

## HEALTH CARE

# A place for families in crisis

*Ground is broken for \$10M behavioral health care facility in Albany*

By **Bethany Bump**

*Albany*

Evan Brooksby and his wife dove into parenthood head-first.

In 2003, the local couple worked with Northeast Parent and Child Society to become therapeutic foster parents to children with severe mental, emotional and behavioral health needs, and eventually adopted two of them. Then they had two more “the traditional way,” Brooksby said.

“It was really quite a rocket-ship ride from basically childless to over-capacity,” he said.

But mental and behavioral health issues don't disappear overnight, and the couple soon found themselves needing help.

“The services seemed to all be there,” he said, “but they were all over the place.”

That's why on Tuesday, Brooksby made a personal appearance at the groundbreaking for Northern Rivers Family of Services' new \$10 million behavioral health care center — a 26,000-square-foot facility that will go up over the next year on Academy Road in Albany and serve as a “one-stop shop” for families and children in mental or emotional crisis. He wishes the center had been around when he and his wife were frantic and desperate for help, he said.

That's precisely the point of the new center, said William Gettman Jr., CEO of Northern Rivers, a family of human service agencies in eastern New York — to streamline and ease what is often a chaotic and fragmented search for help when families find themselves in moments of crisis.

A family whose child attempts or threatens suicide, for example, may call their county mobile crisis line for help and spend the next few weeks moving back and forth between emergency room, psychiatric center, primary care services and counseling — all different services offered by different providers, and often on different sides of town.

The Northern Rivers center, on track for a grand opening in the spring



Photos by John Carl D'Annibale / Times Union

CEO of Northern Rivers William Gettman, center, is joined by dignitaries and officials to break ground Tuesday for a behavioral health care center in Albany.



Parent Evan Brooksby of Niskayuna speaks during the groundbreaking ceremony on Tuesday.

or summer of 2019, will offer it all under one roof: psychological assessments, crisis stabilization, inpatient and outpatient mental health services, primary care, Medicaid care management and — eventually, through a partnership with a local agency — substance abuse treatment. It will also include a residential treatment facility for both long- and short-term inpatient care. An existing residential facility on Academy Road will be demolished once the center opens.

“The system today is well intended, but it is fragmented,” Gettman said. “And it's not because of anyone's mal-intent. It's simply because the systems are in silos and they operate accord-

ing to their own rules. So we've got to break down some of those rules and think of the family at the center of it.”

Aware that such a facility could help cut down on unnecessary emergency room visits and Medicaid costs by streamlining care, the state's Medicaid Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program awarded Northern Rivers a \$4.2 million grant to help build the center, and the organization has launched a capital campaign to finance the rest.

A significant component of the project will involve creating a single electronic health record for the child or family member, Gettman said.

“The worst thing in the world for a parent is to go in to a provider and have to explain why you're there again and again and again,” he said. “It's like going to a doctor and they refer you to another doctor. This way we have a single record, a single assessment so we can pass the data electronically to a new clinician so we don't recreate the trauma of what might be going on in that kid's life.”

Albany Medical Center will provide primary care services at the site. Northern Rivers, the parent organization for Northeast Parent and Child Society and Parsons Child and Family Center, will provide the behavioral health services.

Northern Rivers currently serves 16,000 children, adults and families at several dozen locations across 35 counties.