

RHA, province celebrate \$12.2-M lab upgrades

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Premier Greg Selinger speaks at the grand opening of the expanded Westman Laboratory at the Brandon Regional Health Centre on Thursday afternoon. After the ribbon-cutting, Selinger toured the facility.

Though it never technically closed, Manitoba Premier Greg Selinger joined Brandon Regional Health Authority officials in cutting a blue ribbon to officially reopen Westman Laboratory Thursday afternoon.



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Lab manager Carol Brown gives Premier Greg Selinger a tour of the Westman Laboratory at the Brandon Regional Health Centre on Thursday afternoon. (TIM SMITH/BRANDON SUN)

The \$12.2-million expansion of the facility -- which handles all provincial medical specimen testing outside of Winnipeg -- began in June 2009 and saw an additional 10,000 square feet of lab space added to the existing 9,000-square-foot facility, all while its 145 staff continued the day-to-day operations of the lab.

Now complete and in full operation once again, the facility offers an improved work environment for staff, both in terms of workflow efficiencies and environmental safety, comfort and ergonomics. Among the upgrades are pneumatic tube systems for sending samples directly from the hospital to the lab and state-of-the-art analytical equipment.

"On a day-to-day basis when (staff) are coming in to work, the decor and the lighting just makes it welcoming and kind of soothing almost, to come to work in a facility like this every day," says lab manager Carol Brown. "As far as patients, we have the ability with our instrumentation to provide a much better service for them and, of course, that effects turn around time as well."

The lab has struggled in recent years with pathologist and technologist shortages, which, at times, led to the shipping of samples to labs in other provinces for analysis.

With the lab's upgrades, Selinger has pledged that those staffing troubles should take care of themselves.

"A facility like this attracts staff," he said. "People want to work in first-class facilities. We've found this all around Manitoba, when you have good facilities, you attract staff and when you attract staff, that also attracts other people that want to work with them."

Brandon RHA officials confirm two pathologist vacancies currently exist at the lab, though recruitment is underway to fill those vacancies.

With its improvements, the lab now meets provincial green building requirements and is expected to receive LEED (Leadership in Energy and Development) silver certification.

The green features include improved temperature management, ventilation and lighting efficiencies, such as light tubes to direct outside light, and daylight and occupancy sensors.