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## **ER planned for Chiefland; Hospital planned for Fanning Springs; Clinic planned for Cedar Key; Regional General Hospital of Williston continues aggressive expansion with highest quality equipment and staffing**

**Story, Photos and Video**

**By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 29, 2017 at 1:57 p.m.**

**Updated Aug. 30, 2017 at 8:47 a.m.**

**WILLISTON** -- Any one of a set of announcements about health facilities in the Tri-County Area of Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties made very late Monday afternoon (Aug. 28) would have been significant, however the whole series is seen here.



**Tilman Mears speaks to the people in Chiefland about six weeks ago.**

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**George Perez at RGH in Williston yesterday afternoon (Monday, Aug. 28).**

George Perez, the owner of Regional General Hospital (RGH) of Williston, arrived at Williston Municipal Airport on a Learjet that came from an airport in Miami for his conferences with several people, including a telephone conference with individuals in other places on Monday.

Perez first noted that RGH Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer Edith Mears and her husband Chief Operating Officer Tilman Mears have made great strides at improving RGH with their leadership. The Mears couple recently relocated to Williston from the Panhandle of Florida.

Perez said he is conducting research to create a freestanding Emergency Room (ER) in Chiefland that would be an extension of the ER at RGH. There is a potential for free transport to and from that ER to the hospital in Williston for needs such as MRI scans.

In another announcement by Perez, he said the Agency For Health Care Administration (AHCA) can expect a Certificate Of Need (CON) application from him in the relatively near future so that a new hospital with 35 or fewer beds will be built on property in the City of Fanning Springs area of Gilchrist County.

Perez, Tilman Mears, J.T. Lander and others stressed that a key and vital element to the

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request for AHCA to issue a CON for a hospital in the Gilchrist County section of the Fanning Springs Area is public endorsement for the effort.

They hope and expect members of the general public to express their desire to add this health facility, which will be an economic engine for the region as well.

Another relatively big announcement is that Perez is conducting research for the establishment of a clinic in the Town of Cedar Key, so that its residents and visitors do not need to leave the island for relatively minor medical attention.

And while those three projects are of significance to the Tri-County Area's residents and visitors, RGH is continuing to aggressively expand its services.

Ten or 11 years ago, the people of Chiefland came out in strong force with a 100 percent backing of the construction of a hospital in Chiefland. AHCA issued a CON for that project, which never broke ground – although a sign was placed on the property, where it sat for a decade.

Frank Schupp said in a 2011 *HardisonInk.com* news story the \$60-million, 60-bed, 106,000 square-foot hospital is ready to be built. It will be approved for occupancy, according to the project completion forecast, on June 1, 2013. Construction is currently scheduled to start on May 1, 2012.

This is the same Frank Schupp who in 2006 convinced the Chiefland area residents and visitors that a hospital would be built next to Walmart if the people urged the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration.

This proposal for an ER in Chiefland is different than Schupp's wished-for hospital in Chiefland. The difference with the free-standing ER from RGH in Chiefland is that no CON from AHCA is needed for that.

This ER in Chiefland will be an extension of RGH in Williston.

A CON from AHCA is required, however, for a new hospital to be built in Gilchrist County.

If previous actions are any indication of what might occur in the near future, Gainesville-based hospital interests such as North Florida Regional Medical Center may again oppose a CON being awarded by the AHCA to any entity building outside of Alachua County.

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## **RGH hires MD; RGH buys Mending Fences**

**Dr. Charlene D'Costa**

Regional General Hospital of Williston, 125 S.W. Seventh St., continues its aggressive expansion with the highest quality of equipment and staffing.

Tillman Mears, the chief operating officer of Regional General Hospital in Williston, spoke to the Chiefland City Commission on July 10.

Mears introduced himself, and he mentioned that his wife Edith Mears is the chief executive officer as well as the chief financial officer of the hospital.

Dr. Devaiah Pagidipati and his wife Dr. Rudrama Pagidipati previously had bought the hospital and they were investing millions of dollars to upgrade it.

After those doctors saw a continual loss of revenue, they sold their interest to Jorge Perez, who had been a partner in the time just before that deal closed in early 2017.

Since the hospital came under one owner, the Mears were placed as the day-to-day top management team and it has shown continual great progress, Perez said.

On Monday, Perez announced the addition of Dr. Charlene D'Costa as the director of the rural health clinic, which adjoins RGH.

Dr. D'Costa, a medical doctor, will be assisting in the RGH ER as well as practicing general medicine.

Dr. D'Costa's hours for general practice patients are from 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment and become one of Dr. D'Costa's patients, call 352-528-2801.

Dr. D'Costa graduated from the School of Medicine at University of Guadalajara, Mexico, in 2003.

She is fluent in Spanish as well as English, and RGH is a bilingual hospital, Perez said.

There are other high points for RGH's recent continued progress in facilities being added, and

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the future is bright for the hospital as well.

- The addition of Dr. Mark B. Sacher as a pain management specialist is significant. He is available one Saturday a month. The advertisement with more about him is on the Community Page -- <http://www.hardisonink.com/florida-community-news.php#hospital>.
- Within the next 60 days, RGH will be purchasing its own MRI.
- There is an upgrade of laboratory equipment so that now one machine has consolidated several tests. This reduces the amount of time required to find results from several tests.
- At or by the start of 2018, everything will be in place for dialysis patients to undergo that treatment at RGH.
- At or by the start of 2018, everything will be in place for chemo-therapy patients to undergo that treatment at RGH.
- There is a new doctor coming on staff soon to specialize in issues unique to female patients, except for the delivery of babies.

## RGH BUYS MENDING FENCES

In an expansion of its detoxification program, RGH has purchased Mending Fences, a residential treatment facility just on the Marion County side of the Levy County-Marion County line.

<https://youtu.be/4ZHYqcTmV3M>

**In this video from late May open house event, the Mending Fences staff members are showing how a horse and drug rehabilitation client become acquainted in a trust exercise, where the handler of the horse is leading the horse and the client has a hand on the horse to sense its gate and the person is walking with her eyes closed.**

*By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 29, 2017 at 1:57 p.m.*

This residential drug rehabilitation center is noted to be in the Morriston area, and it is located on Marion County Road 326.

It does not have a conventional story of development from the ground up as a residential treatment center.

It started as a rehab center for injured horses, until an employee and a horse died on the grounds in a freak accident in 2012.

Before that accident, it started from a vision.

The Mending Fences Story, its mission, its programs and much more can be viewed on its website <https://mendingfences.com/>.

The initial 18-bed dual diagnosis program opened in February of 2016. The design focuses on the comfort and safety of clients. The living quarters consists of nine two-person bedrooms each with their own beautifully appointed bathroom and individual climate control.

"Since we recognize that a good night's sleep is essential to physical and mental health we have provided each client with a queen sized bed with soft, comfortable bedding," the site notes in part.