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## Health clinics get boost with TV link

By **Danielle Gaines**

[dgaines@mercedsun-star.com](mailto:dgaines@mercedsun-star.com)

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**MERCED** — On a normal day, it's just Vivienne Brunigis and Danny Fluke holding down the fort at Northside Clinic in Greeley Hill, 30 miles north of Mariposa.

On Wednesday, Brunigis, the nurse practitioner, and Fluke, licensed vocational nurse, were joined by medical professionals throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

By television, that is.

The Greeley Hill clinic, an offshoot of John C. Fremont Hospital in Mariposa, is part of the University of California at Merced's new Valley Telehealth Partner- ship.

Brunigis said patients at the year-old clinic often travel down a winding and sometimes dangerous road to Modesto or UC Davis for medical treatments.

Now, she can ring up doctors at one of the partnership's six other sites for a second opinion or diagnosis.

Representatives from partnering institutions gathered at UC Merced on Wednesday to commemorate the beginning of the telemedicine program and give it a test run.

Maria Pallavicini, dean of the School of Natural Sci- ences, said the telemedicine system will improve access to physicians for residents throughout the valley.

The partnership — funded by AT&T, the California Emerging Technology Fund and the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley — could add as many as 20 sites next year, depending on the economy, project manager Jennifer Smith said.

San Joaquin Valley residents have the least access to physicians of any region in California. On average, there are 302 physicians per 100,000 people in California. In the San Joaquin Valley, the number is 173 per 100,000 people.

In Greeley Hill, it's zero.

"As you can imagine, we are a very rural clinic," Brunigis said. "(Telemedicine) is extremely valuable because I am out here on my own."

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Phone: (209) 578-2000.