

## **City Heights Community Event Sets Lofty Goal of \$10 Million Dollars for New Health Care Facility**

*by Wendi Whitmore*

*Editor*

The La Maestra Community Health Center in City Heights is launching a capital campaign to raise \$10 million for the construction of its new state-of-the-art health and well-being center beginning with a cultural event and fundraiser that took place on March 10 on the future site of the new facility on the corner of Fairmount and University Avenues.

The “La Maestra: Heart of the Community Campaign” is a community-wide, three-year effort that will almost double the number of residents who will receive medical treatment in one of San Diego’s most impoverished and ethnically diverse communities.

The funds will be used to construct the first “green” health and well-being center in the region. To be “green” is a term for a facility that minimizes impact on the environment and is conscious of how day-to-day operations effect the ecosystem.

With the new facility, an estimated 25,000 new patients will have a medical home – a 30 percent increase that will boost the total number of patients treated by La Maestra annually from its current 41,000 to 65,000.

“We are running out of room and we had to keep adding services to keep up,” explained Zara Marselian, CEO of La Maestra. “We wanted to be totally efficient, and we can’t with the space we have. We have 19 languages and cultures represented in the Center on a daily basis. We need to have staff on-hand to work with those patients.”

The Center grew from one house to 13 houses, and now has to stagger the doctor’s schedules that speak all 19 of those languages because of lack of space. Some people seeking treatment at the Center don’t even have a written form of their language, so if the right staff member isn’t on-hand to work with them treatment can be extremely difficult.

“Imagine, just as an example, giving ice chips to a woman in labor. In our culture it’s the norm, but in another culture it may be thought of as bad, or they may not understand. We need someone to work out that perhaps tea or something else is better,” Marselian added.

The cornerstone of this project is a three-story, 32,000 square foot healthcare facility and well-being center will house the full range of La Maestra’s health and well-being services. These include adult primary medical care, women’s health, senior and children’s specialized services, dental care, disease and nutritional education, prevention and screening programs, food pantry, housing assistance, and job training.

It will also include a “community pharmacy,” telemedicine capability connecting specialty care to patients in central San Diego, and storefront spaces for retail and resident micro-enterprise opportunities.

One extraordinary function of this most unique health care and well-being facility, is the fact that many refugees end up as staff with La Maestra as part of the aforementioned job training program. With 19 cultures represented, that sometimes is the best way to find people to translate, and many end up in other areas of the medical field or on staff.

If a refugee comes over from another country with medical training, or who needs job training, La Maestra will train them so they can become certified to work in the medical field here. Even doctors from other countries must complete this process. Some refugees have started in the La Maestra training program and gone on to be medical doctors certified in this country.

The program is part of the La Maestra Works Program, part of the Welfare to Work Program. “The program is a two-fold essential need for this community. We have such cultural diversity and people need job training. Additionally, these same people need good health care. They can find all of that here, and it’s vital that we continue to expand with the need of the community. If we can’t provide these services, who will?” Marselian asked.

With new breakthroughs in technology, science, operations and building science, designers, builders and owners who build green have an opportunity to maximize both economic and environmental performance.

According to the U.S. Green Building Council, of which La Maestra is a member, going green reduces the environmental impacts of natural resource consumption, enhances and protects ecosystems, improves air and water quality, reduces solid waste and conserves natural resources.

Now, with such delicate plans in action and services already being offered, the trick is in the funding. How does one fund such a mammoth operation? “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time,” Marselian joked.

The funding will come through fundraisers like the one held on March 10, but also through various grants and donations. “Now is the time we really need people to see the need and donate, and for local businesses to come through for us. Donations are essential.

“It’s true, \$10 million might as well be \$3 million. It’s a lot of money, but the new facility will become the heart and soul of this extraordinary community.”

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**PULL QUOTE:** “...[I]t’s vital that we continue to expand with the need of the community. If we can’t provide these services, who will?” Zara Marselian, CEO of La Maestra Community Health Center