

Business Quarterly

Medical group is a 'great asset' to town

By Deborah Rose

When you don't feel well and are in need of care, you want immediate, effective and thorough attention.

Enter Western Connecticut Medical Group Litchfield Crossings — part of the Western Connecticut Health Network, which operates New Milford, Danbury and Norwalk hospitals — in New Milford.

The medical practice, at 169 Danbury Road (Route 7 South), the shopping plaza across from Stop & Shop, serves people of all ages.

"I just love the group," said resident and long-time patient Dottie Schaffer. "I think they are all very professional, from the minute you walk in the office to the care you get and the nurses and the doctors.

"They've been a really great asset to New Milford," Schaffer said.

Dr. Karen Tarbell, who practices internal medicine and pediatrics, said she likes the "variety" of each day and how "you can see a child and, in the next room, an 80-year-old."

Her colleague, Dr. Abra Mabasa, agreed.

"I like to see the families. I see parents and ask how their kids are. ... I like the continuity of care," said Mabasa, who practices family medicine.

"They're the greatest," said resident and long-time patient Fred Golino of the practice and its doctors. "They're always there to help me."

He described Tarbell as "amazing" and praised her keen eye when it comes to all aspects of his health, and applauded Mabasa's thorough care if Tarbell is unavailable.

Schaffer said Tarbell has been "a guiding light ... for the family," noting the support she and the practice offered the family when her husband died a few years ago.

Drs. Tarbell and Mabasa — at a glance

As young children, Dr. Karen Tarbell and Dr. Abra Mabasa knew their futures would include a career in medicine.

Their dreams came true, as today the women are doctors at Western Connecticut Medical Group Litchfield Crossings in New Milford.

The practice originated as Brookfield Family Medicine/New Milford in 1996, became Housatonic Internal Medicine & Pediatrics and eventually Western Connecticut Medical Group.

The office moved to its location in Litchfield Crossings in March 2011.

It is part of the Western Connecticut Health Network, which operates New Milford, Danbury and Norwalk hospitals.

Tarbell graduated from Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania, received a medical degree from Tufts University School of Medicine and completed her residency at Geisinger Medical Center.

Tarbell has been with the practice since 1999.

For some time, Mabasa envisioned herself as a surgeon, following in the footsteps of her father, the late Dr. Ramon Mabasa, a well-known New Milford surgeon.

However, unlike her father, she chose a different path, realizing she could focus on family medicine and still do smaller surgical procedures such as suturing and performing minor dermatology tasks.

The graduate of Bryn Mawr College, holds two master's degrees — one from the University of Connecticut in Storrs and another from the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington; received a medical degree at Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences in Poznan, Poland, and completed her residency at Bryn Mawr.

She joined the practice in 2008.

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"Everything comes straight from her heart. Her questions, her sincerity," Schaffer said. "And Dr. Mabasa has been kind-hearted, helpful. She definitely pitched in right away and took us on, and asked questions like she's known us for a long time."

The practice has a long history, but the current office opened in March 2011. It is set up for four providers, although only two — each of whom has her or his own nurse — are there.

"We'd like to grow. This location was built to grow. Our goal is to expand," said Michelle Kowalski, office coordinator.

In fact, a nurse practitioner is expected to come aboard in the near future.

The office boasts a spacious and bright waiting room, with a kid-friendly section, and large patient rooms, each stocked with the same medical equipment for doctor accessibility and a scale for patient privacy.

Rooms are equipped with special, soft lighting for eye exams and to make patients with migraines and other ailments more comfortable.

Adjustable lift tables are available in rooms to

accommodate patients who cannot lift themselves up on the table.

A lot of thought went into planning the practice, Kowalski said. She noted the space next door where patients can meet with two specialists: rheumatologist Dr. Alla G. Rudinskaya and endocrinologist Dr. Guillermo Pons.

Tarbell and Mabasa pointed out the convenience of having specialists next door.

For example, if a patient has arthritis in his or her knee and has plans to see the rheumatologist anyway, he or she can be walked over and possibly seen right away.

Such easy access also benefits older patients, who often don't want to drive out of town to visit a doctor's office.

The practice provides numerous services. Among them are urine analysis, EKGs, diabetes testing, ob/gyn examinations and tests, cultures, cryotherapy (i.e., wart freezing), breathing tests, preventative care and vaccinations.

"Seeing chronic, acute and general needs keeps your day interesting," said Mabasa.

"Our organization-wide

commitment is to have the best patient-wide access and provide access to care," said John Courtney, operations director for the group. "That's important."

"We want to have enough access," he said, noting "people who have needs in the short term" can come to Litchfield Crossings.

While some doctors may fill their schedules, making it challenging for a patient to be seen right away, Tarbell and Mabasa offer same-day appointments, according to Kowalski.

Additionally, patients can view their doctor's availability and schedule their appointments online through www.zocdoc.com.

Lunchtime appointments are available Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and evening appointments are offered Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Being part of the WCHN, which also operates group practices in numerous other towns in the region, provides patients with easy access to care.

For example, when the New Fairfield practice closed due to inclement weather this past winter,



DEBORAH ROSE/STAFF PHOTO

Dr. Karen Tarbell, right, and Dr. Abra Mabasa, back, are the physicians at Western Connecticut Medical Group Litchfield Crossings in New Milford, part of Western Connecticut Health Network, at 169 Danbury Road. They are joined by office coordinator Michelle Kowalski in one of the exam rooms.

the doctors came to the Litchfield Crossings office to see their patients, Tarbell said.

Access to care and continuity of care are vital components for the health network and the medical practice, Courtney said.

Golino cited the follow-through calls the practice made to check in on him during his recent visit to New Milford Hospital.

Western Connecticut

Medical Group Litchfield Crossings is at 169 Danbury Road (Route 7 South). The office is open Mondays and Fridays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Wednesdays from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. In addition, one doctor works at the Brookfield practice Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For details, call 860-355-6949.

Save the dates for upcoming chamber events

■ **Breakfast Networking Scene:** June 17, 8-9 a.m. Sponsored by Western Connecticut Health Network at New Milford Hospital's Robison Room, 21 Elm St. Exclusive for chamber members, with one attendee per chamber membership. Reservations required by calling 860-354-6080 or emailing

nmcc@newmilford-chamber.com by Wednesday.

■ **Business Scene:** June 19, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Sponsored by Scott's Landscaping & Nursery at Scott's Landscaping & Nursery, 322 Kent Road (Route 7), New Milford. Informal networking business event open to the public.

■ **Board of directors meet-**

ing: July 1, 8 a.m. Railroad station, Railroad Street, New Milford.

■ **New Milford Fourth of July fireworks celebration:** July 5. Opening ceremony, 6:30 p.m. Rain date, July 6. Village Green. Fireworks to be displayed from Fort Hill.

■ **Business Scene:** July 10, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Co-spon-

sored by Charter Business, New Milford Tennis & Swim Club and William Raveis Real Estate at New Milford Tennis & Swim Club, 93 Aspetuck Ridge Road, New Milford. Informal networking business event open to the public.

■ **Village Fair Days:** July 25-26, 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Village Green, New Milford.

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