

Local

Sender retiring, will remain in community

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Sender

BLOOMINGTON — Alan Sender, who helped to direct Chestnut Health Systems' growth over the past 29 years while responding to community needs, will retire July 7.

But he and his wife, retired 11th Judicial Circuit Court Chief Judge Beth Robb, plan to remain involved in the community.

"We've tried to give back to our community and intend to stay and continue to contribute in, hopefully, meaningful and helpful ways," Sender said Thursday.

Sender, 63, of Normal, retires from Chestnut as chief operating officer. Before he was hired by Chestnut CEO Russ Hagen in 1988, Sender spent 13 years with WJBC/WBNQ, starting as a reporter and working his way up to news operations manager. He has a bachelor's degree in finance and a master's degree in journalism.

"We'd started a family and getting up every day at 3:30 a.m. (Sender was part of the morning news team) was not conducive to raising a family," Sender said of his career switch.

Hagen hired Sender as director of administrative services.

"I had the good sense to hire Alan to work at Chestnut in July of 1988 to help me manage a growing organization," Hagen said in a written statement. "As the organization developed, Alan became an essential part of leadership."

When Sender was hired, Chestnut had a budget of about \$2 million, 40 employees (almost all at 702 W. Chestnut St.) and its services were predominantly substance abuse treatment.

Today, Chestnut has a budget of \$50 million and 710 full- and part-time employees — 256 in Bloomington-Normal, 417 in the Metro East area and 37 at other locations.

Chestnut's lines of business are substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, mental health services, substance abuse research and training, employee assistance programs, housing for the mentally ill, credit counseling and federal qualified health centers (FQHCs) in Bloomington and Granite City.

"We are more diverse than a typical not-for-profit," Sender said. Unlike many not-for-profits, only two of Chestnut's seven lines of business rely on state funding (the rest comes predominantly from the federal government and corporate reimbursement) which is why Chestnut has been able to navigate state funding delays better than most agencies.

"There always has been an entrepreneurial culture around Chestnut," Sender said. "Our organization has done a good job responding to community challenges by opening the crisis (stabilization) center and the FQHC."

But, Sender said, "the biggest frustration is recognizing that human services are last on the pecking order list at the state level."

For the past two years, Sender has been working with several Chestnut employees to assume his responsibilities, he and Hagen said.

But he will remain a member of the Bloomington-Normal Airport Authority board, will stay involved with the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation and will remain with the ownership group of the Normal CornBelters.

"He really enjoys being a part of making Bloomington-Normal a great community," said Robb.



STEVE SMEDLEY, THE PANTAGRAPH

Chestnut Health Systems Chief Operating Officer Alan Sender, right, talks with Illinois first lady Diana Rauner during a tour in January of Chestnut's crisis stabilization unit for people in substance abuse and mental health crisis at 1003 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Bloomington. Sender is retiring July 7.