

## Medical center gets support after thefts

*Jon Hand • Staff writer*

In the first two weeks of this month, the Grace Family Medicine center on Arnett Boulevard was the inexplicable target of repeated thievery and vandalism.

Since then, staff at the medical center, which has served underprivileged families in the 19th Ward for the past 32 years, has been the target of the community's generosity and support.

The center was broken into at least four times in 12 days in early April, and was vandalized at least two other times during that time period, said Dr. William Morehouse, Grace's medical director.

Morehouse said he believes the thefts are not connected to the vandalism because of how they occurred.

During the thefts, someone broke into the center at 340 Arnett Blvd., which also houses the Embracing Options counseling, through a second-floor window accessible from a roof. Office materials were disrupted, a laptop and desktop computer were stolen, a medical freezer was broken into and valuable immunizations were allowed to spoil, and a very small amount of cash was taken.

"We really don't have anything of much value here, but these things add up," said Morehouse, referring to the lack of cash and prescription drugs kept at the center. "We don't know why we were targeted; we don't know of anyone who has hostile feelings toward us."

The vandalism occurred "in the midst" of the thefts, Morehouse said, but he thinks the vandal — or vandals — was not connected to the thieves, in part because of a video tape taken by a surveillance camera at a convenience store at Arnett Boulevard and Rugby Avenue.

"We actually have a video tape of an older man carrying a cinder block down the road on his shoulder. At first he tried to break the window of the convenience store but it bounced back at him and then it appears he came down to our place," Morehouse said. "He looked like someone just bent on doing damage."

The timing seems to be a coincidence, he said.

Several other nearby locations have been vandalized, including a building next door which houses RISEGO Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to creating young social entrepreneurs in schools, and the library at 310 Arnett Blvd.

Grace has rung up a pricey list of unexpected expenses, including having to replace all the locks in the office, alter the roof where the thieves were getting in the office, replace the medical freezer, and fix about 10 broken windows — including a \$475 window that had to be replaced twice. That is in addition to the loss of the cash and the computers.

Fortunately, Morehouse said, the community has responded in a "wonderful and generous" way.

"The community has been very supportive, the neighbors have all rallied around us and responded with very generous donations," he said, estimating large and small donations have totaled about \$6,000. "They are people who know what we do here, and people we have possibly helped in the past."

Grace Family has served the 19th Ward since 1978 when Morehouse and a group of Christians came together with the goal of providing health care and other services to underprivileged communities.

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