(RE)MAKING HISTORY

Metro Inclusive Health raises the roof on Tampa expansion

Parliament House resort closes, to be torn down
Tampa Bay launches Transgender Film Fest

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Tampa became one of Florida’s largest cities by 1900, growing from less than 800 residents in 1880 to more than 15,000 in just two decades. Its population was bolstered by the founding of Ybor City, a community sustained almost entirely by immigrants.

The city was populated primarily by those of Cuban and Spanish descent, a demographic that continued to evolve as Tampa Bay’s mining and shipping industries grew. Italian and Jewish immigrants soon followed, among them Germans fleeing persecution.

Mutual Aid Societies formed as a response, social clubs dedicated to improving the lives of Tampa’s residents. These organizations built large clubhouses – safe spaces for the communities they served that provided social services – including Ybor’s German-American Club.

It was first organized in 1901 and collected enough dues from members to lay the cornerstone for its three-story, 16,400-square-foot building on Feb. 23, 1908 at 2105 N. Nebraska Ave., where it remains today. Its grand opening was held less than a year later on Jan. 1, 1909.

“Fine classical details and proportions marked the three-story building, with concrete block molded to appear as tooled stone masonry,” the structure’s...
government-placed historical marker reads: “The building served Tampa’s German and Jewish population until its sale in 1919.”

The German-American Club served more of Tampa’s growing community than that, however, inclusively opening its doors to other ethnicities in typically exclusionary times. Even so, widespread anti-German sentiment forced its doors to close when the U.S. entered World War I.

Ownership of the massive structure changed throughout the years. In the ‘90s, Tampa officials converted it into office space before it was ultimately vacated and fell into disrepair until 2019.

That’s when Metro Inclusive Health and CAN Community Health announced that the health care partners had acquired the structure. The nonprofits have proudly worked to meet the health and wellness needs of Tampa Bay since 1992 and currently share LGBTQ and ally-focused health centers throughout the area.

Their offices include St. Petersburg’s 47,000-square-foot health and community center; a three-year renovation they completed with the help of community funding in Dec. 2018, and a 12,000-square-foot location they lease in Ybor. The organizations have long since outgrown the latter space.

The $1.7 million acquisition of the German-American Club was made through German American Tampa Holdings, formed along with their current landlord, Alliant Ybor Properties. After its purchase, they revealed plans to transform it into their Tampa headquarters, renovating the structure to double their services, create new jobs and breathe new life into a key part of Tampa’s history.

“As a local organization, we have grown alongside Tampa Bay by serving the community’s holistic health needs,” Metro CEO Lorraine Langlois said at the time. “Being able to restore and modernize this beautiful piece of local history for the community while expanding our impact fits right in line with our organizational mission.”

“CAN and Metro started their partnership in 2013, building what has become a model for us in other communities across Florida, the east coast and Puerto Rico,” CAN CEO Richard E. Carlisle added. “This investment in our community ALL ARE WELCOME: Tampa, CAN Community Health and Metro Inclusive Health officials raise Metro’s Inclusivity Flag representing all LGBTQ identities at their renovation site June 30. Text XXXX. PHOTO COURTESY METRO INCLUSIVE HEALTH

will continue to transform modern healthcare services for all in the Tampa Bay area.”

The organizations broke ground on the project Aug. 15, detailing renovation plans for the club’s existing structure and a 15,000-square-foot addition. To transform the iconic space into their next state-of-the-art health and community center, Metro also announced its $1 million Raise the Roof fundraising campaign.

“Metro has provided healthcare services that are inclusive of all segments of our community, starting with its roots in HIV case management in 1992,” the organization shared. “Today the organization provides over 100 services focused on the health and wellbeing of our LGBTQ+ community, but available to all, including full-service primary care, prevention and sexual health and advanced HIV care and treatment with partner CAN.

“Demand for services continue to increase,” they continued. “When completed, the nearly 30,000-square-foot facility will more than double our impact in Tampa.”

That impact has only grown in recent years. By 2019’s end, 18,980 people received one-on-one services from Metro and 11,627 had benefited from its educational outreach efforts, for a total of 30,615 lives served in Tampa Bay.

“Healthy communities create a greater quality of life for all,” Langlois shared in Metro’s 2019 Annual Report. “Community sponsors, donors and patients alike helped us maintain and grow life-changing community programming in safe spaces that has impacted thousands of individuals and families.”

Among them were 6,689 people from high-risk populations; 4,626 people living with HIV; 2,741 youth ages 13-24 and 2,851 HIV+ women, families and individuals with high-risk pregnancies. Metro also welcomed 2,674 LGBTQ+ and community center program participants; 1,739 behavioral health clients and 4,708 medical care patients.

Through its Raise the Roof campaign at the German-American Club, they hope to increase those numbers.

“In addition to restoring one of Tampa’s oldest landmark buildings, we are doubling our capacity to provide over 100 services including primary care, mental health, HIV care, treatment and prevention,” Metro’s fundraising campaign reiterates. “Every donation brings us one step closer.”

Like the services Metro offers, fundraising and construction were impacted by the onset of COVID-19 earlier this year. The coronavirus’ effects on Tampa Bay and beyond greatly limited educational outreach and social interactions, inspiring Metro to find new ways to connect with the community they serve.

“We’ve seen a big increase in Telehealth usage in our health center and among new patients,” Metro Chief Marketing & Experience Officer Brian Bailey says. “We’ve always tried to position ourselves as the provider of LGBTQ+ health care and that’s really closed the gap for some people.”

Telehealth offers secure and discrete ways to virtually visit with local health care providers. From a smartphone, tablet or computer, patients have access to obtaining the HIV-preventative Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), transition-related Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) and LGBTQ+-focused primary care, including mental health services. Prescriptions are also available by no-contact delivery or mail.

Programming has evolved in similar ways. The organization’s annual LGBTQ+ youth-focused summer camp was held virtually in July, reaching more participants than ever before. More than 70 teenagers assembled for two weeks of LGBTQ+-inclusive workshops, receiving customized care packages made possible by community support.

“We had kids from Canada to Alabama,” Bailey recalls. “There are pros and cons to every situation and this has allowed us to spread our outreach farther.”

“Not only did it broaden access to the program for young people,” Metro Development Division Director James Keane adds, “but it also spread the philanthropic support. We received donations from Canada and Alabama, but also from other locations where we didn’t even have youth participating. It spread not only our net of service delivery but our net of financial support.”

At the direction of donors, some of that financial support has been designated for particular causes within the organization like its youth programming. Others give generally – allowing Metro’s executives to determine where it will have the most impact – or directly to the Raise the Roof campaign.

“We’ve done well overall from fundraising this year, but the pandemic has made it hard to focus on building and construction,” Bailey says. “Raising money for a building versus raising money for services in a pandemic is challenging, there’s no doubt about that, but I feel comfortable with the more outreach we do.”

He says that’s “because donors are interested in our story. They’re interested in what we’re doing and that we’re expanding access in a big way.”

The renovation will ultimately impact all of Metro’s programs, something donors seem to understand. Since announcing its $1 million goal last year and in the midst of a global pandemic Metro has gratefully received $120,000 for the cause.

Among the donors are Tampa Bay surgeon Gopal Grandhige and husband Darin Bahl, who owns local event design studio Tailored Twig. The philanthropists first discovered Metro and its mission after the Pulse shooting in 2016.

“Both of us are drawn to serving our local community,” Grandhige says. “We researched who was providing LGBTQ+ services to the youth in the area and sent an online donation the next day. Soon thereafter we were contacted to get a tour of their facility.

It was inside of Metro’s Ybor location that he interacted with a group of LGBTQ youth. “It took me back to being that age,” he says, “and how important the work that is being done at Metro is, especially for transgender youth who have the highest suicide rates, similar to the gay youth of our time.”

The couple later toured Metro’s renovated St. Petersburg site, something Grandhige says helped them fully realize what a difference the organization makes in Tampa Bay.

“Being in healthcare, I know that many have no other options other than going to the emergency room for their care,” he says. “This leads
to such disparity in the well-being of those with and without insurance.

“The need for affordable mental and preventative care for all is the solution,” he continues. “Metro makes a big difference by providing these services. Although LGBTQ issues are dear to our heart, the health of our entire community is an even greater desire.”

Metro and CAN’s inclusive commitment to all is a defining element of their Tampa expansion. “CAN Community Health is dedicated to providing the best medical services, education and counseling to individuals living and affected by HIV, STIs and Hep C,” CAN CEO Richard E. Carlisle says. “This project will only expand our reach into the communities that need our services.”

The expansion will allow the partner organizations to provide “a one-stop-shop for patient care in Ybor,” CAN officials add.

“Eliminating space restrictions will increase our patients’ capacity and support staff to improve access to patient-centered, same-day care – including access to provider visits, blood draws, patient care coordination and nursing services,” they say. “The new space will include an infusion chair that permits us to provide in-house infusions of critical medications for our patients. In addition, a new pharmacy and clinical pharmacist will be available on-site for clients.”

“CAN continues to be a great partner,” Bailey says. “We’re doing great things together and we’ve all taken a lot of pride in restoring this building. They are a partner in this – the fundraising we’re doing is really to offset our costs but without CAN, the building wouldn’t be.”

“Metro is actually the first organization that CAN partnered with in any formal way, so we really have grown together and I think complement one another,” Keane adds. “Without the partnership we would not be in the position we are of restoring and creating this space in Tampa.”

The restoration remains Metro’s fundraising focus through the end of 2020, a year in which one of its largest annual fundraisers has been postponed. Its 2019 Cocktail Party raised nearly $110,000 for its essential health and community services but will not proceed in light of COVID-19.

“It’s critical mass,” Keane says. “We have to get this accomplished and in order to do it, we need further support.”

Metro advises that there are five major ways to support its Raise the Roof campaign:

1. **BECOME A PATIENT**
   - In 2019, Metro delivered $435,749 in financial assistance to under or uninsured patients in Tampa Bay through its Copay It Forward program. Insured patients that utilize Metro’s primary care and fill prescriptions at its pharmacy make that care available to others at no extra cost. In the first half of 2020, insured patients have allowed them to deliver $335,247 in assistance.
   - “Insured patients play a huge role in our ability to provide services,” Metro advises. “State-of-the-art facilities and numerous services under one roof offer a modern and centralized opportunity to take care of your health and that of our community, just by using your normal copay.”
   - Visit MetroTampaBay.org/CopayItForward for more details.

2. **HOST A FACEBOOK FUNDRAISER**
   - Metro became an approved Facebook Charity earlier this year, allowing users on the platform to directly raise funds for the nonprofit from their personal pages. Facebook does not charge processing fees.
   - “This is a way that you can help us and have fun at the same time. It’s a very easy way to donate.” Facebook users can start their own fundraiser at Facebook.com/Fundraisers/MetroTampaBay.

3. **DIRECT DONATIONS**
   - “Small donations add up to big things,” Metro shares. Financial contributions can be sent directly to Metro by utilizing a web-based form at MetroTampaBay.org/Tampa or by texting "METRO" to 44-321.
   - “Our percentage of new donors has actually been a surprise to me,” Keane says. “We have been making progress with them, primarily small level donors, which is very much appreciated. We know that all donations matter and that everything helps … the community has really come together to support us.”

4. **HOST A PRIDE RAISER**
   - These business or individually-led fundraisers vary in scope and size.
   - Some donors have gifted Metro with flat amounts after allocating a percentage of sales on their goods and other organizations have hosted virtual gatherings.
   - “The Pride Raiser can really take any shape,” Keane says. “I would encourage each potential host to reach out and talk through it to see how they may be able to have an impact on raising the roof.”

   The German-American Club restoration and new 15,000 square-foot addition offer opportunities to show support now and into the future,” Metro shares. “The Grand Hall & Community Center, restored to its original 1909 grandeur, is sure to be high visibility for event rentals.”

   Opportunities to name spaces at the renovated site begin at $5,000 and sponsorships remain available. While the dedicated youth room has been reserved, a conference room, meeting room, group room and lab remain.

   Five of the nine intake rooms are also available, as are four of five counseling and therapy rooms, two testing rooms and 10 patient exam rooms. The health center reception area, community center lobby, Grand Hall, health and community center buildings and entire campus are also available.

   Every day and every donation brings Metro closer to serving Tampa in a new and exciting way, officials share. Bailey says that “we’re trying to innovate.”

   “That’s all you can do,” he continues. “We’re trying figure out how to keep in front of people’s eyes and keep our eyes on the mission and adapt.”

   Grandhige and Bahl, who have financially sponsored the room dedicated to youth at Metro’s forthcoming Tampa headquarters, say that the organization has done that and more.

   “We live in Tampa and knowing that all the services that are offered in St. Pete will now be offered in our backyard is exciting,” Grandhige says. “We have driven by the historic building so many times, saying how beautiful it was.

   “These old buildings have something special,” he says, reflecting on the German-American Club’s history and its history yet to be made. “The opportunity to play a small part in providing a meeting place for LGBTQ youth to read in, create in, maybe find love in was something we could not pass up.”