



Ramona resident Craig Jung applies his experience in health care and facilities maintenance to his current role on the board of directors for North County Health Services. Julie Gallant

By JULIE GALLANT

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Craig Jung takes a personal interest in the North County Health Services (NCHS) clinic recently relocated from 217 Earlham St. to more modern and spacious quarters at 220 Rotanzi St. As one of the organization's board members and chair of its Quality Committee, Jung was instrumental in getting the clinic opened on March 26.

In addition to fundraising, one of his tasks was getting over the final hurdle of obtaining permits and approvals from the county of San Diego. That process delayed the clinic's opening by about six months.

“Between their phone calls and my phone calls to the county we were finally able to get the occupancy permits and opened up last Tuesday,” said Jung, a Ramona resident for 28 years.

He thinks he helped plant the seed for growing the Ramona clinic, which is plusher and about 3,500 square feet larger than the outdated 5,000-square-foot clinic. He said former NCHS Chief Executive Officer Irma Cota picked up on his suggestion for an improved Ramona facility at the time the NCHS Oceanside clinic opened several years ago. Altogether, the dental and medical provider operates 12 locations in North San Diego and Riverside counties.

ADVERTISING



“I mentioned to her that it would be nice if we could have a ribbon-cutting in Ramona,” Jung said. “I think I planted a little seed in her mind.”

Jung, 72, was well aware of the challenges at the former Ramona clinic due to his varied background in health care, both as a dental practitioner and facilities manager.

Born and raised mostly in Milwaukee, Wis., Jung developed an interest in medicine from the time he began taking basic sciences courses at James Caldwell High School in West Caldwell, N.J. Because of his father’s job offer to work for Sears in Chicago, Jung had the freedom to live on his own in a rented apartment in New Jersey while still in high school and make trips to New York City only 25 miles away.

“I rented an apartment on my own and got a job as a deli clerk at the A&P grocery store,” he said. “The drinking age was 18 in New York City and 21 in New Jersey, so all we had to do was jump on the subway and go into New York City.”

After graduating from high school in 1965, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and learned the dental technician trade in Montgomery, Ala. He spent the next year-and-a-half working as a dental technician at an Air Force station in Istanbul, Turkey. His patients were those enlisted in the Air Force and their dependents.

Next he spent equal time as a dental technician at Luke Air Force Base near Phoenix, Ariz. He left the Air Force to work for a dental supply company in Phoenix and to study pre-dental at Phoenix Community College to become a dentist. He eventually transferred to Oregon State University, a public research university in Corvallis, to study microbiology. He graduated with a bachelor’s degree in microbiology in 1976.

Afterward he accepted what he thought was going to be a temporary job as a maintenance technician at Samaritan Albany General Hospital in Albany, Ore., but it turned into a lifelong career.

Jung worked at the hospital several years before moving to San Diego in 1981 in search of better opportunities and better weather.

“There was a gal I was dating in Oregon who moved down here,” Jung said. “I came down here a year after she did. I came to visit, liked it and stayed.”



Retired hospital plant services director Craig Jung is a North County Health Services volunteer and patient. Julie Gallant

He became a maintenance technician at Hillside Hospital near El Cajon and Park boulevards and was promoted to assistant chief engineer a year later. While working at Hillside, Jung met his future wife LaDawn, who staffed the business office at the time. They were married on the Caribbean island of Jamaica in 1986 and have been together the past 32 years. Craig has a son, Craig Jung Jr., 40, who lives in Phoenix and works in the computer IT field. The couple enjoys the company of three cats and three dogs at their ranch-style home in San Diego Country Estates.

The elder Jung took a circuitous route along the same health care career path once he realized Hillside Hospital was ready to close. First he became a plant manager for the Baxter Diagnostics research lab in Sorrento Valley and after the firm closed two years later he eventually moved on to work at UC San Diego's Thornton Hospital in La Jolla.

"After Thornton, an opportunity arose to become director of plant services at Harborview Medical Center in downtown San Diego near Sixth and Elm streets," said Jung, who helped maintain the building for months after Harborview closed while its assets were being sold. "I was literally the last employee in the building to shut off the lights. For nine months it was just me and a security guard working in the hospital."

One of the nursing staff at Harborview pointed Jung in the direction of Fallbrook Hospital where she worked after Harborview's closure. Jung stayed as plant services director for nine years.

"I essentially retired from Fallbrook Hospital after nine years in 2007," he said. "And then I was called back to do consulting work for facilities maintenance at Promise Hospital on University Avenue in San Diego for about eight months. They needed me to organize the documentation for the different regulatory agencies."

As a retiree, Jung delved into community service as an ambassador for the Ramona Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Ramona Rotary Club. He volunteered on Rotary's Fireworks Committee and eventually became the committee's chairman and the club's president. Then through a contact with Rotary, he was asked to join the board of directors of NCHS about five years ago.

He attends NCHS' monthly board meetings and chairs the Quality Committee. Jung said he joined forces with fellow NCHS board member Victor Botello, who has been involved in the Ramona clinic since its inception in a church basement. Jung said the clinic moved to its Earlham Street location in the mid-1970s.

"Victor and I worked together on fundraising to build the new clinic to make it a reality," Jung said.

On March 20, just a week before the Ramona clinic's opening on Rotanzi Street, Jung was presented with a Leadership Award at the NCHS annual meeting for his involvement in opening the clinic, through fundraising, making phone calls and working with the county.

"My contacts with the Ramona chamber helped with getting the clinic opened," he said. "I was a patient at the clinic on opening day. Before I was on the board I was even a patient there."

NCHS is planning to hold a Ramona Chamber of Commerce ribbon-cutting ceremony and Grand Opening celebration at the Ramona clinic from 5 to 7 p.m. June 6.

Julie Gallant

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