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FRONT PAGE

County's first

Veteran's clinic will share space with Patterson Army Health Clinic

by Debbie Sheehan
Public Affairs Office 278

Representative Christopher Smith bounded up the drive at Patterson Army Health Clinic (PAHC) like a child running downstairs on Christmas morning to see if Santa Claus had visited.

Smith visited here last week to inspect the space for the first U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) outpatient clinic in Monmouth County.

Kenneth Mizrach, chief executive officer of the VA's New Jersey System looked like someone who had gotten his wish gift. "Have I waited a long time for this?" Mizrach said to Smith as the two men shook hands.

Smith, the chair of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs has been trying to get a new clinic opened in the Monmouth/Ocean area for two years.

"This is a great day for the veterans of Monmouth and Ocean counties," Smith said during a brief news conference outside the main entrance to the



Representative Christopher Smith (second from left), visited here last week to inspect the space for the first U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' outpatient clinic in Monmouth County.

clinic.
The VA will lease space on the third floor of the Patterson Army Health Clinic for their

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clinic. Smith said the clinic will operate with a \$1.7 million dollar annual budget and startup costs of nearly \$250,000.

The clinic will have 11 full time staff members, including two physicians, a nurse practitioner and a psychiatrist and is expected to handle about 10,000 visits a year.

The clinic will offer primary care, mental health, nutritional and social work services.

Bob Byrnes, the VA's chief of Community Based Outpatient Clinics in New Jersey, said the clinic should be open by the end of May.

He also said the new clinic would ease ~~patient overcrowding at the James J. Howard Outpatient Clinic in Brick Township.~~

Smith said the Brick clinic has been "a victim of its own success," handling 50,000 visits a year, twice the amount it was designed for. The overcrowding at Brick has led to long wait times for some services.

Byrnes said the new clinic will serve about 4,000 veterans. Mizrach said various means are being used to determine which veterans would get to use the new facility. "We are looking at zip codes, we are looking at the people currently enrolled at Brick," Mizrach said.

Byrnes and Mizrach both said they are aware that many veterans currently working here want to use the clinic facilities. He said they were looking into the needs of the Fort Monmouth-based veterans and trying to honor those needs as the plans for the clinic proceed.

The group toured the primary care area of the PAHC and was told the new clinic would have a similar setup. They went to the third floor wing where the clinic will be housed and got a brief look at the empty rooms that will become waiting areas, examination rooms, staffing areas.

"The DoD has been very cooperative, everyone here has been very helpful," Mizrach said. He said the VA hoped to be able to contract to share services with the facility. He mentioned using the radiology and laboratory facilities here by contract or by sharing agreements allowing the fort's clinic to take advantages of other VA programs and studies.

"We are hoping to see more partnerships between the VA and DoD," said Byrnes.

Smith said he was pleased the funding had been put in place to "marry up need with resources" for the new clinic. As he departed, Smith said he would be back in May for the ribbon cutting for the new clinic.