

McCarthy's surprise withdrawal deepens GOP divide **12A**

YMCA pediatric center prepares for opening

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The Greater Naples YMCA and the largest primary care organization in Collier County are gearing up to operate a pediatric center that will address the whole child and offer convenience for families.

Construction of the Nichols Pediatric Center inside the YMCA has started and the 5,400-square-foot center is targeted to open the first quarter of 2016.

A groundbreaking will be held 8 a.m. Friday.

See PEDIATRIC, 4A

PEDIATRIC from 1A

The center is being named after Jerry Nichols, a longtime Naples resident and supporter of the Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida, a partner with the YMCA on the initiative. Nichols made an undisclosed gift to the project

“It was a substantial gift,” Stephen Wheeler, vice president of development for the health care network, said. “It made a significant impact on our effort to cover the \$500,000 cost of this project. He likes children very much and the health and well-being of them.”

The pediatric center, which will be on the west side of the YMCA building, at 5450 YMCA Road off Pine Ridge Road, will have six exam rooms, two behavioral health rooms and separate occupational, physical and speech therapy rooms. The center also will have a lactation room for nursing mothers and a lab/vitals room.

“Our partnership with the good people and professional caregivers at the Healthcare Network will truly make the new (YMCA) healthy living campus complete,” Paul Thein,



DAVID ALBERS/FILE

The Nichols Pediatric Center will break ground Friday. It will be housed in the west side of the YMCA building, shown Sept. 6.

president and chief executive of the YMCA, said.

The Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida will provide therapists for the speech, occupational and physical therapy services on a rotating basis, Wheeler said.

A third partner in the project is the Naples Children & Education Foundation, sponsors of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, which provided a substantial grant to the health care network two years ago to integrate be-

havioral therapists in the health care network's clinics to assess children and provide mental health services when needed.

The Nichols center will have behavioral therapists to provide assessments in the YMCA and will work with staff to recognize signs of potential behavior or mental health issues for early intervention, Wheeler said.

Dr. Todd Vedder, a pediatrician with the health care network, will have his practice located at the Nichols center

where he will see patients from his practice but also children from the YMCA, which serves as the area's largest child care center.

When a child in any YMCA program appears to be coming down with something, the youngster can be taken to see Vedder and his staff for determining if something is urgent or not, and could mean a parent doesn't have to leave a job to rush and pick up the child.

“It's kind of like the old school-nurse program,” Wheeler said. “I think (the Nichols center) is one of the most exciting things to happen in this community right now.”

Vedder said the center will be kid-friendly and the exam rooms will have sportslike themes where he and another staff member will see an estimated 10 kids a day. The lactation room aims to increase breast-feeding which has been on the decline and means infants miss out on some of the health benefits of breast milk, Vedder said. There also is a benefit to the mom's pocketbook if she breast-feeds.

Vedder announced in January he was joining the health care network to be located at YMCA's pediatric center to have

a greater impact on improving the health and welfare of local children.

The health care network, which is projected to have \$42 million in revenue this year with its 20 locations in greater Naples and Immokalee, is the dominant entity in Collier for primary-care services to children. It serves 60 percent of the children in the community.

“To be part of something unique and cutting edge and outside the traditional clinic-type setting, I see a host of opportunities here,” Vedder said.

One potential project to start locally is called “Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do It,” which was started in the United Kingdom to empower kids and adults to be healthier, Vedder said.

A child and parent come together twice a week for 10 weeks for nutrition counseling, mental health counseling, exercise and other services, he said.

The MEND program focuses on children ages 7 to 13; parental involvement is important because kids at that age are still dependent on parents yet eating habits have become entrenched and often needs to change.

“The family has to embrace the change, so you try to get the whole family,” he said.