

VA outpatient clinic cuts ribbon in Georgetown (Sussex Countian)

By Patrick Varine

Sussex Countian

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GEORGETOWN, DEL. -

Delaware's congressional delegation joined Veterans' Affairs (VA) officials this morning (May 29) in cutting the ribbon on a VA clinic in the Georgetown Plaza shopping center.

"We say to the people we send out into harm's way: 'When you come back, we won't forget about you,'" said Sen. Tom Carper. "To see those folks be able to get the care they need... we can be so proud."

The clinic, which began serving veterans on Jan. 28, opened in two phases.

"The first phase was primary care," said Michael Rybicki, VA's director for community-based outpatient clinics. "Then on April 28, we began the second phase, which incorporates podiatry, eye care and behavioral health care." Additional plans include mental health and audiology services.

"Having these clinics gets about 90 percent of what veterans need a lot closer to home," said Charles Dorman, who will be appointed VA director for Delaware in July.

The county seat's central location played a key role in the VA's decision to consolidate its two Sussex satellite offices, in Millsboro and Seaford, into a single center, and as they often do, Delaware's congressional delegation worked closely in helping to bring it to fruition.

Carper credited Lori James, one of his staffers, "who literally drove around looking for suitable sites," eventually settling on the old Hallmark store in the Georgetown Plaza, on U.S. 113.

While specialized care and procedures not available at the new clinic will still take place at the VA parent facility in Wilmington, "we're hoping to make healthcare much more accessible for [Sussex's] veterans," Dorman said, adding that there are also plans to open a

second clinic in downtown Dover.

"I probably shouldn't say this; but I'm going to, anyway," said Rep. Mike Castle (R-Del.). "I don't think it's a stretch to say that Delaware probably has the best veterans' health care in the nation."

"We only recently celebrated Memorial Day, and this is a real memorial to our veterans," Carper said. "Not a piece of paper, or a certificate, but real help."

The VA Outpatient Clinic is located at 15 Georgetown Plaza, and is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information, call 800-461-8262, ext. 2300.