

RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE:

Expands through acquisitions, organic growth

By Mary Moore

marymoore@bizjournals.com

At a time when most social service agencies are suffering with cuts in government contracts, **Riverside Community Care** tells a different story — one of expansion, largely through acquisitions but also through a budding commercial operation.

Based in Dedham and with operations in 70 communities, Riverside provides behavioral and mental health services in hospitals, schools, homes and just about every other possible outpatient settings. It is a complex organization housed in 100 different buildings, everything from group homes for the developmentally disabled to office-style mental health clinics.

In its growth, Riverside has positioned itself to leverage increasing interest in integrated care as part of federal and state health care overhaul. Meanwhile, over the past decade Riverside has seen its budget double, growing to \$62 million today compared to \$32 million in 2002.

About three-quarters of Riverside's budget comes from state contracts and Medicaid, but its commercial operation — hospitals and government agencies buying specialized services that Riverside has created — represents about 15 percent of its budget and getting bigger, said Scott Bock, Riverside's president.

Riverside is “all about creating innovative approaches and coordinated service and thinking long term and how do we do this the best way possible,” said Frank Saba, CEO of **Milford Regional Medical Center**, which has a contract with Riverside.

Bock estimated about half of Riverside's financial growth is the result of two recent mergers.

In early June, Riverside acquired Somerville Mental Health Association, a struggling organization that had a \$4 million budget but was running a deficit. It ran some of its programs out of three Victorian homes it owned near Davis Square, Bock said.

“They were doing wonderful work in the community but really at risk in the short- and long-term with issues such as,



Scott Bock is president of Riverside Community Care, which provides behavioral and mental health services in hospitals, schools, homes and outpatient settings.

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“Can we keep our computers working?” Bock said.

Riverside since has sold the three Victorian homes and with those sales, the acquisition is now close to break-even, Bock said, adding that Riverside also has increased the revenue from Somerville Mental Health's programs.

The acquisition of Somerville Mental Health built on Riverside's acquisition three years ago of The Guidance Center, a \$7 million organization operating in mul-

multiple sites. Bock said Somerville Mental Health was not hurting financially, but looking to grow. As with Somerville Mental Health Association's program, Bock said, Riverside has expanded The Guidance Center's work.

Riverside's budget has grown in smaller increments through what Bock described as entrepreneurial — or commercial — initiatives. One example, he said, is the Riverside Trauma Center, which it started in response to a shooting spree a

dozen years ago at Wakefield's Edgewater Technology. In late December 2000, a disgruntled Edgewater Technology employee fatally shot seven of his co-workers.

“We found ourselves rushing to Wakefield ... and we were not fully trained,” Bock said.

Now Riverside Trauma Center trains and mobilizes trauma care workers throughout the state, who have responded to such incidents as the recent shooting in Cambridge that left a Cambridge Rindge and Latin School student dead, hurricanes and tornadoes in Western Massachusetts and the bullying issue that rattled South Hadley.

“The shooting was Sunday night and Riverside was working from early Monday morning directly with other service providers in the community to help guide the work we're doing,” said Ellen Semonoff, assistant city manager for human services in city of Cambridge.

Riverside receives about \$500,000 in contracts annually from the **Federal Emergency Management Agency** and the **Massachusetts Department of Public Health**, Bock said.

“We ended up figuring out, ‘Wow, there's something that doesn't exist here that's important,’ ” Bock said. “Payers keep approaching us and saying, ‘We need your help.’ ”

That's exactly what Saba of **Milford Regional Medical Center** asked when he realized that increasing numbers of the patients needed behavioral and mental health help, but doctors had nowhere to send them on an urgent care basis aside from the emergency room.

Riverside set up a new urgent care program, Saba said — one that both Saba and Bock conceded is a work in progress as doctors figure out how to utilize the service.

Yet, Bock said, it's Riverside's creative approach that has helped the organization power through tough economic times and position itself for whatever comes with health care reform.

“As health care reform rolls out ... and everyone is trying to figure out how to integrate care, we've been integrating care for 30 years,” Bock said.