

BEACH, SHOPPERS' GUIDE

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Beach Health Center:
Affordable, compassionate health care

BOB PETCHER

Beach Health Center Owner and Physician Assistant Beth Ulman (far right) likes the way her small team work together and gets compliments from patients about the compassion from everyone. Pictured with Ulman are (l to r) Medical Assistant Misty Gavigan and Office Manager Christina O'Neil. See page 4.



Dining in or taking out on Fort Myers Beach

See page 10



Cell Phones for Soldiers

See page 6



Huges receives Humanitarian Award

See page 8

Beach Health Center:

Affordable, compassionate health care

By **BOB PETCHER**

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Beach Health Center, located at 6051 Estero Blvd. (between Lahaina Realty and BB&T Bank), boasts the Best Physician Assistant from the recent 2014 Fort Myers Beach Observer/Beach Bulletin Best of Beach Awards. Yet, it's the overall small staff and atmosphere that make it worthy of many great reviews from patients.

Led by Elizabeth Ulman, the owner/operator and award-winning health care provider, Beach Health Center delivers empathy, understanding and sensitivity along with its top notch medical care. The staff includes Dr. Christopher Yuvienco M.D. (hired as the supervising physician), Office Manager Christina O'Neil and Medical Assistant Misty Gavigan. During the busy seasonal months, the clinic adds another medical assistant to help out.

"I think we have a really good team here," Ulman said. "People have a good experience right when they walk through the door. They feel comfortable here. They feel at home here ... and listened to."

Ulman loves what she does, and so do her patients. Just before the interview, one patient walked out and was apparently very happy with the care and experience.

"She was just thrilled. It's really nice, and it makes me feel really good when people are that happy about the care they get here," she said.

The Beach Health Clinic owner smiled after one employee remarked, "I can't believe how happy people are when they leave here ... even when they are sick."

That appears to be a tell-tale sign of how com-



Ulman was voted Best Physician Assistant in the 2014 Fort Myers Beach Observer/Beach Bulletin Best of Beach Awards.

fortable patients feel in the clinic's care.

"I think that sometimes a group of nurturing women who love what they do can really provide an excellent experience," said Ulman. "We provide affordable, compassionate health care."

Beach Health Center handles not just primary care, but a lot of cases involving minor traumas, conjunctivitis, sore throats, lacerations, biopsies, EKGs, blood draws and many stingray envenomations. Dr. Beth, as she is known to her patients, has experience in urgent care and was a surgical PA prior to opening the Beach clinic.

Paying for medical care can be difficult, especially when someone is uninsured. Beach Health Center tries to keep self-pay meas-



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Ulman and O'Neil, who have a good working relationship, confer over a patient's records.

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ures in the same line as Medicare rates, says Ulman. That makes the center more affordable in health care.

“We have a pretty large contingent of self-pay patients, where we have been able to negotiate some really good cash rates with Quest lab for blood work and Radiology Regional Center (noted 10-15 minute drive from center to 9776 Bonita Beach Rd. office) for x-rays, MRIs, CT scans, etc. for a pretty reasonable amount of money,” she said. “We’ve kept (the cost) artificially low to get more compliance from our self-pay patients. That is one of the hardest things. People who don’t have insurance and trying to keep them healthy. It’s a challenge.”

Dr. Beth also has programs with sales reps regarding diabetes medications for instance.

“Some of the diabetes medications are either a \$25 co-pay, and now some of the newer medications are actually free. That’s really exciting,” she said. “They are passing that savings along to the uninsured.”

Ulman has an excellent network of specialists she refers her patients to, including an ear, nose and throat doctor, dermatology doctor and urology doctor (the latter two she trained under) as well as new doctors she has met along the way.

Prior to gaining experience as a PA as well as in urgent care, orthopedics, dermatology and primary care, Dr. Beth began her training as an EMT in Brooklyn, NY. —at the top

**Above:
Gavigan does
prep work in
the clinic's
laboratory.**

**Right: The
clinic has two
exam rooms
and two more
for trauma
cases.**



See BEACH HEALTH CENTER, page 13

Beach Health Center

From page 5

of the first graduating class after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

After that world-altering day back on Sept. 11, 2001, Ulman decided it was time to switch her career choice into the medical care field.

"I was a creative director for Internet publishing in my prior life, and I wasn't even home for 9/11. I got transferred to London for two years and was over there at the time," she said. "Soon after that, I moved to New York City and began training right away."

After finishing the EMT training, she figured to keep going in some form of that profession. That is when she moved down to Southwest Florida, found a physician assistant program at a branch of Nova Southeastern University and graduated in its second class.

Dr. Beth has worked as a medical assistant and office manager, so she knows the ins and outs of a clinic's operation. Then she performed orthopedic surgery for roughly two years and gained experience in urgent and primary care in different facilities. At that stage, she was ready to open her own business.

Ulman had moved onto the island roughly eight months prior to that decision, did some market research on opening a clinic and found the location of her future practice. Beach Health Clinic will be celebrating its fourth year on Estero Island this winter, after opening on Dec. 1, 2010.

"I noticed there was a shortage of medical providers in this general vicinity," she said. "I did some market research and asked people what they were missing from their medical provider or if they had a medical provider. Through some research I found out that there would be room enough for another medical provider on the island."

Ulman stated there are a lot of PA-owned clinics in Florida and the U.S. She conducted interviews with quite a few of them.

"I asked them straight out – what was the billing like and how do you it? I learned a lot just by gathering information ahead of time," she said.

Prior to the primary care business, a dental office occupied the space, so a major redesign was not that elaborately needed. Ulman did have to endure a slow start to the business, but people soon realized that the clinic had a warm, friendly and professional feel to it.

"We started from scratch with the practice," said Ulman. "It was tough in the beginning because a lot of people didn't think of this as a medical office."

"I had always wanted to open my own practice since I was in school. I knew what I wanted to do. I just needed all of the ingredients to come together at once: finding and hiring a supervising physician and finding a space. When this space became available, then I really thought that this was doable."

Dr. Yuvienco is just a phone call away.

"If I have a case that is too complicated for me, then I can give him a call," she said. "My electronic health records system is web-

based, so he can access records from any computer. I can call, pick his brain and we can chat about complex cases. But, for the most part, if someone has a urological issue or a cardiac issue that needs a specialist, they go to a specialist.

Right now, the building that houses Beach Health Center is undergoing a structural improvement project. But that hasn't slowed the business that is generally open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"During the off-season, we usually do not see patients between 3 and 5," Ulman said. "But, if people need me, I have no problem saying late."

That attitude is extended during business off-hours. Being a Beach resident, Dr. Beth has and can perform emergency visits.

"If I have patients who are home-bound or if I am worried about a certain patient, I definitely will do a house call," she said. "I have made emergency visits over to the Outrigger (Beach Resort) before. They know me. Sometimes I think of myself as the middleman. I go in and access and say if it's time to call 9-1-1. I may save a lot of useless trips to the emergency room if I can ascertain that it is not that big of a deal. I am kind of like a triage to a certain extent when it comes to emergencies."

Emergency visits are not limited to established patients, though.

"(If not a patient) I can bring the paperwork with me and process it later. The most important thing is for me to get a good medical history from them. I have done quite a few house calls on new patients and established patients. Since I live on the island, it's relatively easy. Most times I am not out of town, so I can come right over, open up and take care of them."

At Beach Health Clinic, appointments are encouraged, but walk-ins are welcome.

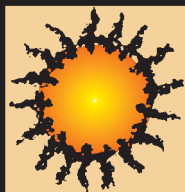
"We are not a walk-in clinic. If we have the availability, we will see someone without an appointment," she said. "We basically call them same-day appointments (due to fire marshal codes)."

Ulman has taught students that need to shadow a physician assistant.

"I've had three in the last six weeks," she said. "They learn about the role of what a physician assistant is in medicine."

So find out if Beach Medical Center is your fit for medical care. Find relief if you are experiencing a sore throat, strep throat, sinus infection, cough, asthma, bronchitis, fever, sinusitis, urinary tract infection, ear aches, ear wax impaction, seasonal allergies, allergic reaction, skin conditions, rashes, shingles, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, joint pain, pink eye, other eye problems, back pain, headaches, migraines, minor burns, foreign body removal, sprains, lacerations, sting ray envenomations, abscesses, cysts, diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and more.

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