MediSend swallows growth pill

Nonprofit wants to send more medical supplies abroad

BY CYNTHIA D. WEBB | STAFF WRITER

DOUBLING UP: Nick Hallack says taking a business approach at its headquarters in Dallas will help MediSend save lives around the world.

KENNETH BROCK

Nonprofit MediSend International, which sends surplus medical supplies to developing countries, has purchased its 62,000-square-foot warehouse/office building on Markville Drive in North Dallas for $2.5 million.

The buy is part of a business plan that aims to double the amount of supplies the nonprofit sends annually.

After taking five months off last year to revamp the way it warehouses and ships donations, the 15-year-old nonprofit is now building a privately funded, 10,000-square-foot biomedical equipment repair lab in its building.

The lab will be a partnership that's still being negotiated between MediSend and three unnamed Texas colleges, said Nick Hallack, CEO, who joined MediSend last year months after the nonprofit's founder, Dallas neurosurgeon Dr. Martin Lazar, operated on him for crippling back pain.

Students will repair biomedical equipment such as sonogram, X-ray and MRI machines that were donated to MediSend as medical facilities upgraded equipment.

Phase Two of the lab will include a separate room to repair X-ray equipment. During the third phase, Web-based education materials as well as books and CD's about biomedical equipment repair are expected to be launched.

Plans call to enroll students in January 2006 in a hands-on component of biomedical repair.

Should the deal with the yet-to-be-named schools fall through, Hallack says several community colleges have expressed an interest in having their students work in the lab.

Daniel Irving, president of the North Texas Biomedical Association, says he knows of only a few programs in the state that offer degrees for biomedical equipment techs.

DeVry University and Texas A&M University offer four-year degrees, while three of Texas State Technical College's campuses have associates plans.

"There is a demand for techs with hands-on equipment experience," Irving said, adding, "A local training facility would be a great resource for area hospitals and local technicians."

Eliza Solendar, president of Solendar/Hall, who represented the nonprofit in the building purchase, said that's "a good use for the building and will involve more people in an extremely worthy effort."

Tim Terrell with Stream Realty and Lorraine Teel with Teel Enterprises Inc. represented the seller, Casey International.

With the students making repairs, MediSend hopes to get its donated equipment to where it's needed quicker.

"There's no way anyone in the United States could meet the need," Hallak said of medical equipment shortfalls across the globe. "We need to distribute more goods."

Hallack's experience as an international businessman has helped MediSend toward its goal of increasing the amount it ships and keeping donors informed, said Thies Rice, president of the nonprofit's executive committee.

Thirty-five hospitals in the Dallas-Fort Worth area currently donate 85% of the equipment shipped to poor countries, and 15% comes from manufacturers. Hallak would like to see manufacturers provide 80% of the shipments.

The nonprofit also faces a black market that can threaten each shipment's safe arrival.

MediSend's new Web-based ordering and tracking system, which now uses United Nations universal codes, means orders get shipped in three months instead of nine and can be tracked. The nonprofit works with import brokers — third parties like nonprofits or health ministries — to report on the containers' arrivals via MediSend's Web site.

That helps provide transparency in all transactions.

"We couldn't certify that our products went to a particular place," Hallack said. "Now, if there's three boxes missing in a shipment to Sri Lanka, the doctor puts that on the message board and in two seconds, everyone knows about it."

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