

Dignity seeking to boost local doctors

Group's medical residency program takes on valley physician shortage

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Dignity Health and Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona are partnering to launch a new medical residency program in Bakersfield.

Slated to begin next year, the program will start out with three family medicine residents and five internal medicine residents per

year, each receiving three years of training. The goal is to expand it over time, as well as add additional residencies in pediatrics and obstetrics/gynecology in 2017.

The program is in the process of obtaining accreditation from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) and the American Osteopathic Association. Osteopathy is an alternative medical approach emphasizing the physical manipulation of muscle tissue and bones.

Western University confers doctor of osteopathic medicine degrees. Dr. J. Michael Finley, associate professor of medicine and

associate dean of graduate medical education, did not respond to phone calls requesting an interview.

Kern County is in dire need of primary health care providers, with just 1,101 licensed doctors last year serving 874,489 residents, according to the Medical Board of California.

The new residency program is "not a money making project," said Dr. Mark Root, chief medical officer at Bakersfield Memorial Hospital. "Our goal is just to not lose money on it, at least. It's an altruistic effort for the public health of the community and to

elevate the care and standards in the valley."

It's not just that there aren't enough doctors, Root said. It's that there's hardly anyone in the pipeline to replace the few doctors we do have when they retire.

"You know you have a problem when I'm the youngest guy in the room at a meeting of OB/GYNs," quipped Root, who is 59 years old.

Kern's hospitals and clinics have long bemoaned the difficulty of recruiting doctors to the Central Valley, which has a reputation for poor air quality and high poverty.

At the same time, Kern County has some of the highest rates in the

state of heart disease, diabetes and sexually transmitted diseases.

Advocates for public health were worried in 2013, when the Kern County Board of Supervisors voted to phase out the expensive family medicine residency program at financially strained Kern Medical Center. That program had been one strategy for convincing young doctors to practice medicine here.

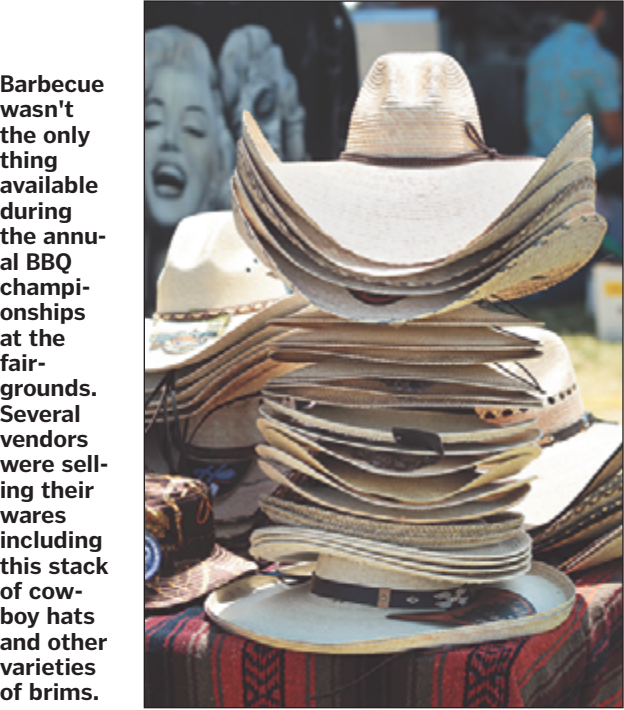
Clinica Sierra Vista, a nonprofit chain of health clinics, is taking over KMC's program with seed money from the county and grants from other sources. A three-year transition started in 2014 with an

Please see **DOCTORS / B3**

The thrill of the grill



King's Cut BBQ workers were happy to prepare and serve meals during Bakersfield's Biggest, Baddest, BBQ event on Saturday at the Kern County Fairgrounds. See more photos from the event at bakersfield.com



It was wonderful weather for those attending Bakersfield's Biggest, Baddest, BBQ Championships.

Q&A



HENRY A. BARRIOS / THE CALIFORNIAN
Bakersfield Police Chief Greg Williamson is one of several members of his family in law enforcement.

Police chief talks family, sports and challenges

BY JASON KOTOWSKI
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There's something in the Williamson family genes that draws them toward law enforcement.

The father of Bakersfield Police Chief Greg Williamson was chief Kern County Probation Officer. His great grandfather was sheriff.

And recently, Williamson's oldest child became a Bakersfield police officer.

The chief, 51, is an avid sports fan who enjoys simple pleasures like cooking and relaxing in the yard. He took some time to answer questions about growing up in Bakersfield and challenges facing today's law enforcement community.

Tell me about your upbringing.

I was born and raised in Bakersfield and attended local schools in Oildale. I graduated from North High School and eventually landed at San Diego State University. I returned to Bakersfield, became a police officer and earned my Masters of Public

Please see **CHIEF / B3**

We need a plan for the next inevitable drought

Lois Henry

I fear more and more people will soon experience first-hand the lack of a true disaster plan for our prolonged drought.

I wrote last year about how the plights of several small towns and neighborhoods in Tulare County had revealed how terribly unprepared California is for one of our most regularly occurring disasters.

Now it's happening in Kern County.

Kern, like most valley counties, is speckled with individual wells serving single homes and small



community wells that serve from four to 20 homes.

Since the beginning of the year four domestic wells have gone dry near Arvin, Wasco and Caliente, according to what's been reported to the Kern County Environmental Health Department.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg.

At least 22 wells have gone dry or may go dry in the Rosedale area, according to Van Grayer, general manager of Vaughn Mutual Water Co., which serves about 10,000 customers in northwest metropolitan Bakersfield.

The owners of those wells have all come to Vaughn seeking emergency tie-ins. An emergency tie-in isn't cheap. It typically costs between \$10,000 and \$15,000 depending on where the infrastructure is, with water costs added on top of that. And it typically provides only enough to meet cooking and bathroom needs.

So what are well owners' options?

In the short term, there is some help. It's the long-term that's the bigger question, but we'll come back to that.

The state has made money available through the California Drought Assistance Act that counties can use to provide aid directly to residents, according to Geor-

giana Armstrong of the Kern County Office of Emergency Services.

Typically, state disaster relief money comes in the form of a 75 percent reimbursement to local governments.

Now, counties can contract with non-profits to provide relief and the state will pay 100 percent of the non-profit's costs.

"It's remarkable," Armstrong said of the freedom that change has given counties.

Which is why Kern recently contracted with Self-Help Enterprises, a non-profit housing and community development organization based in Visalia, to provide emergency relief for local residents whose wells have gone dry.

The plan is, if an individual or

Listen up!

Lois Henry appears on "First Look with Scott Cox" every Wednesday on KERN 1180 AM and 96.1 FM from 9 to 10 a.m. The show is also broadcast live on www.bakersfield.com. You can get your 2 cents in by calling 842-KERN.

small community well goes dry, residents' first point of contact will be the Kern County Environmental Health Department, which will immediately send someone out to verify the dry well.

Then Self-Help will contact the resident, confirm the situation and

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