

Health

Gate Lodge: New outpost in battle against addiction

BY JOSIE GOYTISOLO
CORRESPONDENT

Vero Beach resident George Hamner, Sr. fought two wars successfully in his 86 years. One was WWII against the Japanese. The other against addiction.

In 1973, it was his addiction that had brought him to his knees.

"My alcoholism was dramatically af-

fecting me, my actions were leading toward the destruction of my family. I knew at this time that I had to change everything in my life. I had living proof that my life had become unmanageable."

Hamner, who lives on the barrier island and is the retired CEO of Indian River Exchange Packers, the family-run citrus business started by his wife Ann

Graves Hamners' grandfather and great uncle, has been paying it forward, one day at a time since then, receiving many calls for help over the years.

His goal is lofty -- to keep quality options for treating various forms of addiction alive in Indian River County.

In Vero Beach, the treatment options for addiction are limited. The disease so often waged in silence -- and privately

-- by families is not the subject of dignified conversations at local charity galas. Even today, it carries a stigma, one that Hamner -- now 36 years sober -- and others working with the disease of addiction combat daily.

Those seeking outpatient treatment locally can get access through a number of places. The Substance Abuse Council of Indian River County refers county residents to a variety of state-funded services. There are a couple of organizations including Breakthrough Recovery and Western Judicial that provide substance abuse outpatient services for a nominal fee.

Residential treatment options for those who cannot pay are limited to New Horizons, which provides detox and residential care in Fort Pierce, and CARP of West Palm Beach, which charges a sliding scale based on income. But there are waiting lists. There are also a large number of qualified licensed medical health professionals locally who charge for services, although many work with their clients.

Dr. Wayne Creelman, Eminent Scholar Chair of the University of Florida Center for Psychiatry and Addiction Medicine in Vero Beach, has been in practice more than 30 years. His office provides clinical services and science based treatment programs, with a focus on education, prevention and early intervention to residents of Vero Beach and the Treasure Coast. He considers AA to be the bedrock for maintaining sobriety.

"By immersing themselves and embracing a 12-step recovery program, an individual is going to use those steps for the rest of their lives if they want to successfully remain sober. That's why they are not healed, there's no past tense, no end point. It's always an active treatment process embraced on a daily basis."

Hamner said those on the barrier island fighting the disease have sought private treatment in places like Hazelton in Minnesota, which pioneered treating chemical dependency as a disease instead of a character or moral issue; The Caron Foundation in Pennsylvania or Father Martin Ashley in Baltimore. And then there is the Hanley Center, which opened in November of 1986 in West Palm Beach.

But Vero was lacking in similar services.

At the time, the only local treatment center in Vero was Alchohope of the Treasure Coast, which primarily served the indigent population of Indian River, St Lucie, Martin and Okeechobee coun-

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Gate Lodge Hanley Center at Vero Beach

Photos: Tom McCarthy Jr.

ties. When the Hanley's retired to Vero Beach in the late 90s and toured the rundown facilities, they became the moving force behind bringing affordable private treatment to this area.

The Hanley Family Foundation donated \$400,000 of the more than \$1.3 million raised for the building, equipping, and staffing of a new 20-bed residential chemical dependency treatment center, built on land leased from a subsidiary of the Indian River Medical Center.

Hanley Hall opened for business April 5, 2005, but almost from the beginning it had financial troubles. It was one of the lowest costing programs in the state of Florida at \$7,800 for a 28-day stay, yet as a recession kicked in, few could afford such a price.

"It was very difficult to keep it open even though it was a break-even situation because the average family, not only in this county, but also the rest of the state, couldn't afford it. And the economic decline didn't help either," Hamner said.

Hoping to save Hanley Hall, Hamner obtained a \$400,000 unsecured line of credit from a local beachside bank to help with cash flow issues. When Hanley Hall went through a third of that money without much success, Hamner and others worked to have Hanley Center in West Palm Beach take on their existing clients.

Hanley Hall shut its doors in September 2009. Hamner made sure every bill was paid after that, he said.

But Hamner was undeterred. "George is not a person who gives up," said Dr. Barbara Krantz, Hanley Center CEO and Medical Director of Research. "His heart and soul is in the recovery community and he was extremely instrumental in helping us open Gate Lodge Hanley Center of Vero Beach."

Gate Lodge, housed in the old Hanley Hall building at 3395 11th Court, opened informally in May of this year as an extension of Hanley Center. While focusing on those who relapse, it is a retreat setting open to anyone who needs

to immerse in a long-term recovery program.

"Understanding that the retreat model in Minnesota was successful and helped thousands of patients awaken to recovery, we used that treatment model which is structured around 12-step principles, and is fully licensed and accredited by the Department of Children and Families (DCF)," said Krantz. Their staff locally is headed by Michael Counes, who is the president of Floridians for Recovery, a statewide advocacy group looking to looking to advocate for those suffering from the disease of ad-

diction.

Today, an estimated 25-35% of people who complete addiction treatment will be readmitted to treatment within one year, and 50% will be readmitted within five years.

Krantz, who has been in practice for more than 30 years, points out that addiction is a brain disease but that the vast public perception is that this is a moral issue.

"A core concept evolving with scientific advances over the past decade is that drug addiction is a brain disease

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Construction Begins for New Vision Eye Center

The new multi-million dollar home of the New Vision Eye Center, which will feature a patient-friendly experience from the parking lot all the way to the doctor's offices, is expected to be completed by next summer.

Located just east of Vero Radiology and across the street from Indian River Medical Center, the 19,000-square-foot single-story facility will feature a 6,500-square-foot surgical center and another 12,500-square-foot devoted to clinical space for the four full-time ophthalmologists at the center -- Dr. Paul Minotty, Dr. Roger Meyer, Dr. David O'Brien, and Dr. Stephen Tate.

"We represent every specialty both medically and surgically as far as ophthalmology is concerned," Dr. Minotty said. "And we will be able to grow if that is something we decide to do."

Dr. Minotty said the group considered a number of sites throughout the county, but that it ultimately made the most sense to be in the heart of the medical district to house the center. Among the attractive features was building new rather than retro-fitting space to meet their needs which also means bringing in all brand new state of the art equipment.

Construction began the beginning of June and is expected to take about a year to complete. And as a new building it will meet all the current and stringent environmental and safety codes.

The above story originally appeared on VeroNews.com.



Rendering of the New Vision Eye Center future location, planned to be finished in 2011. The address of our future location is 1055 37th Place, Vero Beach, FL 32960.

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George Hammer, Sr. sits with his collection of citrus company labels at the offices of Indian River Exchange Packers.

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that develops over time as a result of the initially voluntary behavior of using drugs or alcohol. The consequence is virtually uncontrollable compulsive drug craving, seeking, and use that interferes with, if not destroys, an individual's functioning in the family and in society. This medical condition demands

formal treatment," said Krantz.

Treatment is but the beginning of a lifelong maintenance process, in some cases mandating ongoing behavioral therapies as well as social networks, which help individuals sustain abstinence, say Krantz and others.

Gate Lodge Hanley Center costs \$4,200 for a 29-day stay. Some scholarships are available for local and state

residents.

Moorings resident Tim Cheney is another barrier island resident providing help for those with addictions. At the age of 30, he was lying desperate in an emergency room in New England. A physician, neatly attired in a white coat came to his side and said "is that you Timmy?" He looked up to see his cousin, whom he hadn't seen in 18 years.

While his cousin had grown up to be a physician at an Ivy League teaching hospital, Cheney was a street junkie and alcoholic.

"A switch tripped in my terrorized soul. I knew that it was over and that if I chose to disregard this last call that my life would be over," said Cheney.

Cheney went from living in the streets to running a multinational corporation. Today, partially retired, he serves on the board and is a very active participant of the Children's Home Society of The Treasure Coast. His gratitude to be alive is fueling his latest business venture, Chooper's Guide.

Choopers is an online resource directory for those suffering from addiction, their families and clinicians. Cheney and his partner, Adrian Hooper, have developed a site which is easy to use and navigate, as well as comprehensive



Tim Cheney

and accurate.

The majority of existing sites are marketing oriented which makes it very difficult for anyone seeking help to discern fact from sales pitch.

Chooper's facilitates the process by allowing for apples-to-apples comparisons for services.

"The user can now compare facilities or specialists side by side on our site, in essence apples to apples," said Cheney. Cheney says the site, www.choopers-guide.com will be available live online within a few weeks.

While addiction research expands, access is a serious problem. Those without resources are often placed on waiting lists and fall off the radar. Michael Counes said that those in the field continue to work toward giving the addicted a voice.

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