

Executive Q&A: Michelle Gonzalez, CEO, North County Health Services

■ By STEVE ADAMEK



Michelle Gonzalez

In April 2020, North County Health Services Board of Directors unanimously promoted Michelle D. Gonzalez from an Interim role, to the new president and CEO, capping a near 20-year career with the company. Leading an \$85+ million organization, Gonzalez serves as the conduit between the board of directors, executive management, leadership and staff teams, patients, and the community.

Gonzalez began her career at NCHS as a program coordinator and emerged as a leader while working on the frontlines in program development and community outreach. She was then promoted to the role of vice president of operations, overseeing and implementing key clinical initiatives. Most recently, she was appointed chief strategy & development officer. In this role, Gonzalez spearheaded key business expansions including launching a new 11,000 square foot health-care center in Riverside County, the development and implementation of new service lines, and developed several multi-year strategic plans designed to position the organization for ongoing growth. These critical initiatives resulted in significant increase in patient visits and revenue, an increased market share, and greater community engagement.

Throughout her career, Gonzalez developed winning strategies across all functional areas including communications, marketing and outreach, community engagement, planning and grants, and patient engagement and retention. This translated into successful initiatives such as the creation and centralization of the patient call center, expanding new clinic locations in San Diego County and developing multimillion dollar grant applications and award-winning marketing programs, all of which grew both revenue and market share.

Within the organization, Gonzalez has been the catalyst and ambassador for the critical "Building Great Relationships" initiative which underpins the very fabric of the organization and cultural foundation, striving to treat each patient, partner and fellow staff member with the utmost respect.

In her free time, Gonzalez enjoys spending as much time as possible with her husband and their two young children; keeping them closely connected to their roots from Mexico and Guam.

Gonzalez earned her Master's in Public Administration as well as a certificate in the Not-For-Profit Management Development program through the Harvard Business School, San Diego Chapter. As a Certified Green Belt in Lean Six Sigma, Gonzalez brings a deep understanding of community health management fused with a passion for serving and she is committed to leading NCHS into a new era of achievement.

It must be a big plus to be coming into this permanent leadership position with such institutional knowledge and personal experience with NCHS?

North County Health Services (NCHS)

CEO: Michelle Gonzalez

HEADQUARTERS: San Marcos

YEAR FOUNDED: 1971

REVENUE: \$85 million

LOCAL EMPLOYEES: 1,000

CO. DESCRIPTION: Comprehensive health care service provider

WEBSITE: www.nchs-health.org

NOTABLE: 65,000 patients annually

I've had the pleasure of being with NCHS for close to 2 decades and have had the opportunity to work in a variety of capacities throughout the organization and doing so does allow for me to apply a unique level of understanding both for staff and patients. I have enough insights to understand the complexities of our operations, yet, I also have a very strong working knowledge of how each business domain is interrelated and interdependent. This motivates me to listen to those on the front lines, in particular, our physicians and other health care professionals — I've learned that they are really are the heartbeat of the organization.

Has NCHS faced challenges in the COVID-19 crisis?

NCHS has experienced significant challenges, similar to all other health care providers who are on the frontlines. The shortage of testing, PPE, and reduction in patient visits has forced us to consolidate our services, furlough members of our workforce and to quickly ramp up our "virtual visit" capabilities in order to see patients either via phone or through video.

And while we've certainly had a significant amount of challenges, I've also been profoundly moved by the spirit of our staff and their willingness to rise to the occasion. The heart and dedication of our workforce is unlike any other. They are the best of the best and serve without limitations and truly uphold the spirit of our mission. They have done so for nearly 50 years, in particular providing high quality and compassionate health care to the underserved and our diverse communities.

With unemployment rates skyrocketing, do you expect NCHS will need new strategies to deal with a possible influx of patients?

We definitely anticipate that there will be "pent up need" for patients who were not able to access care during the height of the pandemic and we also anticipate that as a result of lost jobs and wages many patients and community members in general will have had an interruption in their health care benefits.

NCHS is ready to respond. Our board of directors, our staff, physicians and all of our health care providers have been working around the clock to provide virtual visits and to ensure that to the extent possible, our patients have had no interruption in their care. This has allowed us to secure increased access so that we can see patients timely.

And NCHS is enrolling new patients. With so many seeking health care, we have enrollment specialists helping individuals sign up for insurance such as Medi-Cal or we can work with individuals on a sliding scale based on income. More importantly, we can sign people up for Cal-Fresh, WIC and we can direct them to food banks and other community resources so that they can be healthy. Not only are we concerned about a patient's physical health, we're concerned about their mental health. This pandemic can be such a stressful time as people are facing the unknown. We have behavioral health specialists who are standing by to help people through difficult time.

Finally, we are very proud that later this year, in September we will be going live with OCHIN-EPIC, a new state of the art Electronic Health Record (EHR) system. The capabilities of this new EHR are so in sync with who we are as an organization. We are the only community health center in San Diego County to have made this level of investment in purchasing a new EHR. It is a testament to our commitment to provide our patients and staff with cutting-edge and innovative solutions.

Health care is often considered difficult and complex, at NCHS, we are doing everything we can to make it as easy as possible.

The future of NCHS is so incredibly bright, we have much to look forward to and we are excited to announce future developments.

When you served as Chief Strategy & Development Officer, were you part of NCHS' expansion plans, including the Riverside facility?

Yes, I was the lead in many of the strategic initiatives

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Escondido Apartment Complex Renovated As Home For Teens and Young Adults

RESIDENTIAL: \$9.5M YMCA Project to Provide Residences For 44 Low Income Youth

■ By RAY HUARD



Photo courtesy of the YMCA of San Diego County

An Escondido apartment complex is being renovated to serve homeless teens and young adults.

A run-down Escondido apartment complex is being transformed into a home for teens and young adults who had been living on the streets.

The YMCA of San Diego County's Youth & Family Services is in the process of renovating the two-building complex at 711 West Lincoln Ave.



Jonathan Hall

"The idea here is to make this a place that allows the youth, the teenagers to really feel like this is not some hole in the wall but this is a nice place to call home," said Jonathan Hall, YMCA vice president and CFO.

"I can't stress enough the importance that the team has put in making these units not just safe and clean, but really making them aesthetically pleasing," Hall said.

The \$9.5 million project will provide a home for 44 low-income youth between the ages of 16 and 26.

The complex has 25 apartments of about 930 square feet. Each apartment will be shared by two people, and the YMCA will provide social services on site.

Dream Come True

"This is really a dream come true," said Krysta Esquivel, YMCA executive director for youth and family services. "We're really excited to be able to renovate the entire complex to create dignified spaces for these young people."

The YMCA bought the property in July 2019 for \$5.8 million, according to CoStar, a real estate research firm.



Krysta Esquivel

Built in 1979, the apartments in the 23,475 square-foot complex were in serious need of repair when the YMCA acquired it.

"The vast majority of the units were a really bad condition. We're talking holes in the wall," said Courtney Pendleton, YMCA associate director of public relations and communications.

"It's not what we would put our young people in. They weren't dignified, that's for sure," Esquivel said.

Interior Demolition Started

Demolition of the interior of the apartments has just started.

"They're actually being fully gutted down to the studs," Esquivel said.

When the renovation's finished, Esquivel said the apartments "won't be high end but they'll look high end."

"We're pretty good at making spaces look beautiful," Esquivel said.

The HVAC systems are being upgraded and solar electric arrays are being added.

"We'll have wood floors and ceramic tile throughout,"

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