



Issues Brief

City of Yakima e-Newsletter

Yakima Wins National Award for Innovation for miCare Clinic

The City of Yakima has been named the winner of the National Public Employer Labor Relations Association's ("NPELRA") 2013 Pacesetter Award in recognition of the City's innovative efforts to control healthcare costs by opening an in-house medical clinic earlier this year.

The clinic, which is being operated by miCare, a subsidiary of Montana-based Employee Benefits Management Services, Inc., officially opened in February.

"We are very proud of the Yakima miCare clinic and are grateful that the NPELRA recognized what the City has done to keep costs in line while still meeting the healthcare needs of its employees, their families, and retirees," said City Human Resources Manager Colleen Chapin. "Winning the Pacesetter Award is definitely a feather in our cap."

Chapin was on hand at the NPELRA's Robin Hall Memorial Annual Awards Luncheon on April 8th in San Antonio, Texas to receive the award.

The more than 2,000 public sector agencies represented by the NPELRA employ over 4 million federal, state, and local government workers.

Yakima is believed to be the first local government entity in Washington State to open its own in-house medical clinic. By paying miCare a set rate for operating the clinic, the City is avoiding much of the overhead its insurance program usually has had to pay to private healthcare providers. The City estimates that by having opened the clinic, it will save its self-funded insurance plan as much as \$326,000 this year, roughly double that amount in 2014, and up to \$2 million dollars over the first three years the clinic is operating.

Since the clinic first opened in February, more than 97% of the appointments that are available during the 26 hours a week the clinic operates have been taken. Based on that high level of usage, the City is now considering expanding the hours the clinic is open each week.

The clinic is currently staffed by two doctors, a mid-level practitioner, and a medical assistant. General medical services, such as lab work, physical exams, primary office visits, and prescription medication (dispensed both at the clinic and by mail order) are provided through the clinic to City employees, their families, and retirees.



Deputy HR Manager Cheryl Ann Mattia (left) and HR Manager Colleen Chapin (right) hold NPELRA Pacesetter awards.

City Launching Next Steps in Downtown Revitalization

This spring and summer, the City of Yakima will be ramping up its efforts to spur the continued revitalization of Downtown Yakima by launching new events and activities and by beginning a public process to help chart the future of the downtown area.

Earlier this year the City hired two consulting firms to help it develop a strategy for the downtown. Crandall Arambula, a Portland, Oregon-based urban design, architecture, and planning firm that specializes in downtown revitalization, is heading up the downtown master planning process. Thomas Consultants, an international retail strategy company headquartered in Vancouver, B.C., is responsible for crafting an approach to bring more businesses to the downtown core.



An expanded Farmer's Market and music performances will fill Downtown Yakima this summer.

Community members will play a key part in developing the downtown master plan and the retail recruitment strategy. On May 9th starting at 6:30 pm, the first in a series of public meetings will be held at the Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel to gather community input. Additional community meetings will be held later this year.

Since he was hired by the City last fall, a focus for Yakima Economic Development Manager Sean Hawkins has been to create new events and activities this summer to help solidify Downtown Yakima's growing reputation as an arts and entertainment destination.

On June 7th, the new *Lunchtime Live* concert series will kick off a run of 13 consecutive Friday shows, all of which will take place from 11:45 am to 1:15 pm at Performance Park, located at 2nd Street and A Street. During the free shows, Yakima restaurants will be on hand selling a variety of to-go food. The series will feature local musicians and will run through August 30th. The list of *Lunchtime Live* performers and food vendors will be announced soon.

Music will also be the focal point of the free Thursday evening *Downtown Summer Nights* concert series. Townsquare Media has partnered with the City to produce the family-friendly series, which will start on June 13th and run through August 29th. Legends Casino is the title sponsor for the *Downtown Summer Nights* shows, which will start at 5:30 pm and will feature a wide mix of musical styles including country, blues, and rock. Craft vendors, kids activities, food booths run by local restaurants, and a beer and wine garden will fill 4th Street behind the Capitol Theatre during the 11 *Downtown Summer Nights* events. The performer lineup for *Downtown Summer Nights* is expected to be released next week.

Adding to the excitement in Downtown Yakima this summer will be the expansion of the popular Yakima Farmer's Market to include Tuesday night events near the corner of 4th Street and Yakima Avenue starting at 4:30 pm. Each Tuesday from July 23rd through late September, the market, which will continue its successful Sunday events on 3rd Street beginning May 12th, will feature the same outstanding, locally-grown produce it has become famous for.

"Downtown Yakima will definitely be a hot spot this summer," said Hawkins. "The new events and activities that we've put together are designed to keep the momentum that's been building in downtown rolling. It's going to be a lot of fun," said Hawkins.

MLK, Jr. Blvd Underpass Project Continuing to Make Progress

Utility relocation work is nearing completion on the roughly \$10.6 million project that will eventually take MLK, Jr. Boulevard traffic below the BNSF railroad tracks near North Front Street. The utility work, which has been underway for the past few weeks, involved moving power and fiber optic lines in the area that will eventually be excavated to make way for the railroad underpass.

The focus of the project will soon be shifting to construction of a temporary track commonly referred to as a "shoo-fly" that will be used as a detour for BNSF trains while the underpass project is ongoing. Mowat Construction Company, the Woodinville-based firm serving as the project's primary contractor, will do the initial work of building a stable bed for the temporary track. Once the track bed is finished, BSNF crews will take over and install new tracks for the shoo-fly and put it in to service to handle mainline train traffic through Yakima.



Road closures and detours took effect in March and will remain in place during construction of the underpass.

Once the shoo-fly is in place, excavation work will begin for the underpass. Construction will also start soon on a concrete "bottom seal" that will help keep ground water from seeping into the underpass. Later this spring, construction will be underway on a new railroad bridge and the first section of walls for the underpass.



Heavy equipment is used to remove old asphalt and begin excavation at the MLK, Jr. Blvd underpass site.

The underpass project is expected to be ongoing until late summer or early fall of 2014. Until then, motorists on MLK, Jr. Blvd are being encouraged to turn right on 5th Avenue and use Yakima Avenue to continue traveling east. Local access is being maintained on MLK Jr. Blvd between 5th Avenue and 1st Avenue.

Both the MLK, Jr. Blvd underpass and the Lincoln Avenue underpass, which opened in May 2012, have been designed to improve driver and pedestrian safety, reduce exhaust emissions from cars waiting for trains to pass, and speed the response times for police, fire, and other emergency services providers.



Be Part of the Solution!

If you want to volunteer for one of the many Yakima Community Clean Ups taking place this year, call James Scott at 576-6745.

Yakima is our community – Be Part of the Solution!