

The Saint Francis Health Center at AT&T Park, San Francisco

Ballpark Facility is a Hit with Neighborhood Residents

BY GABRIEL KILEY

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SAN FRANCISCO — It's easy for visitors to The Saint Francis Health Center at AT&T Park to be distracted by its picturesque location. Nestled along McCovey Cove behind the ballpark's signature right-field brick wall, the center offers an expansive view of the San Francisco Bay outside its main entrance. A stroll down the port walk that extends from right field to the center-field scoreboard presents a view of sailboats and ship liners with the Bay Bridge and the green hills of the East Bay in the distance.

The view may be spectacular, but this ballpark health center is more than just a nice part of town to walk around in. The Saint Francis Health

Center's reputation is built on occupational health, but, in recent years, has added services related to physical therapy, primary care and urgent care. This expanding array of offerings is in response to the growing needs of residents and employers in Mission Bay and throughout the city. The center is operated by Saint Francis Memorial Hospital, a 322-bed downtown facility owned by Catholic Healthcare West.

The health center's success is evident by the increasing number of patients coming through its doors since opening in 2000, the same year AT&T Park opened. The ballpark health center is expected to treat about 20,000 patients by the end of the 2008-09 fiscal year, a 33 percent increase from five years ago.

"The health center is an established part of the community, especially being tied in with the ballpark," said Andrea Finucane, LVN, the health center's occupational health supervisor. "And being part of Saint Francis, which is a well-established hospital in this city, makes it even better."

STRATEGIC PRESENCE

The headquarters of Catholic Healthcare West, which owns and operates 41 hospitals in three states, is located across from the ballpark on Berry Street. The health system is the official health care provider for the San Francisco Giants, and the ballpark health center is available to injured players needing specialized medical attention. The health system provides defibrillator machines that are installed throughout the ballpark concourses and even sponsors the seventh-inning stretch. In addition, Saint Francis doctors and nurses staff the ballpark's first aid station, which is available to fans and is located on the main level near left field.

The health system's presence in and around the ballpark, particularly the health center, has certainly been beneficial for Saint Francis.

"(From the health center) we can build a referral network that generates back to our specialists at the hospital. That referral network helps generate the actual patient flow for our hospital," said Tony



The Saint Francis Health Center at AT&T Park opened in 2000 and is located along the San Francisco Bay. The facility offers a variety of services, including occupational health, physical therapy, urgent care and primary care.



Clockwise from top left: Andrea Finucane, occupational health supervisor, oversees the day-to-day operations at the clinic; radiologist Bill Balbierz talks with Carla Helmbrecht, director of therapy services and occupational health centers for Saint Francis; and Susan Eaton (right), physical therapy supervisor, assists a patient during a Pilates exercise.

Jackson, chief operating officer for Saint Francis.

The ballpark facility is actually one of two occupational health centers in the city operated by Saint Francis. The other, the Franciscan Treatment Room, is located downtown across from the hospital and opened more than 36 years ago. Both clinics are open daytime hours Monday through Friday, and patients needing immediate medical attention during off hours are directed to Saint Francis Memorial Hospital's emergency department.

Hospital officials said the success of both facilities reflects the hospital's reputation as a leader in occupational health in San Francisco.

"We have a lot of experience between the two clinics," said Brad Moy, MD, occupational health medical director for both facilities. "Most of the doctors have been working here for a number of years. We know the community well."

A NEIGHBORHOOD FIXTURE

The emergence of The Saint Francis Health Center at AT&T Park coincides with the transformation of Mission Bay, a previously rundown area of warehouses and shipping yards in the southern part of the city. Since being formally turned into a redevelopment area in 1998, this bustling area is

now filled with condominiums, lofts, hotels, restaurants, biotech research facilities and a campus for the University of California, San Francisco.

"This area in a matter of seven years has probably had an increase of about 12,000 residents and employees," said Carla Helmbrecht, director of therapy services and occupational health centers for the hospital. "This is a crucial area for Saint Francis."

The staff at the 2,000-square-foot, seven-room health center, consists of five physical therapists, two primary care physicians, two occupational health physicians and three medical assistants. Not only do local residents and businesses use the health center's services, the staff sees patients from major employers such as Norcal Waste Systems, PG&E, the San Francisco Unified School District, the San Francisco Police Department and Amtrak. Moreover, since the health center is located near the water, the staff also attends to injured bridge and ferry workers as well as National Park Service employees at Alcatraz Island.

"The myriad of services we offer is a lot for a relatively small clinic and each one of these services is in response to what the community asked for," Helmbrecht said.

Video Report

See a video report on The Saint Francis Health Center at AT&T Park by visiting www.chausa.org/hp.

GETTING PEOPLE BACK TO WORK

When it comes to occupational health, which accounts for about 80 percent of the health center’s traffic flow, the goal is to get injured workers back to work as soon as possible. Meeting this objective means focusing on customer service and efficiency, employees said.

“When people get injured on the job, especially in this economy, they get scared,” said Lisa Zacharewicz, MD, the health center’s occupational health and urgent care physician. “We want to make them feel better and give them hope and get them back to work as soon as possible.”



AT&T Ballpark is the home of the San Francisco Giants. The ballpark hosted the 2002 World Series and the 2007 All-Star Game.

Common occupational injuries treated by the staff include lacerations, back and spine injuries and repetitive stress injuries.

“And [Mission Bay] is a high-construction zone so you’re going to have lots of bangs and bruises and some fractures here or there,” Zacharewicz said.

In order to get employees back to work as quickly as possible, the staff stresses the importance of modified duties to injured workers and employers.

“Taking employees off work costs a company an enormous amount of money in workers’ compensation claims, and it can isolate the patient and lead to a non-healing, non-productive frame of mind,” Helmbrecht said. “As often as possible, our physicians will try to work with the patients and employers to find some alternative job duties that employees can do while they recover from their injuries.”

For example, if a worker’s injury is such that he or she is restricted from lifting heavy objects as

required in the regular job, then perhaps the company will be able to assign them to a temporary job that doesn’t require lifting, Helmbrecht said.

“Our physicians also like to stress that these modified duties are not only for the workplace, but also for home and anywhere else,” she said. “It gets them back to their regular job and regular life faster.”

Some patient cases, however, can take unexpected turns.

“I find it humbling when someone comes in with what he or she thinks is a work-related injury and it turns out to be something devastating like a cancer,” Zacharewicz said. “That sits with you.” She said two people had told her, both in January, “Aren’t I lucky to get injured on the job?” Otherwise, she said, “They probably wouldn’t have received the early diagnosis.”

The health center’s occupational services are also available to not-for-profit organizations like the Delancey Street Foundation, which is a residential, rehabilitative and work re-entry program for ex-substance abusers and ex-convicts, and the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation, which offers housing and community services for low-income people.

LOOKING AHEAD

With the continued growth of Mission Bay, The Saint Francis Health Center at AT&T Park figures to remain a prominent fixture in the neighborhood for the foreseeable future.

“Primary care is something we see as a big need in this community and we want to bring in more primary care physicians,” Helmbrecht said. “There are a lot of young families moving into the area and they will need access to more services.”

Benefiting from a beautiful location and a well-rounded array of pertinent health services, the ballpark health center has proven to be a hit with residents and employers. Building trust in the community has also proved beneficial.

“This is a city that’s dependent on relationships, and we’ve developed a lot of good relationships,” Zacharewicz said. “This is a big city with a small town mentality. People talk. That’s why we’re seeing more of an uptick in business.” ■



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