The quiet noise – if such is possible – at 1285 Hartrey Ave. comes from a tricky sort of construction: making more room in a working health center.

On April 3, Erie Evanston/Skokie Health Center hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony to unveil a new expansion of the health center at 1285 Hartrey Ave. The 8,500-square-foot expansion doubles Erie's capacity to serve patients.

The expansion adds 17 new exam rooms, bringing the total to 34 exam rooms and five dental suites, as well as providing additional space that will be dedicated to behavioral health, health data analysis, community events or meetings and medical professional training.

Last year Erie served approximately 6,800 patients. In the next few years, Erie plans to increase the number of patients it serves to about 10,800. The new facility will enable it to serve 14,000 patients at capacity.

The expansion was made possible by $1.7 million in capital funding from the Finnegan Family Foundation and NorthShore University HealthSystem, said Dr. Lee Francis, President and CEO of Erie Family Health Centers, at the ribbon cutting survey. “This expansion grants the residents of Evanston, Skokie and surrounding area much needed additional access to high-quality, affordable primary health care,” he said.

Erie provides a wide variety of services for adults and children, including pediatrics, teen services, family medicine, women's health, prenatal care, behavioral health, dental care and health education. It partners with NorthShore University Health System, Presence St. Francis Hospital, and Swedish Covenant Hospital for patients requiring hospital care and specialty services.

Ninety-eight percent of its patients are low-income, 76% are on Medicaid insurance and 57% are 18 years old or younger. Only 60% of Erie's budget comes from insurance payments and patient revenues.

Dr. Francis discussed another major program that will enhance Erie's ability to provide medical services. Starting July 1, he said, 18 doctors who are family medicine residents in the University of Chicago (NorthShore) Family Medicine Residency Program will do their outpatient training at Erie.

This will serve two purposes, said Dr. Francis. The residents will provide medical services to patients at Erie Evanston/Skokie. In addition, providing the training at Erie may induce some of the doctors to decide to serve high-need communities.

Sean O'Grady, Chief Clinical Operations Officer of NorthShore University HealthSystem, said NorthShore has provided more than $3.5 million in financial support to help establish the health care facility and for the current expansion. He added that NorthShore has committed $1 million in annual operating support to Erie in the expanded location.

“We couldn't be more proud and excited to provide the support to the outstanding team at Erie who have been incredible partners to us for many years,” Mr. O'Grady said.

Evanston Mayor Stephen Haggerty said, “I am in awe of what you have accomplished here. … Health care really is and should be a human right. What you’ve created is top rate care for the people in this community that need it.”