

Coeur d'Alene's celebrate 20th anniversary of medical center – 6/25/10

The Benewah Medical Center celebrated its 20th anniversary Friday, making it one of the oldest community health clinics to serve Indians and non-Indians in the country. Anniversary

“President Obama’s health care reform includes community clinics, but we were one of the first in the country to actually do it,” said Coeur d’Alene Tribe Chairman Chief Allan. “We’re way ahead of the curve. Previous tribal councils had the vision to make this a reality.”

The Benewah Medical Center serves tribal members and non-tribal members to the rural Coeur d’Alene Indian Reservation Community and since opening its doors in 1990, the Benewah Medical Center has delivered health care to 17,500 patients.

BMC was constructed in 1990 and opened with nine employees and served 800 patients.

Today, the clinic has 122 employees and serves 6,500 patients, who account for more than 36,000 visits annually.

Roughly half of the patients at the clinic are non-tribal members.

During Friday’s celebration, Allan recalled visiting the dentist in a trailer on the reservation before the clinic was constructed.

“I am so pleased we have this,” he said.

Before the clinic was built, the city of Plummer kicked in seed money to help jumpstart the project.

“The Tribe recognized that it needed quality health care, along with the non-Indians living on the reservation,” said Coeur d’Alene Tribe vice chairman Ernie Stensgar. “We realized we were in the same boat as there were, so we came together in a marriage.”

The Tribe hopes to build a \$12 million new clinic in Plummer within the next few years. On Friday, the BMC unveiled a new waiting room that was funded through the American Recovery Act.

“We’re not done yet,” said Stensgar. “We’re working toward building a state of the art facility in the immediate future. We’re in the process of securing those funds to move forward.”

The Benewah Medical Center also provides dental service for its patients. The clinic is funded through Indian Health Services, federal grants and tribal dollars.

The event was attended by about 400 people, including past and present employees of the clinic and political and community leaders.