



## Hospital strikes deal to open new facility in eastern Lawrence



photo by: Submitted photo

LMH has struck a deal to locate a doctor's office in the Independence Inc. building, 2001 Haskell Ave. Plans call for the office to be open in early 2019.

Eastern Lawrence is getting a new doctor's office that will be run by Lawrence Memorial Hospital. The hospital has announced plans for LMH Health East Heights Family Care to open inside the Independence Inc. building near 20th Street and Haskell Avenue.

The facility will have a family practice doctor, a nurse practitioner, a trio of exam rooms, and will offer all the services you would expect from a traditional family doctor's office, said Janice Early, a vice president for LMH Health. The doctor's office will occupy a portion of the space used by Independence Inc., which provides services to people with disabilities.

The decision to locate a medical facility in eastern Lawrence comes after the hospital earlier this year approved plans for an approximately \$100 million outpatient medical building to be constructed near Rock Chalk Park in northwest Lawrence.

The idea of ensuring that LMH has facilities distributed throughout the community had become a point of discussion for members of the LMH Board of Trustees in recent meetings. As we reported last month, LMH President and CEO Russ Johnson indicated the hospital was working on some sort of eastern Lawrence deal.

Early said LMH leaders have been working behind the scenes for several months to strike a deal to expand into eastern Lawrence.

“Our strategic plan really has some imperatatives about putting people first,” Early said. “Providing access to care when, where and how people need it played heavily into this. I bet we looked at 20 different locations. But Independence Inc. is a great location, a great building, and its board has been awesome to work with.”

Early said LMH hopes to begin renovation work for the facility soon, with a goal of opening in early 2019. The hospital’s endowment association already has provided \$150,000 worth of donations to fund construction work. Early also said the hospital already has identified two medical professionals currently practicing in Lawrence who will be based at the center. However, she said the hospital is not ready to announce who they will be. Johnson called out Mike Wildgen, an LMH board member and former Lawrence city manager, for being a vocal advocate for the new facility. Wildgen, whose term on the LMH board is set to expire later this month, said he’s glad to see the project moving forward.

“For people in that part of the community who don’t have a primary care provider, this new clinic will be a big help,” Wildgen said in a press release. “And for people who have a medical concern and need to be able to walk in without an appointment, the staff will be prepared to provide care or offer assistance.”

The hospital may not be done making deals for new facilities quite yet. Early said that when hospital leaders were doing their research for this project they also realized that some other areas of the community also were lacking in access to doctor’s offices.

“This really did get us looking at where we have primary care geographically,” Early said. “There is kind of a dearth of locations in south and east Lawrence.”

She said hospital leaders have continued to look for potential locations.

“We don’t have anything ready to announce, but we are looking at potentially some other south location,” she said.

Johnson, who came to LMH in mid-2016, said one of his goals was to evaluate where LMH was delivering services and work to make the system more convenient for consumers. Plans for the approximately \$100 million outpatient medical building near Sixth Street and the South Lawrence Trafficway have been the most visible part of that effort. A groundbreaking for the facility was held earlier this week. When completed in mid-2020 the building will house the LMH Breast Center, a physical therapy center, an orthopedic center of excellence run by OrthoKansas, and doctors offices for the Internal Medicine Group, Mt. Oread Family Practice, and Plastic Surgery Specialists of Lawrence, among others.

“Providing services in the right place at the right time is key to lifelong health,” Johnson said in a release announcing the eastern Lawrence deal.

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