

# AMERICA'S HEALTHIEST HOMETOWN

A weekly report on The Villages' efforts to become "America's Healthiest Hometown" compiled by Daily Sun Ombudsman **Larry D. Croom**  
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## Primary care centers in The Villages

**Colony Care Center**  
Opened December 2012  
**Santa Barbara Care Center**  
Opening October 2013  
**Pinellas Care Center**  
Opening November 2013  
**Mulberry Grove**  
Opening February 2014  
**Lake Sumter Creekside**  
Opening March 2014

Villages doctors excited to become models for fixing nation's health care system

## 'This could just light up America'

By **LARRY D. CROOM** / DAILY SUN OMBUDSMAN

The Villages Health has big ideas about the future of medical care, and its physicians aren't surprised that others are taking note.

"Four or five years from now, I think people will look at this thing and say, 'they got it right,'" said Dr. Joe Hildner, chief medical officer of The Villages Health. "Hopefully, it will be plagiarized, certainly nationally, and maybe even beyond our borders."

The Villages model, which centers on the relationship between patients and their primary care doctor, is not without risk. But Hildner said, "It's right and it just makes sense."

Dr. Saul Rosenblum, incoming medical director for the Santa Barbara Care Center, said he expects the plan to spark conversation at the national level.

"Because we'll probably be closely observed both by those who want us to succeed, as well as those who have a vested interest in keeping the status quo, there's a level of anxiety as well as excitement," he said. "All the great decisions in my life were preceded by excitement and anxiety, and this is no different."

Rosenblum said doctors will be drawn to the model that emphasizes health care over industry.

"We have the opportunity, as well as the talent, to change health care in America," he said. "It excites me that there are those in academic, political and financial institutions who think this just might work."

Dr. Jack Hocutt, who practices at the Colony Care Center, said patients here have a lot to teach patients elsewhere.

"A lot of them have old-fashioned values and are willing to work and are interested in their health and readily take part," he said. "So that will serve as a model for the rest of the country and the world."

Dr. J.D. Steed, medical director at the Belleview Care Center, agreed.

"If you're going to shoot a guy to the moon, everybody's going to be watching, so you'd better get that guy to the moon," he said.

Among those watching are medical students, said Dr. Elliot Sussman, chair of The Villages Health.

"They will begin to say, 'geez, yeah, there's a place in Florida and there's a place in Georgia, in California; I'm going to be a primary care doc,'" he said. "And this, The Villages, could just light up America in health care. We're doing this to create America's Healthiest Hometown, and I think it's absolutely terrific that others are really starting to pay attention to us."

## HEALTH, from A1

the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine and CEO of USF Health.

"That has begun to get attention," Sussman said. "And that's good for us, because doctors say, 'my gosh. They're really doing this? Maybe I should call.'"

Sussman also recently spoke with The Advisory Group, a national organization of thousands of health care professionals.

"They try to keep their members abreast of the latest emerging trends and developments,"

Sussman said. "They wanted to hear all about what we're doing to make us America's Healthiest Hometown."

Finally, Sussman said, a \$3.6-million gift from Promise Healthcare Inc. to create an Endowed Directorship in Geriatrics for USF Health is one of the best examples of the momentum building. That funding will provide training for young doctors in specialized care for older patients.

"We can help contribute to that new knowledge that's necessary to take better care of folks here in The Villages," Sussman said. "Then that knowledge can be shared with folks throughout the country."



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— **Dr. Elliot Sussman**,  
chair of The Villages Health

Klasko said he's not surprised the initiative is getting so much attention.

"Insurers, investors and health care professionals of all stripes are looking to The

Villages as a model where a community has taken hold of its health care and created a future which is patient-centric, primary-care driven, integrated and innovative," he said. "Ten

## Fixing health care: All about Dr. Michael Clifford

Primary care doctors have been recruited as part of an initiative to revamp health care right here in Florida's Friendliest Hometown. The Villages Health is partnering with USF Health to bring in family doctors and specialists who will work as a team, all in the best interests of serving patients. This weekly feature will introduce these innovative doctors who have joined this effort.

**Q: Doctors in The Villages Health treat a maximum of 1,250 patients. What does that mean to a physician?**

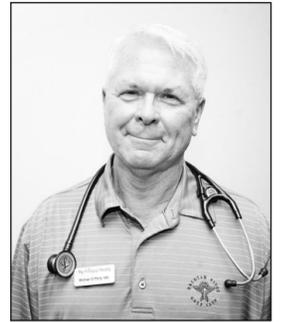
**A:** It definitely takes the load off of our shoulders and it gives us a chance to spend more time with the patient. I'd much rather be able to be responsible for less people but giving them more of my time than what I was in before, where I was seeing 25 to 28 patients a day.

**Q: Do you think more time with patients will lead to better health for them down the road?**

I hope so. The No. 1 thing that people have to remember is that we're here to educate, be their advocate. But they are responsible for their care. So all we can basically do is give them the knowledge, the appropriate medications and the appropriate tests to get done. But they have to be part of that formula.

**Q: How does it feel to be a part of this health care initiative in The Villages?**

It's really fun. There are a lot of gifted people that are working here. It's really refreshing to get the feedback from patients that they really appreciate the time that we



**Care Center:** Colony  
**Age:** 68  
**Undergraduate:** St. Thomas University  
**Medical school:** University of Minnesota  
**Internship, residency:** Bethesda Hospital in St. Paul, Minn.

spend with them.

**Q: What is your personal philosophy on health care?**

The No. 1 thing that you can do for a patient is to listen to them. From that is derived the medical problems, whatever individual specific needs they require and their knowing that you care about them. If you get those things all together, everything else will take care of itself.

**Next week** Find out all about Dr. Aya Olejeme, a physician at Belleview Care Center.

## How national health care is broken

### What is your philosophy on health care?

*"When I started medicine about 25 years ago, the doctor was kind of in charge. The patient came in and got the care that the doctor would provide. I think it's become much more of a partnership, which carries with it both opportunity and responsibility. The physician still is somebody who has the knowledge and the skill and the training, but he needs to have the patient as part of that team to help provide the care. It works much better when the patient becomes involved in that care."*

**Dr. Stephen Fischer**,  
Belleview Care Center



years from now, people will talk about The Villages model in creating America's Healthiest Hometown as an example of a positive community reaction to the health care tsunami of 2013."

Gary Lester, vice president of community relations for The Villages, said he's thrilled.

"This community is made up of many wonderful people who are enjoying the best years of their lives," he said. "They have the best of the best, from recreation to entertainment to golf to those special friendships that often form here among neighbors. Health care is quickly moving to the top of that best-of-the-best list,

so it's a real compliment that others want to be involved or learn from what we are accomplishing. Frankly, we're honored by that."

Sussman agreed. "What we're trying to do in health care is match the extraordinary nature of this community, to be just as innovative, just as creative, just as extraordinary," he said. "And we're getting noticed."

*Email your health care questions to [larry.croom@thevillagesmedia.com](mailto:larry.croom@thevillagesmedia.com) or send them to the Daily Sun, 1100 Main Street, The Villages, FL 32159. Attn.: Larry Croom. Or call 753-1119, ext. 9366.*