

## Rejoice for Rio

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### **The El Rio Community Health Center has a mission: to serve the people of Tucson, one medical case at a time.**

Presently, there are more than one million uninsured people in Arizona, and their medical care often goes neglected. However, the Tucson community has a place to turn to when medical emergencies arise: The El Rio Community Health Center opened its doors nearly 40 years ago to lend a hand to those who are financially troubled or without access to health insurance. Today, El Rio is one of the largest providers of medical and dental services to the uninsured and Medicaid populations in Tucson; and, according to El Rio's Web site, more than 70,000 people depend on the institution for medical care.

A conversation with one patient and supporter, Jack Young, leaves no doubt that the El Rio Community Health Center has helped those in need. Young found himself in a desperate dental situation years ago. "I [was] sitting here, living on social security and my teeth started hurting," he says. After seeking help from other dental providers, Young realized that he simply couldn't afford it. Young recalls turning to a health center his stepdaughter had heard of: "I called [El Rio], and they said that they could help me," he says. Young had his bottom tooth replaced at no cost and has had no problems since. Young is one of many Tucsonans who rely on the El Rio health center for their valuable medical attention.

Young says that the quality of care that El Rio offers is as good as any you would encounter at other hospitals. "It was one of the most pleasant experiences I think I've ever had," Young says. "I would never go to anyone else." El Rio understands that the diverse community of Tucson has a variety of needs and in light of this, has developed a patient advocacy service that assists patients in their unique medical situations.

Through this service, "patient advocates" screen and analyze individuals in order to help them find placement in medical programs like AHCCCS, Kids Care and PCAP that suit their personal situation. These advocates also act as a liaison between patients and third parties, and a resource for medical information.

Young expresses his appreciation for El Rio and the role it plays in the community: "There are so many people in this town that could not get any care at all if it weren't for [El Rio]," he says. The health center fights daily for its patients' right to quality medical care, and in the past years El Rio has expanded its facilities to provide medical attention for more citizens city-wide.

In order to live up to its mantra—"helping keep people healthy"—El Rio has added a number of programs to suit the needs of the population groups who need them most: children, the homeless, individuals with HIV/AIDS and the uninsured. Through this outreach, El Rio hopes to demonstrate its value to the community by providing reliable and accurate information that will educate the public on specific health risks and methods of prevention.

"Our belief is that every person deserves access to quality health care," says Brenda Goldsmith, executive director of El Rio Health Center Foundation. "The private gifts we receive to help El Rio help those in need, and every dollar we receive is extremely important."

Making health care more accessible and affordable to the community is the premise El Rio was founded on. The foundation's knowledgeable and experienced team of medical experts has reached out to the community in hopes of making health care less of a burden and more of a right—and seeing that Tucson continues to be taken care of.