A place for families in crisis

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

By Bethany Bump

Renowned local couple, 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. Though they had few more “traditional ways,” Brooksby said, “It was really quite a rocket-ship ride from basically childless to over-capacity.”

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 ceremony for Northern Rivers Family of Services’ new $10 million behavioral health care center — a 28,000-square-foot facility that will open 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 there, he said, “but they were all over the place and not connected.”

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That’s precisely the point of the new center, said William Gettman, CEO of Northern Rivers, a family of human service agencies in eastern New York — to streamline and ease access to services. “The system today is well intentioned, but it’s fragmented,” Gettman said. “It’s simply because the systems are silos and they operate according 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.”

“One of the best things in the world for a parent is to go in to a provider and have to explain why you’re there 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 as 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.

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 and again and again,” he said.

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The site features a New York State Education Room, where state dignitaries and historical experts will work to prevent that from happening.

The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution is donating $10,000 to the Albany County Historical Association for the Ten Broeck Mansion plaque and interpretive project.

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