

## **CORDILLERAS MENTAL HEALTH CENTER**

On January 28, 2002 Desi & I drove to Redwood City and toured this facility. It took us an hour in good traffic. The purpose of the tour was to find a locked facility closer to Santa Cruz that had the type of environment that we consider healthy for our mentally ill adult children. And also to see what other Counties were doing with similar programs.

The Cordilleras facility is located in a beautiful canyon in San Mateo County off of highway 280 on Edmonds Road. The building and grounds are owned and maintained by the County of San Mateo. It was built in 1950 as a Tuberculosis Hospital, but phased out shortly after that. The building itself is three stories high, built in 1950 as a TB hospital, but never used for that purpose. The grounds are surrounded by open space with a fire station next door. A locked facility for adolescence children between the ages of 13 and 18 years had just been built next to the fire station, which will be opened this year. There is a basketball court and lawns both front and back.

The building and grounds are owned and maintained by the County of San Mateo, and provided at no cost to Telecare Corporation. San Mateo County does a minimal job in the upkeep of the building, therefore, although overall the building is in good shape it is like stepping back into the 50's with vintage tile floors, wood molding, and 50's built in furniture.

The new director of the facility, William S. Kruse graciously gave us a complete tour and spent almost an hour and a half with us.

The building itself is 3 stories high and looks like a hospital from the outside with metal coverings on the windows. The 3 floor is a MHRC with 68 people. All the rooms with the exception of 2 rooms have two beds in them, with a 1950's style nightstand built in between the beds. It is locked, but the residents have use of the stairwell to go to a small outside patio where they can smoke or hang out. It was very quiet and Mr. Kruse said they were purchasing new furniture and looking at creating a comfortable "home" environment with pictures on the walls, murals painted by the clients with the supervision of an artist for the MHRC portion of the facility.

As we walked through the facility we notice no one just wondering around, some people in the TV area hanging out. They had decent sized cafeteria, he told us that residents have a choice of 2 entries, fresh salad or a sandwich for each meal. The entire third floor had the vintage dark 1950's tile flooring but he also said they hoped to have carpeting installed in the bedrooms sometime in the future. The average stay is 18 months with some people staying 1.5 years and a very few who have been institutionalized and have been in there a long time.

The second floor consisted of two wings, the west wing was residential for 20 people with Borderline Personality Disorders, it was carpeted and very homey, apartment like. The therapy which they are using is known as DBT (dialectical behavioral therapy) which is also known as the Linehan Model. Marsha Linehan is a psychiatrist who works out of Seattle who helped to create this model of therapy. You can get books or tapes by her which might help you to better understand it if you are interested. They have a restaurant style dining room, whereby residents actually take turns as waiters or waitresses. The east wing consisted of offices for staff.

The first floor was residential, the east wing coed with 15 residents and the west all male with 14 residents. It kind of had the feel of low-income apartments. Residents can come and go as they please.

The MHRC and second floor residents have shared bathrooms with showers in the halls. The down stairs residences have shared restrooms and showers in the halls. There were different areas for programs, a room with a stage, pool table and ping pong table, staff offices, several kitchens and snack areas, access to outside for smoking, living room areas for relaxing and watching TV and the whole building was very quiet. This atmosphere of calm and quiet was definitely a plus, especially for those suffering from a severe mental illness. Many of the rooms had a lot of windows allowing light and an open feeling. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors had a bird cage, 2 house cats and fish tanks.

The grounds surrounding the back of the building were very beautiful and park like with a very tall fence in the way back.

The director took time out to tell us about the two doctors that staff the facility. Both are older, one is from Russia and is 78 years old. He told us that she really believes in alternative treatments and the facility has an acupuncturist that comes 2 times a week. They have tai chi classes and that they strongly believe in physical exercise. The facility has an exercise room (we did not see it, so we don't know how extensive it was). This particular doctor also strongly believes in certain herbal remedies that she has brought from Russia.

One couldn't get away from the feeling of being in an institution, since it was built to be a hospital with wide corridors.

Transportation to and from the city was limited to one bus in the morning and another in the late afternoon. For those allowed to leave the facility a van would occasionally take people downtown and they would catch a bus back to the facility. A large room off of the main entry hall was open for use by NAMI and other non-profit organizations. It had artwork displayed on the walls, tables and chairs, a projection screen, TV and video. The director mentioned that he worked closely with NAMI and the local mental health board.

