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## Tongan community building links with medical providers

BY ELIZABETH BASSETT  
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When Dr. Stephen Buksh started as an internal medicine physician in 1999, he began noticing patients coming to the emergency room of Harris Methodist H-E-B Hospital with severe, advanced diseases. They would come in with uncontrolled diabetes or chronic heart disease, and then he realized they were from one of the local communities.

"Very early on in practice I noticed that a lot of patients who were Tongan from the community had very little primary care," he said.

Tongan community leaders had also noticed health care issues, many having to do with cultural norms. After many years of building a relationship, the staff at Harris Methodist H-E-B and Tongan volunteers have created a medical home for many in the well-established Tongan community. Once a week a mobile clinic vehicle from the hospital parks outside a Tongan church and volunteer medical staff help patients manage their illnesses and learn more about prevention and treatment.

"We know for sure it wouldn't be possible for us to carry out this mission without them," said Ilaiasi Ofa, a member of the Voice of Tonga, a nonprofit organization founded to promote the welfare and well-being of Tongans and other Pacificans in the North Texas area. Ofa said he and others in the community knew they needed to educate and support others, but it was

important to have the backing of an established health care system like Texas Health Resources.

In 2000, participants in the Voice of Tonga approached the hospital to talk about what could be done to help their community.

"It's very important that there is a group of community members that are liaising between an agency and a community," said Filieta Ofa, a member of the Voice of Tonga and a labor and delivery nurse who worked at Arlington Memorial Hospital, another THR institution.

Harris Methodist H-E-B started a pilot education program in 2002 to reach out to the Tongan community, said Amy Hampton, community health and benefit coordinator for the hospital. They gathered volunteers and trained them to act as interpreters and health promoters, and also conducted surveys to see what needs should be addressed. Buksh said he got involved early on, and in 2007 he worked with a non-physician health care provider to start overseeing primary care.

Ilaiasi Ofa said many Tongans and Polynesians gathered near the airport because it was an area of economic growth, good job opportunities and close to transportation to get people home or to visit friends and relatives. An estimated 4,000 Tongans live in Texas, most in the Hurst, Euless and Bedford area.

Filieta Ofa said many Tongans weren't seeking medical care because the Tongan culture is focused on home treatment and remedies unless a person is very ill.

**We know for sure it wouldn't be possible for us to carry out this mission without them.**

— Ilaiasi Ofa,  
Voice of Tonga

"People don't go to the hospital unless they're very, very sick, and that is a pattern we see here with the older generation because they're not acclimated to the system here," she said. "They're keeping the same kind of understanding as from home."

Buksh said this is the reason why many of his patients were coming to the hospital when they were so ill that their disease could not be well managed.

"A lot of the patients I'd seen in the hospital had a misconception about medical care, that it was only really necessary at a time of crisis," he said.

Through time and educational efforts, though, Buksh and his supporting volunteer staff have been able to show patients how to monitor and control their blood pressure or diabetes and other illnesses. He said the generous, sharing nature of the Tongan community was a definite asset, but it also posed some challenges for health care workers, who saw patients share their prescription medications with each other, figuring that if it's good for one

person, it must be good for others as well.

Being respectful of each other's cultures is essential for any community outreach clinic, both Buksh and the Ofas said. Cultures can vary widely, but every person is focused on being healthy, even if there are different ways of approaching treatments and remedies.

"Culturally, you know you have to make sure you're not just treating the numbers," Buksh said.

In the future, Buksh said he would like to get more support from area physicians and especially from specialists, who can lend expertise to the patients. He said some hospitalist physicians from H-E-B will start volunteering in the New Year, and he would also like to bring in a woman physician who may make female patients feel more comfortable talking about more taboo subjects, like breast health and mammographies.

With continued support from volunteers, Texas Health Resources and other local agencies, like the United Way, Ilaiasi Ofa said, the clinic can continue to grow and help establish good health habits in a younger generation of Tongans that are in school. Filieta Ofa said the Tongan community has always been focused on self-sufficiency and sharing resources, but the North Texas group has now found this clinic as a way to incorporate outside help for the betterment of all.

"There is that common feel, it's a want, it's a need that we have to come together to help our community, and it's out of love," she said. ■

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## CHEERS AND JEERS

**Jeers:** To the person who broke my driver's side door glass and stole my radio/CD player on Thanksgiving morning. Apparently you have nothing to be thankful for — except that I didn't catch you. Cheers to Euless police for knocking on my door.

— Marvin Morris, Euless

**Cheers:** To the city of Euless and the many volunteers who worked on my house from Restoration Church in Euless (and especially Diane Higdon). I appreciate your giving so much of your time to paint the exterior, trim the trees and make so many other improvements. My house looks great!

— Eva Weiland, Euless

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BF GOODRICH

# Investor group begins selling plots at landing-gear plant

**BF Goodrich closed the plant in far east Fort Worth in 2000.**

By **SANDRA BAKER**  
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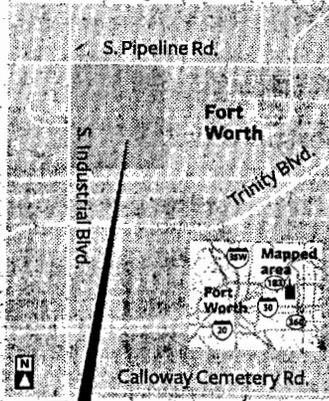
FORT WORTH — Vacant for more than eight years, the behemoth, former BF Goodrich landing-gear plant in far east Fort Worth has been bought by an investor group that has sold two parcels totaling 14.5 acres to energy companies.

Benton Rutledge, a broker with Greenway Investments in Dallas, who represented the buyers, said the new owners are in the process of tearing down the 402,322-square-foot plant and plan to sell the remaining 26.69 acres. An environmental remediation of the property was completed by BF Goodrich, he said.

R.J. Grogan Jr., a Dallas real estate lawyer listed on state records as manager of the buying group, 157 & Pipeline, Llc., did not return phone calls Monday seeking comment.

The group bought the land, totaling 41.21 acres, in mid-November from Charlotte, N.C.-based Goodrich Landing

## Goodrich plant sold



The former BF Goodrich landing-gear plant, also formerly the Menasco plant, has been sold to Dallas investors.

STAR-TELEGRAM

Gear, according to deed records. The property is on the east side of Farm Road 157 and stretches between Trinity Boulevard and Pipeline Road.

The buyers have sold 7.7 acres near Trinity Boulevard to Oncor Electric Delivery in Fort Worth, and a 6.8-acre parcel near Pipeline Road to Oklahoma City-based Chesapeake Exploration, deed records show.

Carol Peters, an Oncor

spokeswoman, said the company bought the property for the possible location of a substation to accommodate growth in the surrounding neighborhoods. There is no development timeline for the property, she said.

Julie Wilson, a vice president with Chesapeake's Barnett Shale operations in Fort Worth, said she is unaware of any immediate plans for the site.

Menasco Aerosystems, a landing-gear manufacturer based in Burbank, Calif., expanded its company to Texas and in 1956 built a 100,000-square-foot plant at the site.

The facility was expanded a few times over the decades. In 1977, Menasco was acquired by Coltec Industries, which merged with BF Goodrich in 1998. Goodrich closed the plant in 2000. At one time, there were more than 600 workers at the plant.

Matt Thompson, a broker with Colliers International, represented the seller.

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