

City a "hot spot" for medical firms

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By Candace Carlisle / Staff Writer – Denton Record Chronicle

A rehabilitation hospital will open its doors later this month, making Select Rehabilitation Hospital of Denton one of the newest members of the local medical community.

But it won't be the last.

Doctors from across the nation are looking at moving to Denton, said Dee Dee Hunt, vice president of Huffman Builders of Denton County.

"This is the hot spot to be right now," Hunt said. "People from outside of Denton are realizing that and trying to get into town and beat the other guy."

Huffman Builders are in that race with 21,000 square feet of medical space in its initial phase at Unicorn Lake scheduled for completion in January 2009, with a scheduled second phase of 28,000 square feet.

Other parts of Unicorn Lake are scheduled for medical, said Bob Shelton, the project developer of the multi-use community.

DRC/Barron Ludlum Ellen Shankles, chief executive officer of Select Rehabilitation Hospital of Denton, stands in a physical therapy room of the new facility slated to open at the end of October. The hospital is located at 2620 Scripture St. [View larger](#) [More photos](#) [Photo store](#)

A 45,000-square-foot nurse training facility will be housed at Unicorn Lake and about 4 acres of land in the development has already been sold to doctors for medical buildings, Shelton said.

Denton becoming a hot commodity in the medical community is all part of the plan, said Michelle Cunningham, city of Denton business development officer.

"The medical investment in the community was very evident in 2005, and with over \$150 million in medical, we realized that we were fast becoming a medical destination," Cunningham said.

As that dream of a medical destination is realized, Select Rehabilitation Hospital, an in-patient medical rehabilitation facility, is just another piece of that vision.

The newly constructed 55,000-square-foot rehabilitation hospital off Scripture Street is located across from Presbyterian Hospital of Denton.

The new hospital will contain 44 beds catering to the Kessler model of rehabilitation --the same rehabilitation used by Christopher Reeve, said Jinny Yoon, the medical director for the facility.

"It's a real honor to be with the Kessler model," Yoon said. "There are people who can hardly breathe and we can train them, giving them the best capability they can have."

The rehabilitation hospital, with sites in other areas of the nation, has treated patients who have had seizures, traumatic brain injuries, strokes and amputation, Yoon said.

When Yoon first moved to the North Texas area from New York about three or four years ago, she said the facilities were 20 years behind those she was used to working with on the East Coast.

But the Kessler model is something new, she said.

"It's going to be real exciting, using the Kessler method here," Yoon said. "It's the best rehabilitation. Maybe we can have the right rehab here, open a new chapter. Denton deserves the most up-to-date technology."

Along with providing advanced technology, the rehabilitation hospital will provide the staging area for patients to transition from their hospital beds to home, said Ellen Shankles, chief executive officer of the hospital.

"It's good for the Denton community," Shankles said. "Select Medical can set another tone for Denton."

The hospital will include a full kitchen to provide three meals a day to people in their care, rehabilitation patient gyms and an active daily living center to help patients make the transition into everyday life.

"Over 80 percent of those discharged back home with families are too well to be in acute care and not well enough to go home," Shankles said.

It's difficult for many rehabilitation patients to perform personal care tasks independently. And that's where Shankles' company comes in.

Patients in its care will use the active daily living center to practice getting in and out of a bathtub or using the bathroom by themselves, she said.

All 44 beds have private rooms with satellite television and their specially designed beds can hold up to 500 pounds while protecting against bedsores, she said.

Although Presbyterian Hospital of Denton is not directly involved in the new rehabilitation hospital plans, Presbyterian Hospital can only see it as beneficial, said Stan Morton, chief executive officer of the hospital.

"The project is nothing but value added to the medical community," Morton said. "It will help discharge patients that require acute rehabilitation services."

Select Rehabilitation Hospital is leasing the space from Evergreen Realty Partners, which recently finished building the new facility for an estimated \$1.3 million, said Steve Everbach, managing partner.

"They obviously felt the market and demographic studies were conducive to opening a brand-new facility," Everbach said. "There will be a tremendous amount of development over the next few years."

Everbach said his company is investing an undisclosed amount of money in the project, but he isn't worried. He said he considers it a good investment.

And he's not the only one willing to invest in the Denton medical community.

In a matter of months, a podiatrist will move from his office at the Denton Regional Medical Center to a building he can call his own.

Dr. Jaret Walker, who owns a private practice called Advanced Foot and Ankle Surgery in the Professional Building, has decided he would rather own than lease -- a common decision for doctors who have their own practices.

The decision is like buying a house, but a little different for doctors since the medical community has escaped some of the same economic woes as homeowners across the country, said Gary Conwell, vice president of business development at Denton Regional Medical Center.

"He obviously reached a level to make that investment," Conwell said. "The advantage to physicians having rental property is to get started on their practice."

Walker is not the only one to move to a new building; some other doctors from the hospital are following suit, said Conwell, as medical space becomes a hot commodity in town.

"Everyone knows the North Texas area is not affected by economic downturns.

People move to this area and the economics are still looking good," Conwell said. "It's a good business move to come here."

After three years of performing foot and ankle surgeries in Denton, Walker is establishing his medical roots in a 3,000-square-foot treatment space that includes five examination rooms.

Walker won't leave the Professional Building at the medical center until January -- the scheduled completion date on his building.

But part of Walker's office already has been claimed by an incoming doctor, Conwell said.

Construction began last month on Walker's new office building in the 3200 block of Medpark Drive by Fort Worth construction company Innovative Developers Inc.

And the project has gotten off to a good start, said Lance Williams, site superintendent.

Right now, it is the first of three similar medical buildings scheduled for development, according to Williams. He said the entire development belongs to Walker.

But Walker warned that his plans for the land could change at any time: "There could even be an ice cream stand," he joked.

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