

The County is renting the site — at 1798 A and B Bay Road — from the City of East Palo Alto for \$1 a year for the next five years, while providing more than \$2.4 million in health services. The center has served more than 1,300 people since it opened in December.

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