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First Alcohol Treatment Center Opens

By **Dan McKay**

Journal Staff Writer

Dr. Sam Slishman sees plenty of drunks in the emergency room.

And he has donated much of his time and money to see that they are better off when they leave. So Slishman was understandably pleased Friday when Bernalillo County celebrated completion of a detoxification and treatment center—the first of its kind in New Mexico.

"Every night I take care of a lot of people who are intoxicated," Slishman said Friday. "The next morning the bed rail goes down, and they're added to the streets" again.

The new center— called Metropolitan Assessment and Treatment Services, or MATS— is intended to help people like that. Police and hospitals can send public drunks to the new center, where they will have access to an array of services intended to help them stay sober.

"It's a place where they can regain control of their lives," County Commissioner Deanna Archuleta-Loeser said at a news conference.

The center is housed in the old Charter Hospital at 5901 Zuni SE. The county hopes to start moving programs into the building within a week.

The MATS center will feature a 50-bed detox unit, 70 beds for a 28-day treatment program, 12 beds for crisis triage to help people with mental-health problems and counseling and other services.

A host of county officials, health-care professionals and others celebrated the center's completion Friday afternoon.

Supporters say the programs should help relieve pressure on hospital emergency rooms and the jail. State liquor taxes provide around \$1.7 million a year to fund operations.

"There is nothing more painful than seeing a need in the community for a facility like this and seeing the need not filled," said Elisabeth Endean of the University of New Mexico Psychiatric Center.

Slishman, an emergency physician at UNM and chief executive of the nonprofit Endorphin Power Co., helped get the treatment center up and running. He also worked on his own project across the street, a community center that will offer Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and other services to graduates of the detox center.

Bernalillo County bought the Charter Hospital for \$2.5 million.

John Dantis, the county's director of public safety, said the county took steps to get support from the South San Pedro Neighborhood Association, which he thanked.

"We want very much to be a good neighbor," he said.

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